

Create Your Own Mbira

The mbira (pronounced Um-beer-ra) is an African musical instrument that dates back centuries. It traditionally consists of a wooden board with attached metal tines, or keys. Create a mbira using everyday materials and create a rhythm of your own.

Materials

2 plastic plates
Dried beans or dried peas
Bobby Pins of various lengths
Tape (clear packing tape works best!)

Instructions

1. Take two clear plastic plates: fill one plate with a mix of dried peas or beans.
2. Cover the bottom plate with the second plate, so the contents placed within can be secured, the mouths of the plates open to one another. Tape the two plates together, sealing the edges.
3. Select your choice of long and short bobby pins and bend them slightly so they open more. Tape the bottoms of the bobby pins down in a row.
4. Pluck the bobby pins and hear the vibrations.
5. Make your own rhythm by plucking the keys!

Go Further

Do the sounds from the short bobby pins sound different than the longer ones? Why do you think that is?

As an experiment, create another mbira that isn't filled with dried beans or peas. Compare the sounds. Do they sound the same? Different?

Share a photo of your mbira with us! Tag us on Instagram @bcmkids #bcmandyou

