Name: _____ Date: _____

# The Thumb Piano and Its Buzzing Tongues

Circle group

A thumb piano is a small instrument. You hold it in both hands. You play it with your thumbs. People in parts of Africa have made thumb pianos for a very long time. Some call it a kalimba or an mbira.

On top is a row of thin metal strips called tines. Each tine is a different length. You press one down with a thumb and let it go. It shakes back and forth. That makes a sound.

Short tines make high notes. Long tines make low notes. The tines sit on a wooden board. The board sits on a hollow box or a gourd. The hollow space makes the sound louder.

Some players add bits of metal that buzz. The buzz makes the music lively.

## Questions

**1. How do you play a thumb piano?**

_____

_____

**2. What are the metal strips called?**

_____

_____

**3. Which tines make the high notes?**

_____

_____

**4. What makes the sound when you let go of a tine?**

_____

_____

**5. Why is there a hollow box or gourd under the board?**

_____

_____

**6. Why might a player add bits of metal that buzz?**

_____

_____

## Words to know

tines: thin strips of metal that make notes
hollow: empty on the inside
gourd: a hard fruit shell that can be dried and used as a bowl
notes: single musical sounds

## Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

# The Thumb Piano and Its Buzzing Tongues

Triangle group

A thumb piano is a small instrument that you hold in both hands. You play it with your thumbs. People in parts of Africa have made thumb pianos for a very long time, and some call the instrument a kalimba or an mbira.

On top of the instrument is a row of thin metal strips. These strips are called tines. Each tine is a different length. When you press one down with a thumb and let it go, it shakes back and forth. That shaking makes a sound.

The short tines make high notes. The long tines make low notes. The tines are fixed to a wooden board, and the board sits on a hollow box or a gourd. The hollow space helps the sound grow louder.

Some players add little bits of metal that buzz on purpose. The buzzing gives the music a lively, shimmering sound.

## Questions

**1. How do you play a thumb piano?**

_____

_____

**2. What are the thin metal strips called?**

_____

_____

**3. Which tines make the high notes?**

_____

_____

**4. What makes the sound when a tine is released?**

_____

_____

**5. Why does the instrument sit on a hollow box or gourd?**

_____

_____

**6. Why might a player add bits of metal that buzz?**

_____

_____

## Words to know

tines: thin strips of metal that make notes
hollow: empty on the inside
gourd: a hard fruit shell that can be dried and used as a bowl
shimmering: shining or sounding with a quick, soft flicker
notes: single musical sounds

## Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

# The Thumb Piano and Its Buzzing Tongues

Square group

A thumb piano is a compact instrument that a player cradles in both hands and plays with the thumbs. People in parts of Africa have been making thumb pianos for a remarkably long time, and the instrument is sometimes called a kalimba or an mbira.

Across the top runs a row of thin metal strips known as tines. Every tine has a different length. When the player presses one down with a thumb and then releases it, the tine vibrates back and forth, and that vibration produces a sound.

The short tines sound high, whereas the long tines sound low. The tines are fastened to a wooden board, which rests on a hollow box or a gourd. The empty space inside helps the sound swell and carry.

Certain players attach small pieces of metal that buzz deliberately. The buzzing gives the music a lively, shimmering quality.

## Questions

**1. How is a thumb piano played?**

_____

_____

**2. What name is given to the thin metal strips?**

_____

_____

**3. Which tines sound high?**

_____

_____

**4. What produces the sound when a tine is released?**

_____

_____

**5. Why does the board rest on a hollow box or gourd?**

_____

_____

**6. Why would a player attach pieces of metal that buzz on purpose?**

_____

_____

## Words to know

tines: thin strips of metal that make notes
hollow: empty on the inside
gourd: a hard fruit shell that can be dried and used as a bowl
shimmering: shining or sounding with a quick, soft flicker

## Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

# For the teacher: The Thumb Piano and Its Buzzing Tongues

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

### Circle: The Thumb Piano and Its Buzzing Tongues

Easier · 126 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 1.4

1. You press the metal strips with your thumbs.
2. Tines.
3. The short ones.
4. The tine shakes back and forth.
5. The hollow space makes the sound louder.
6. To make the music more lively.

### Triangle: The Thumb Piano and Its Buzzing Tongues

This passage · 147 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 3.1

1. You press the metal strips with your thumbs.
2. Tines.
3. The short ones.
4. The tine shakes back and forth.
5. The hollow space makes the sound grow louder.
6. To give the music a lively, shimmering sound.

### Square: The Thumb Piano and Its Buzzing Tongues

Harder · 146 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 6.9

1. The player presses the metal strips with the thumbs.
2. Tines.
3. The short tines.
4. The tine vibrates back and forth.
5. The empty space helps the sound swell and carry, so it is louder.
6. To give the music a lively, shimmering quality.