



JIGU! Thunder Drums of China Suggested Study Guide*

BEFORE SEEING THE PERFORMANCE

1. Ask the class to brainstorm about China and the Chinese culture.
2. Review the attached vocabulary list.
(Or, assign a portion of the list to different groups of students and have the groups then share their definitions with the class.)
3. Discuss capitalism and communism. Have students discuss how their life would be different if they lived in a communist country?
4. Have students read and discuss the attached information about Shanxi Province, China, Chinese daily life, politics, theatre, and background on Chinese Musicians.
5. Have the class compare daily life in China from ten years ago and as it is today. How has the life of the average Chinese person changed over the last ten years? How has it improved? Has anything gotten worse? Have the class discuss the possible reasons for these changes in China?
6. Based on the attached information, have the students compare their daily lives to the daily life of a Chinese *drummer or musician*. How might their routine differ? How is it the same?
7. Based on the attached information, have the students discuss the significance of costumes in musical performances?
8. **For Music Classes:** Review the attached list of Chinese musical and percussion instruments. Have the class discuss these instruments, then compare and contrast them to Western Musical Instruments.

AFTER SEEING THE PERFORMANCE (Discussion Questions)

1. Since Chinese theatre is considered to be an illustration of life for the Chinese, how did the performers illustrate joy and/or struggle in the performance? Be specific about your answers.
2. Think of a struggle you have experienced or, one of your joys in life. Now create and/or describe your own artistic percussion routine to depict this personal experience.
3. What was the most interesting thing that you learned about China or the Chinese people through the musicians' performances?
4. Using your memory of the performance (and the attached information) consider all the training that goes into to being a Chinese drummer or percussionist. What does this tell you about what human beings are capable of accomplishing? How can this be applied to your own personal goals in life?
5. Consider Chinese percussion as an Eastern musical art form. Compare and contrast this art form with similar Western musical forms of art. (European, American, Latin, etc.)
6. Discuss the costumes you saw in the performance. How did they add to your experience of the performance? Be specific about your answers. Can you see influences of the traditional Chinese theater costumes in current fashion trends?
7. If a friend asked you about the performance you saw, what would you say? What part of the show would you most like to tell them about? Why did this part stand out from the rest of the performance in your mind?

*Please note that this is only a *suggested* study guide.

As each group of students is different, instructors may wish tailor this guide to suit their class.
Jigu! Thunder Drums of China's management hopes that the students enjoy this cultural experience and that it will deepen their understanding of this unique culture and musical art form!



CHINA AND HER PEOPLE

Hailing from the Shanxi Province in China, is called the *Shanxi Jiangzhou Drum Arts Ensemble* when they perform in China. However, they are known as “Jigu! Thunder Drums of China” when they perform here in the United States and North America. In English, Shanxi means “Western Mountains” which refers to the province’s location, west of the Taihang Mountains in China. Shanxi Province is located in the very heart of China, boasting a population of more than 36 million in an area of over 77,000 square miles. Shanxi is abundant in natural beauty and rich historical legacy. As one of the five best-known mountains in China, Shanxi’s Mount Huashan is famous for its breath-taking cliffs and awe-inspiring landscapes. In terms of agriculture, crops produced in Shanxi include wheat, maize, millet, legumes, and potatoes. It’s fertile valleys and the presence of the Yellow River, make Shanxi Province among the ‘bread-baskets’ of China. The area has about one third of China’s coal deposits, making Shanxi a leading producer of coal in China. Shanxi also has about one third of China’s bauxite deposits. A main source of aluminum, bauxite is an ore from the earth. Industry in Shanxi is mostly centered around coal, generating energy, chemical industries, metal refining, and other heavy industries.

Until the 20th century, the Chinese system of government was the dynasty. From around 1111 B.C., under the dynastic system, an emperor would rule the country until his death. The throne would then be passed on to his first-born son, nephew, or grandson. However, as a result of the Cultural Revolution in 1911, most of the Chinese dynastic governments were ended and a communist state was installed. The province of Shanxi was an exception to this. The Shanxi Province was held by Yen His-shan, until his failed defense against the communist People’s Liberation Army in early 1949. A communist form of government is a form of government where all businesses, property, foods, goods, and services are controlled by the government.

