

MAKE  
YOUR OWN

# Bolang Gu

## Chinese Pellet Drum!

The Bolang Gu (波浪鼓; pinyin: bo lang gu) is a hand-held percussion instrument that is also called a monkey drum, pellet drum or a rattle drum. It's a two-sided drum with small beads or pellets attached to its sides. When the drum is played, the pellets bounce back and forth off both sides creating a unique sound. Although bolang gu are often seen as children's toys; especially at Chinese New Years celebrations, they actually date back to ceremonies held in the Song Dynasty of China and are part of religious rituals in Tibet, Mongolia, India, and Taiwan.



### *Supplies for One Drum*

Making your own version of this inventive little instrument is simple.

Here's what you need:

- ◇ 2 paper plates
- ◇ 1 cardboard paper towel roll
- ◇ Stapler
- ◇ Tape
- ◇ A bit of string or twine
- ◇ 2 beads
- ◇ Any materials desired for decoration.



### *Decorate Your Drum*

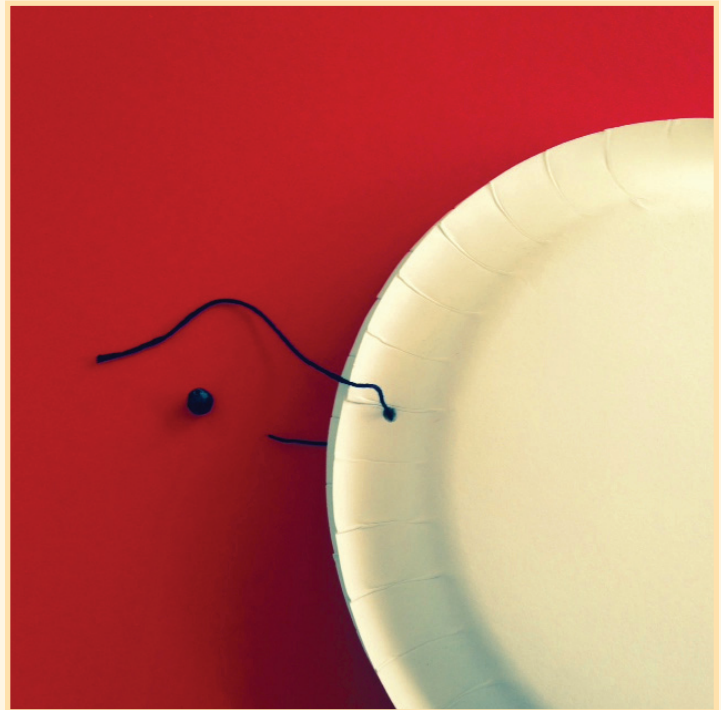
If you're going to decorate your plates, do this first. In fact, you may wish to have many plates and try lots of different designs, then select your favorites to be used as the two faces of your drum. For decoration ideas, you can use Chinese characters or calligraphy. You can find stickers or designs that reflect animals in the Chinese zodiac or look for Chinese New Year or related printables as part of your design. Once your plates are created, move on to the next step.

## *Assemble Your Drum*

Place your two paper plates "back-to-back". Apply a few staples to hold them in place. Compress the top part of your cardboard tube together slightly and insert about 1 to 2 inches inside the paper plates, where you want the handle to be. Continue stapling around the plates until you reach the other side and staple right up to the handle. This should hold it firmly in place, but you can also add decorative tape to make it even more sturdy.

## *Add the Pellets*

Now it's time to add the beads. Start by making two holes on the right and left side of the drum halfway up the paper plates. Use a hole punch to make your 2 holes or have an adult help by poking the holes in the paper plates with the tip of a nail or an awl. Knot a bead onto a small piece of string, twine or embroidery thread and tie onto each side, leaving about 2 to 3 inches of string. The length of string allows the beads to bounce back and forth to create the signature sound of the drum.



## *Lots of Different Drums*

Will every bolang gu sound the same? Not at all!

Adjusting the length of the string will create a different sound on each drum. Experimenting with different size or material of paper plates will change the sound as well. Lastly, the size and type of beads will all produce different sounding drums. This is a fun craft to do several different ways and compare the results!

## *Play Your Drum*

Although this instrument looks very simple, there are several different ways you can make music with it.

To get the classic monkey drum sound effect, place the handle between two hands and "rub" back and forth. Try this slowly and try it faster to hear the difference in sound.

Hold the bolang gu in one hand and rotate your wrist to make the rattle sound.

Try either technique (above) while moving your arms like a dancer. For instance, play by rubbing with both hands and move the drum up and down in front of you while playing it.

Play it with one hand and move that hand gracefully in circles while keeping a steady rhythm going.

Make up your own creative techniques and moves!

Play along with music and try to match the sound of the drum to fit with the music.

Play along with Chinese New Year music and use the drum as a sound effect.

For inspiration, check out several of the Chinese New Year videos on DARIA's Multicultural Kids Music Video site: <http://multikidsmusicvids.com/>. One bolang gu video, that features dancers from Taiwan doing really creative dance routines while playing their pellet drums can be seen at this link: <http://multikidsmusicvids.com/?p=1389>