



Taiko drummers rock Rye students

School gets an education in Japanese culture, too

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RYE — Loud, hollow thuds were heard coming from the gym at Rye Elementary on Thursday, but don't be alarmed, as it was entirely educational.

Teachers and students from kindergarten through fifth grade watched intently as performers of Odaiko New England (ONE) played large taiko drums, told stories and spoke of the Japanese culture.

Later in the show, students and a teacher participated in banging the barrel sized drums.

"This was the best assembly we've ever had," said fourth-grader Ava. "I really liked the stories."

ONE is a Boston based performance group that uses Japanese drums to educate and celebrate multicultural society. Odaiko is Japanese for "big fat drum."

"It's our mission to expose people to cultural arts in a way that's very powerful," said performer Mark Rooney, 34, of Boston.

The pounding of the drums resonated throughout the gym and shook students to their sneakers. "The floor was vibrating," said an excited student.



Juni Kobayashi, of Odaiko New England, acts out a story for Rye Elementary students explaining how Taiko drumming was used in old Japan. Don Clark

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www.onetaiko.org

According to Julia Grant, enrichment chairwoman, the assembly was an important opportunity for students to be educated about a different culture.

According to students, the performers drummed so quickly that "it looked like they were playing in fast forward."

Rooney and another performer, Juni Kobayashi, said they train for hours to get as good as they are at the taiko.

"You use your whole body to play the drum," said Rooney. He also noted taiko was the "most rewarding and exhilarating" profession he's had.

Grant contacted ONE through Young Audiences, a nonprofit organization that works to bring professional artists to schools.

The school's PTA and enrichment committee funded the assembly.



Mark Rooney, left, of Odaiko New England, leads Rye Elementary students and teachers in Japanese Taiko drumming. Don Clark

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Mark Rooney, left, and Juni Kobayashi, of Odaiko New England perform Japanese Taiko drumming at Rye Elementary School. Don Clark
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