Although private enterprise flourishes in China today, most Chinese citizens are still employed, either directly or indirectly, by the Chinese government. They receive wages, housing, health care, and an education as compensation for their work. The culture and economic environment in China is continuing to change and evolve. With more relaxed government controls and the spread of capitalism, today the Chinese people enjoy many of the modern conveniences that many of us in the West have come to take for granted.

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While many Chinese citizens still commute to work or school by bus or bicycle, the influences of the West can be seen in their new shopping malls, proliferation of cell phones, computers, fancy cars, glossy, high-rise apartment buildings, and the growing number of fast food restaurants everywhere in China!

Young people in China enjoy a wide range of activities many of which involve modern technology. From playing video games and chatting on their cell phones to watching DVDs and surfing the Internet, Chinese children and young adults enjoy many of the same things that young Americans do. Many of these things were once rare or even forbidden in China. Today, however, these activities are more prevalent, which allows the Chinese people to reap the many benefits of modern technology, both personally and professionally.

In addition to these new technologies, ancient tradition is still alive and well in China today. Many Chinese people still practice the ancient art of T'ai Chi ch'uan, a Chinese form of exercise and meditation. Others enjoy taking day trips to the numerous historical sites such as the Hukou waterfall or the Museum of the Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses. Older people tend to gather in restaurants and tearooms to talk or sit quietly with their thoughts, and consider the news of the day with their peers.

Chinese children are taught to appreciate and respect their elderly relatives. Even though living space is at a premium, and their homes are often very small compared to what we have here in America, families still tend to take responsibility for aging parents, grandparents, and other elderly relatives. Often this means that grandparents move in with their young families, and live out their lives in the homes of their children. In addition to caring for their elderly relatives, the ambition of most families is to provide their children with higher education and/or to help them to secure a good job.

Most schools (Kindergarten through Middle Schools as well as most Universities, Colleges and Technical Schools) are run by the Chinese government. Children begin Kindergarten at age six in China. Students study five years of language, arithmetic, physical education, music, art, natural science, and political doctrine.

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Then, they move on to six years of middle school where they take classes in politics, language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, basic agriculture, physical education, music, art, and a foreign language, such as English. For most Chinese students, their formal education ends after middle school. Many of them join the military or go to work in a factory, while others go to work on the family farm or in some form of government service for the rest of their lives.

China has a long and rich history of theatre that dates back many centuries to the Shang Dynasty (1523-1028 B.C.). In this period, “seers” performed ceremonial songs and dances to honor the gods. They would “invoke” these gods to drive out pestilence, help create plentiful harvests, or to perform other “miracles.” By the beginning of the Han dynasty, around 202 B. C., court entertainments became very popular. Clowns, wrestlers, acrobats, singers, and musicians entertained emperors and their attendants by acting out mythical stories and famous fables.

These kinds of performances were the precursors for Peking Opera, which is a multi-faceted art form. Chinese Opera is very different from opera you may have seen in the West. Peking Opera combines music, singing, dancing, acrobatics, martial arts, and pantomime. It involves highly stylized acting, costumes, and make-up to create fantastic stage productions. The fundamental belief of Chinese theatergoers is that theatre, at best, should be an illustration of life. It is thought that good Chinese theatre must portray the human struggle to succeed and survive. In addition to this, it should address the joys of living. **JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA** takes the musical part of this theatrical tradition, and brings it to their modern performances today.

The drummers, percussionists, and musicians of **JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA**, are culled from 28 villages within the Shanxi Province. The performers range in age from about 16 to 30 years old. Passed down from generation to generation, their drumming tradition can be traced back many centuries to the ancient city of Jiangzhou, in Xinjiang County. Old Jiangzhou was the home to the Emperor Li Shimin (Tang Dynasty A.D. 618-907), and his celebrated percussion orchestra. In fact, some of the earliest archaeological evidence of Chinese percussion music has been unearthed in the Shanxi region.

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Drumming and percussion music is generally placed in one of two categories. The first category is *yuchui*, pronounced “Yu-Shwee”. This is a *drum and wind style* and is mainly performed at weddings or funerals to bring good fortune and peace to those being honored. The second category is *saishe*, pronounced “Sigh-Sheh”. This is a *festival style* of drumming and is performed largely by villagers praying for prosperous weather and rich harvests. In their repertoire, **JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA** embraces both of these styles of performance. This makes for truly varied performances that combine formal, ceremonial tradition with the more joyful, light-hearted style that can be found in daily life. The percussion section is among the most important aspects of Chinese opera. The drummers and musicians in **JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA** take part of the aforementioned philosophies of Peking Opera, and express them through percussion.

