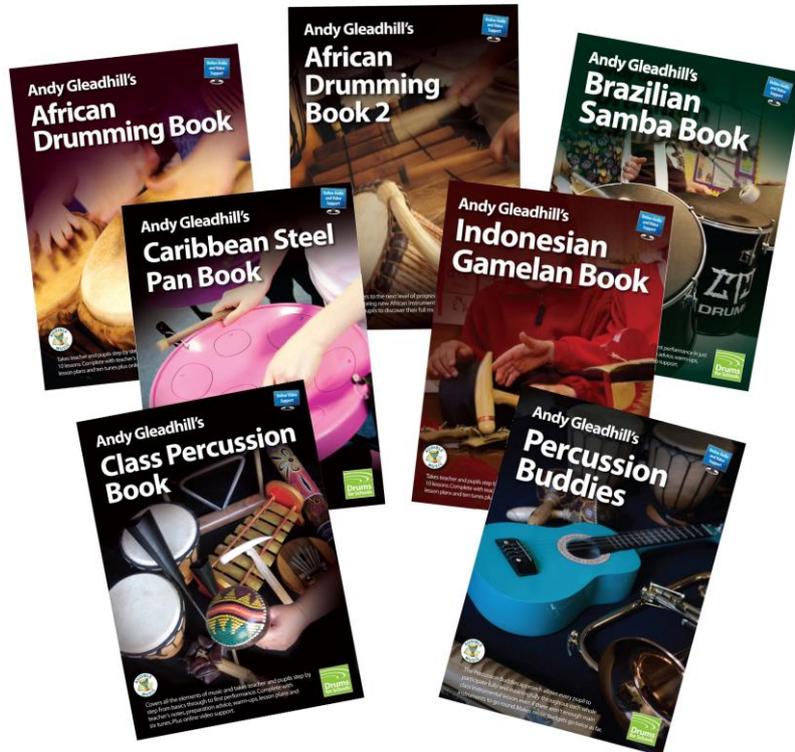


General Technique

- **Andy Gleadhill books**

Andy Gleadhill has produced some wonderful resources for non-specialist class teachers and these also provide very useful support for music specialists who are teaching African Drumming for the first time. *Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1* covers all the basics (culture, technique, elements of music, warm-ups) and gives a suggested ten session breakdown approach to teaching the content. Also included are ten different rhythms and teaching notes for each, which have been simplified for beginners or Primary setting. His second book is a more substantial tome and contains more advanced information about playing the djembe, as well as other traditional African percussion instruments that can extend the ensemble and contains some more in-depth scores that can in turn be re-adapted to suit your own classroom percussion content.



- **Drum Positioning for Djembe**

To obtain the best tone and range of sounds from your drum it is essential that the Djembe is raised up from the ground and not played whilst it is standing on the floor. This is to allow the air and sound waves to escape from the bottom, open end of the drum. This is easily demonstrated by holding your hand against the open end of the drum while another player strikes the drum - you can feel the escaping air. It can also be demonstrated by leaving the drum on the floor and playing a few beats and then doing the same with the drum off the ground and noting the improvement in the sound from the dead tone with the drum on the floor to the rich ringing tone of the raised drum.

When considering the best playing position to adopt you need to take account of the ages of the performers, the size of the instruments they are using, as well as the numbers in the ensemble. Generally speaking, a good playing position is to have the performers seated on the edge of a chair, to give more leg space for the drum, with backs straight and shoulders relaxed. The drum can then be placed between the thighs, just above the knee, and with the players feet crossed over on the floor around the drum. This will allow the player to have a firm grip on the drum and leave both hands free for playing.

Elements taken from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book, pages 5-6





- **Detailed technique for Djembe (Bass, Tone, Slap)**

The playing techniques of African drums vary enormously across the African continent with many different hand positions that not only change from country to country, but from village to village and each teacher will have a strongly held view as to how to play the drums 'correctly'. Others believe that so long as a good sound is produced then technique is secondary.

It is important that the Djembe is played with hands and not drums sticks, as the goat skin is relatively thin compared to cow hide and it can cause stretches or splits which will damage the drum skin.

There are three main sounds that you can make with a Djembe. Here we will explain all three, Bass, Tone and Slap, although with the music we look at we will mainly be considering the Bass and the Tone sound (labelled here as Bass Tone and Open Tone).

Elements taken from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, Page 5

Bass Tone (Low sound, Bass)

A good Bass note will produce a full and rounded deep tone. To produce a good Bass tone, the Djembe must be struck in the middle of the drumhead with the hand slightly cupped, palm down, with the hand returning quickly from the drum. You can use your whole arm and pretend that you are bouncing a basketball and this will result in the correct action for playing good Bass tones.

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, Page 7

Open Tone (High sound, Tone)

When playing the Open Tone the drum should be struck with the whole length of the fingers on the edge of the drum nearest to your body with your elbows



slightly raised. If you imagine the drum head to be a clock face your right hand will be on the four and your left hand on the eight. Your hands must not remain in contact with the drum once you have played the beat but should return to your natural playing position just above the drum. A good way to achieve this technique is to imagine that the drum head is very hot, like a radiator, and so you do not want to leave your hand on it any longer than necessary.

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 1, page 6

Slap

The Slap is a more advanced technique that can take quite a while to master. Moreover, whilst an adequate sound for a Bass Tone or Open Tone can be created with a loosely tuned drum, it is imperative that a Djembe is correctly tightened in order to get the most out of a Slap.

The type of sound that you are aiming for is a short bright crack. Some people mistake the Djembe's natural harmonic ringing as the sound they are after, but it is more than this.

To play a slap you need to use the pads of your hand on your palm (opposite side to the palm knuckles) down onto the edge of the Djembe where the skin is being pulled onto the wooden shell. Have your fingers relaxed and slightly apart and the hand angled slightly proud. If your fingers are relaxed enough then they will continue follow through onto the skin and create the whip-crack sound of a Slap. The sound will not be muted as your pads will not be impacting on the resonant area of the skin.

Slaps are great to throw in as Open Tones now and then to wake things up during a performance.

[Click here](#) to watch the accompanying video.

Master Drummer

No doubt as the teacher or group leader in other avenues you are used to being at the front of others leading a session. In Djembe performances a Master Drummer is essential to keep things running smoothly. They will be the ones making the Calls to tell the others when and what to perform, as well as ensuring that everyone else is on track. Quite often they will be the ones playing the solos over the top of the set rhythms, but within a group such as yours this activity can be delegated around the class.

