

Beats of Art

The secret inner beauty of Japanese taiko drums gives them their rich sound

MARCH 2018 By Greg Uyeno

Don kara, don kara, don don don! That's the sound of taiko drums.

Taiko drums are traditional Japanese instruments. Musicians usually play them in groups. The musicians also move with dance-like choreography. The drums have beautifully painted wood on the outside, but some of their most impressive characteristics are never seen.

When making a taiko drum, drum makers carve patterns on the inside of the drum. Sometimes the drums are hand-carved from a single piece of wood. The work is done over several weeks. Traditional patterns are often inspired by nature. Designs can look like turtle shells or fish scales. To finish the instrument, drum makers stretch material tightly over its ends. This hides the carvings from view.

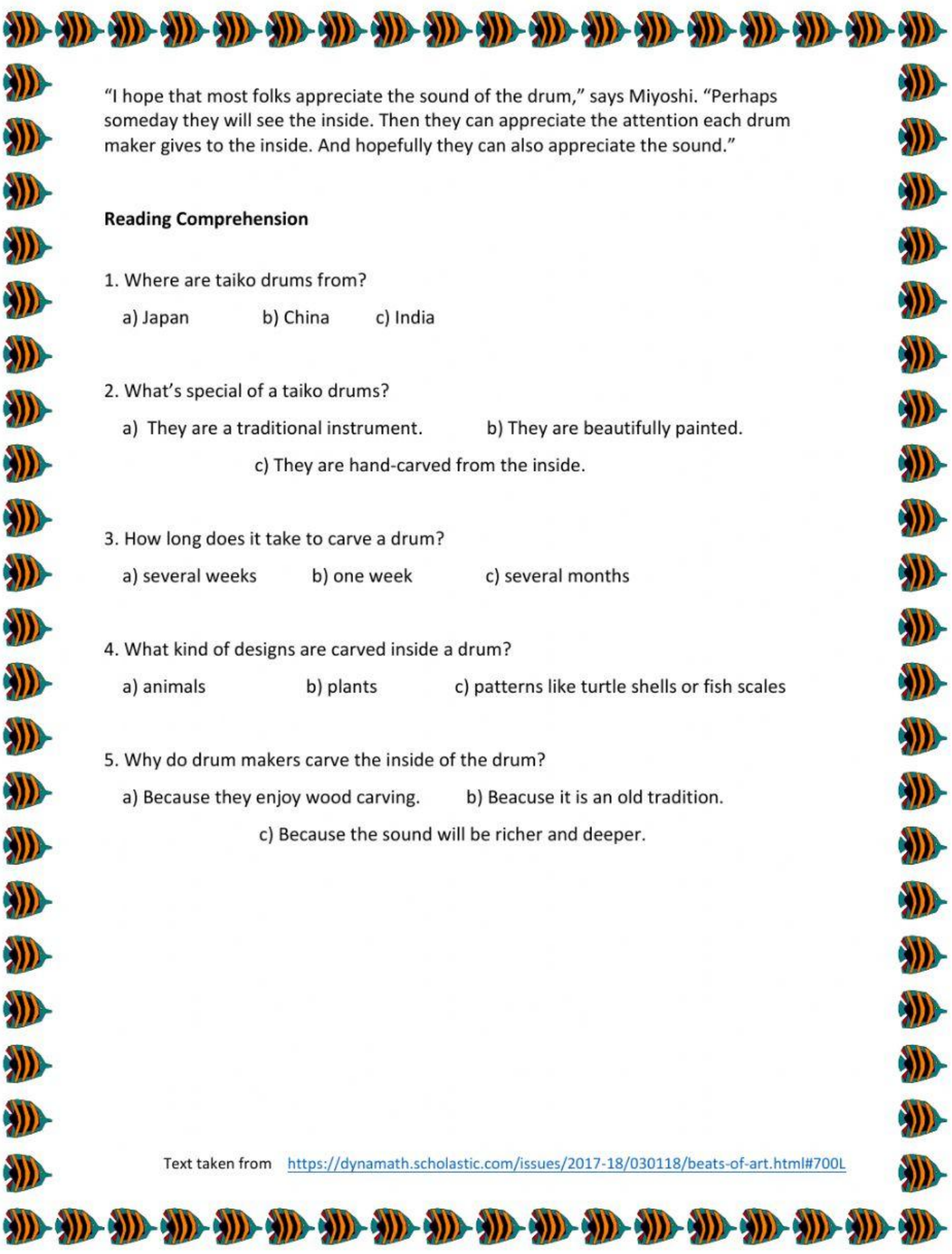


Kouichi Nakazawa

A taiko drum maker carves a pattern of hexagons into a drum.

So why do drum makers go through the trouble? It's all about the sound. The carvings create a deeper, richer sound than a perfectly smooth surface would. "You need the interior surface to be broken up. Otherwise, you'll get a high-pitched ringing when the drum is struck," says Mark Miyoshi. He's a taiko drum maker in Mount Shasta, California.

"Each carving has a different purpose. That's to make different sounds," says Sumiyo Asano. She works at the Asano Taiko Company. The company has been making taiko drums in Japan since 1609. For example, some customers choose a special pattern. The drums are then used in art performances or festivals.



"I hope that most folks appreciate the sound of the drum," says Miyoshi. "Perhaps someday they will see the inside. Then they can appreciate the attention each drum maker gives to the inside. And hopefully they can also appreciate the sound."

Reading Comprehension

1. Where are taiko drums from?
a) Japan b) China c) India
2. What's special of a taiko drums?
a) They are a traditional instrument. b) They are beautifully painted.
c) They are hand-carved from the inside.
3. How long does it take to carve a drum?
a) several weeks b) one week c) several months
4. What kind of designs are carved inside a drum?
a) animals b) plants c) patterns like turtle shells or fish scales
5. Why do drum makers carve the inside of the drum?
a) Because they enjoy wood carving. b) Beacuse it is an old tradition.
c) Because the sound will be richer and deeper.

Text taken from <https://dynamath.scholastic.com/issues/2017-18/030118/beats-of-art.html#700L>