In China, being selected to become a company member of **JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA** is considered a great honor. Membership in this elite performance group brings with it a great deal of prestige as well as the possibility of travel. This is very exciting, particularly for Chinese young people. Parents encourage their children to audition for musical and percussion schools so that they can broaden their horizons and travel the world.

Most Chinese musicians begin their life in art at around age six, but they are not selected to become part of a professional performing troupe until they are about sixteen years of age. *Imagine being chosen for a professional music troupe and traveling the world at such a young age!* While on tour, they will see many exotic places and meet people from all walks of life. As these musicians are representatives of their country and of their ancient art form, they take great pride in being selected to perform for audiences like you in the Western world!

Although there are many positive aspects to being chosen, once a student is selected to attend a special music school, there are great sacrifices involved, for both the parents and the students. These schools can often be far away from the students’ family, friends, and familiar surroundings. In addition to the unfamiliar surroundings, the students work very hard in these schools. Students take their general education classes in the morning hours and their afternoons are spent practicing their musical art, with speed and timing, to perfect their craft. The students do this every day, six days a week!

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A DAY IN THE LIVES OF JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA

A typical day in the life of the touring performers in **JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA** is very busy. They wake up early to get on the bus and head to the next performance city. The first thing the group does when they get to their performance city is go to their hotel and unpack. Then, they ride over to the theatre in their tour bus, where they prepare for their performance. During the show preparations, which can take up to five hours, they eat their lunch, perform sound checks, and tune their instruments. Then, they warm-up their bodies to ready themselves for their performances as their shows are very physical, featuring not only music, but also high-energy choreography and showmanship. The drummers in **JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA** work not only as artists, but as athletes, too! After their one to two hour performances, there is sometimes a reception where they will meet audience members, take pictures, and sign autographs for them. After this, they pack up all their instruments, props, and equipment and return to their hotel for a good night's sleep!

During their free time, the performers like to do many of the same things that American young people enjoy. They might organize a quick game of soccer, or badminton, or table tennis at one of their stopovers. They listen to Asian pop music and play video games. They text and e-mail their families and friends back home in China. If there is time, they even go to the movies or enjoy a swim at their hotel. However, as touring can sometimes be tiring, they may choose to just read a book and rest. These performers are very much like young people here in America, except they are skilled, professional musicians that tour foreign lands, sharing their musical talents and cultural traditions with the world!

The performers see a great deal of the world while on tour in the United States and North America. They enjoy meeting new people and, when they return home to China, they have a wealth of memories to share with their family and friends. Although becoming a member of **JIGU! THUNDER DRUMS OF CHINA** means hard work and being far from home for long periods of time, it also offers benefits such as travel and fun!

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PERCUSSION

The history of percussion instruments in China is longer than any other category of traditional instruments. A written character known to be 'drum' (or, *gu*, in Chinese, *pron. goo*) was first found in the inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty. At that time, around 1562 - 1066 B.C., more than 50% of musical instruments were percussion instruments.

Percussion instruments produce sound by striking on their surfaces. Common materials used for making percussion instruments in Chinese history were gold, rock, wood, and bamboo.

Traditional Chinese musical instruments were once classified into eight groups, according to the materials from which they were made. This system of categorizing the instruments was known as the *bayin* classifications (meaning in Chinese, "eight materials") and they included instruments made from gourds, earthenware, animal hides, wood, bronze, silk, and bamboo. Then, ropes, or adhesive-like substances, such as pitch, were used for keeping the instruments together. It is said that there were once more than 70 different musical instruments in ancient Chinese orchestras, but many of them have been lost, or are obsolete today. The number eight was selected in part as it was thought to be a harmonious number in nature, and it was also the number of the Chinese Emperor, who was considered to be the emissary of Heaven to the human race. Even today, remnants of this tradition remain and the number eight is considered to be a lucky number among many Chinese people.

The percussion section is the most important section in Chinese opera, particularly in "martial arts" scenes known as *wu-chang*. The player of the *bangu* directs the rest of the orchestra through different methods and positions of striking their instrument. He or she has control over the overall development of the action. The leader and creator of the opera's atmosphere the player of the *bangu* is the eastern equivalent to the *conductor* of a western style orchestra.

Due to their many varieties and the richness of timbre and sound, Chinese percussion instruments are frequently used in western style musical compositions. For example, a large *gong* can create a stately and imposing atmosphere. Dramatic effects and an atmosphere of mystery can be achieved with the addition of the *tanggu*, (a medium sized barrel drum), and the *muyu*, (a woodblock or slit drum).

For the most part, percussion instruments are easy to learn and play. As these instruments can produce different sound effects, they are frequently used in joyful and exciting occasions such as harvests, weddings, and many kinds of festivals. They are also used in more somber, traditional memorial ceremonies. The more popular Chinese percussion instruments include *luo* (gong), *bo* (bronze cymbals), *gu* (drum), and *bianzhong* (bronze bells).

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Percussion Instruments Commonly Used by JIGU! Thunder Drums of China

Bangu (Single-headed Frame Drum)



(ban: flat board; gu: drum)

It is also commonly called *Jing Bangu* (*bangu* for Peking opera) and *Danpi* (single drumhead). The drum's frame is constructed of thick wedges of hard wood glued together in a circle, wrapped with a metal band. Its body is bell mouthed in shape, and open at the bottom. Its top surface (C.25cm), covered with a piece of pig or cow-hide, has a small convex central circular opening (about 5 or 6 cm in diameter), which is called the *guxin* (drum heart), the actual sounding position. The player strikes on this central area with a pair of bamboo sticks. The type used for Peking opera and other northern musical dramas, with a smaller central striking area, has a relatively solid tone quality. The type used for the southern gong and drum ensemble, with a larger striking area, is loose and soft in tone. The southern type is fit for solos with a variety of techniques and rhythms. The *Jing Bangu* leads the percussion section in the instrumental ensemble of the Peking opera.

Bo (Pair of bronze cymbals)



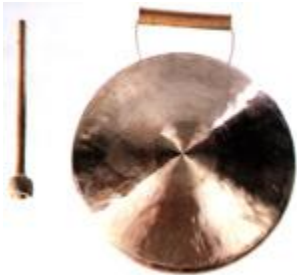
They were frequently used in Sui and Tang dynasties (A.D. 581- A.D. 907) with varying designs. Now it is commonly made of high-tin bronze. The performer strikes the pair together. The most common type now is the *jingbo* (the prefix *jing* referring to *Beijing*), the name derived from the instrument's use in the Peking opera. This type is clear and forceful in tone quality. It is also used in other regional opera genres and instrumental ensembles, and is one of the four major instruments (drum, large and small gongs, and cymbals) in the jubilant *luogu* (gong and drum) music. In local operas, the instruments are often employed as musical accompaniment for acrobatic stage fighting.

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Percussion Instruments Commonly Used by JIGU! Thunder Drums of China

Luo (Gong)



Chinese gongs are made of high-tin bronze, hammered into a sifter shape. Its central resonating area can be either flat or convex. Its long history can be traced back to the early Western Han period (206 B.C.- A.D. 24) according to an archaeological find from a tomb of that period in Guangxi. In the Tang text (A.D. 618- A.D. 907) it is called *shaluo* (sand gong), the earliest evidence in classical literature. Modern varieties are great in number with varying tone qualities. The name is usually preceded by a prefix to specify the different kind of tones. The largest type (over 120cm in diameter) called *dachaoluo*, with the name derived from its deep and grave tone, and it is used in weddings, funerals, and temple ceremonies. The smallest *goujiao luo* (dog-call gong), is only 8cm in diameter, and can often be seen in theatrical musical ensembles in the southern Fujian province. Both the larger and the smaller versions of these gongs, include a series of types under different names, and in varying tone qualities. There are also derivative types of gongs found in the music of many ethnic minorities with individual acoustic features, functions, and performing styles.

Diameter: 35-50 cm (larger type) and 8-23 cm (smaller type)

Tanggu (Medium-Sized Barrel Drum, or, Hall Drum)

(*tang*: hall; *gu*: drum)



The drum is listed as "hide" in the traditional *bayin* classifications. The common type is similar in shape to a barrel. Its wooden shell, entirely painted red with decorative patterns, is covered with two drumheads of cowhide or pig-skin. Four lateral iron rings around the shell allow the drum to be vertically suspended in a frame. It is struck with a pair of wooden beaters. Tone quality can be modified by moving the point of striking closer to the centre of the surface, with varying dynamics. The *tanggu* is constructed mainly in two types. The larger one can produce a deep and sonorous tone, while the smaller one is solid and forceful in tone quality. The drum is traditionally used with other instruments like *luo* (gong) and *bo* (cymbals) in folk festivals and celebrations, and in theatrical ensembles or accompaniments as well. Types for local operas are mostly smaller, e.g. The *jing tanggu* in Peking opera. Diameter: over 1m (large drum); 20-30cm (small drum).

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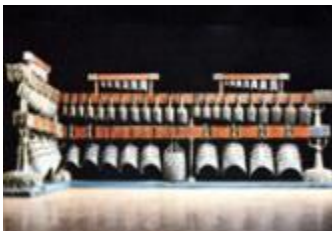
Percussion Instruments Commonly Used by JIGU! Thunder Drums of China

Lion Drum



The size of a Lion Drum is very big, and this instrument is widely used for the traditional Lion Dance. There are normally 2 types, the northern Lion Drum (normally in red color) and southern Lion Drum (in black color). It is a single headed drum, if its size and the color doesn't draw a crowd, then the glorious booming sound is sure to get lots of attention. The Lion drum has a thick durable goat-skin head, and a wooden body, normally with beautifully hand painted decorations.

Bianzhong (Collected Bronze Bells)



(bian: collected; zhong: bell)

This instrument, listed as "metal," heads the *bayin* classifications. Its long history dates back to the Shang dynasty (1766-1122 B.C.), when a set of 3 bronze bells was common, though the earlier pottery type of the late Stone Age have also been discovered in Shanxi province. From the 5th to the 3rd century B.C., the number of bells was increasing over time, mostly to 9, then up to 13. The largest set ever seen was from the tomb of Zenghou Yi (the 5th century B.C.) in Hebei province. This archaeological find has become a focus of world academic attention. The set consists of 64 bells, hung in three layers. The upper ones are called *niuzhong*, (bells with bronze loops for vertical suspension); those on the two lower layers are called *yongzhong*, (bells with handles for suspension at a slight angle). Because of the bells shape, two different pitches, a major or minor third apart, can be produced on any of the bells, depending on the two striking locations, the frontal or the lateral. Twelve semi-tones are found in the set, with a range of 5 octaves. The inscriptions on the bells unite to form a literature of a large tone system, and have proved to be valuable sources for the study of the musical culture in the Warring States Period (475 - 221 B.C.). With the construction for two different pitches from a single bell, and the unique casting technology, the *bianzhong* has established itself as the eighth wonder of the world!

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Percussion Instruments Commonly Used by JIGU! Thunder Drums of China

Yunluo (Set of small bronze gongs)



(yun: cloud; luo: gong)

The *Yunluo* was first mentioned in China as *yun-ao* in the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368 A.D.). The small gongs in the set, usually 10 in different pitches, are suspended vertically in the same wooden frame. Each is attached to a cubicle within the frame by cords. The gongs are all of the same diameter but of varying thickness. In tuning, thicker dimensions give higher pitches, and thinner ones, lower pitches. The instruments are struck with a small beater. In the redesigned type, the number of gongs has increased, ranging from 29 to 38, and two mallets with either hard or soft tips, are used for different tonal effects. Some sounds are clanging and solid, while others are soft and drifting. Owing to the enlarged range, modification in thickness cannot produce any other pitches. Thus varying diameters are used for the new tones. The *yunluo* are mostly seen in instrumental ensembles and, more recently, for solos as well.

Muyu (Woodblock or Slit drum)



(mu: wooden; yu: fish)

Used originally to accompany the Buddhist chant, an account of this instrument was found in the literature of the Ming dynasty (1368 -1644 A.D.): "The *muyu* is carved from a block of wood and into the shape of a fish, and then its interior is hollowed out. Sounds can be produced by striking." Since the Qing dynasty (1645 A.D. -1911 A.D.) the instrument has appeared in folk instrumental ensembles. The *muyu* is mostly made of mulberry or Chinese toon wood. The larger type is primarily used in Buddhist temples, but recently has appeared in sets, varying in diameters and tone qualities. The set is mainly used for regular rhythms in the accompaniment. Diameter: 5-50 cm (or more) and 8-16 cm (types in sets).

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*Please Note: The above is intended as a brief introduction to Chinese percussive and musical instruments. Not all instruments shown may be used in our performance. For further information on these and other musical instruments, see our bibliography attached, or pay a visit to your local Public Library.



COSTUMES and MAKE-UP



Costume, referring to what an actor or actress wears on the stage, is technically termed in Peking Opera and local Chinese operettas *xingtou* (pron. shing TOO) or, more popularly, *xiyi* (pron. shee YEE). The Peking Opera costume is traced back to the mid-14th century. With the passing of time, traditional costumes underwent changes, gradually and continually, until they emerged to what we see on stage today.

The costumes worn in Chinese Opera performances are based broadly on the dress in China about four centuries ago during the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 A.D.). Exaggerated flowing sleeves, pennants worn on the backs of military officers, and pheasant feathers displayed on headpieces were added to heighten the dramatic effect of the stage choreography and add symbolism to the plays. These extra touches bring out the different levels of gesture and rhythm of movement. Like facial make-up, Chinese Opera costumes tell much about the character wearing them. In the past, Chinese Opera singers would rather wear a worn and torn costume than one that did not correctly represent the character they were portraying.



Facial make-up in Chinese Opera, besides giving information about the personality traits and mind-set of a character, also has inherent artistic interest. The designs and colors employed all have specific meanings. Red symbolizes loyalty and courage; black represents a bold and swashbuckling character; blue shows a calculating nature; and white portrays a deceitful and conniving individual. Silver, gold, and yellow are colors reserved for the exclusive representation of the supernatural, spirits and gods and heaven. A face that is made up in a straightforward and consistent manner is called a "complete face"; one that incorporates many diverse elements is referred to as a "fragmented face."

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SUGGESTED VOCABULARY LIST

audition	a trial performance, as by an actor, dancer or musician to demonstrate suitability or skill.
capitalism	an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately or corporately owned.
communism	an economic theory or system of the ownership of all property by the community as a whole.
commute	to travel regularly between one's home and work or school.
compensation	that which is given or received as an equivalent for services, debt, want, loss, suffering, etc.; amends; remuneration; recompense.
dedication	selfless devotion.
doctrine	something taught; teachings.
dynamics	The branch of mechanics that is concerned with the effects of forces on the motion of a body or system of bodies, especially of forces that do not originate within the system itself. Also called <i>kinetics</i> .
dynasty	a lord, ruler; a succession of rulers who belong to the same family; also, the period during which a certain family reigns.
fossil	any hardened remains or traces of plant or animal life of some previous geological period, preserved in rock formations in the earth's crust.
invoke	to call upon for blessing, help, inspiration, protection, etc.
mutual	shared in common; having the same feelings one for the other.
neolithic	designating the latter part of the Stone Age, during which man developed polished stone tools and weapons, raised cattle, etc.

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SUGGESTED VOCABULARY LIST (Continued...)

pantomime	a drama played in actions and gestures to the accompaniment of words sung by chorus or music.
percussion instrument	a musical instrument in which the sound is made by one object striking another or by being scraped or shaken.
percussionist	a musician who plays percussion instruments.
pestilence	any virulent or fatal contagious disease.
philosophy	the study of the principles underlying conduct and thought.
ponder	to think deeply; to deliberate; to meditate.
precursor	one who or that which goes before.
revere	to regard with deep respect, love, awe, and affection.
sacrifice	to give up one thing for the sake of another.
seers	a prophet; one who foretells; a soothsayer.
troupe	a company or group of touring musicians, actors, singers, dancers, or other performers.
bayin classifications:	an ancient system of classifying Chinese musical instruments according to the materials of which they are made. This includes instruments that were made from gourds, earthenware, animal hides, wood, bronze, silk, and bamboo. Literally translated, <i>bayin</i> means “eight materials” in Chinese.

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