Purpose: Students will acquire an understanding and demonstrate their knowledge of the significance of drumming to First Nations culture and beliefs.

Estimated time: 60 minutes

Resources required:
- An empty can with a plastic lid (small or large) for each student, as well as the teacher
- Construction paper
- Glue
- Scissors
- Paint or markers
- Paintbrushes and water
- Dowels or sticks from trees, string, leather, feathers, beads

Activity:
1. Ask the class to assemble in the meeting area of your classroom. Begin the lesson with a story about drums. We suggest The Drum Calls Softly by David Bouchard and Shelley Willie, illustrated by Jim Poitras or The Song Within My Heart by David Bouchard and illustrated by Allen Sapp. Read it to the class to introduce the topic of the lesson. If these books are not available, use this traditional Ojibwe story about the origin of drums:

   Long ago and yet not so long ago, the Ojibwe people were at war. Warrior societies flourished, and around the village campfires the talk was always about war. But the costs of war were high. Many of the village’s men died, and the women and children mourned, even though most of the people forgot what they were fighting for.

   One young girl decided she was tired of losing the men she loved and tired of war. She took her wish to put an end to the wars to the elders of the village, but they were not kind to her. They believed that as a child nothing she could do would change the warrior ways of the village men.

   Unable to accept their opinion, the young girl decided to go to a nearby lake to reflect and look for answers. On the eve of the next full moon she set out on her journey with only a blanket and a few provisions.

   For days she waited, but nothing happened. No visitors or visions came to her. It was not until the next full moon many days later that the answer came to this patient child. While the girl lay on her blanket looking up at the Grandmother moon, she saw seven grandfathers coming toward her with the Grandmother moon. The grandfathers sat with the girl through the night giving her all their teachings as the Grandmother moon showed her how to stretch raw hide and lace it, showing her how to create a drum. The Grandmother moon told the girl that the men of the village were so busy with war that they had forgotten how to connect with their hearts but that the drum would help them.

   The next day the girl returned to her village wiser than when she had left, carrying the drum she had made with the Grandmother moon. At the warriors lodge she presented the drum to the men who accepted the gift. The warriors began to use the drum and their voices. Just as the Grandmother moon had predicted, the warriors began to connect with their hearts and soon thoughts of war left their minds. With the sound of the drum, the warriors put down their guns and danced. Peace had entered their hearts.

   Note: This story is based on a traditional Ojibwe legend “How the drum came back to the Ojibwe People.”

2. Tell students they will be learning about the importance of drums in First Nations cultures in Canada. Ask students:
   a. What are some different kinds of drums? (drum sets, bongos, the timpani, steel drums, etc.)
   b. Does anyone here play drums?
   c. Why do you play them?
   d. Why do people usually learn to play an instrument? (for fun or entertainment, etc.)
   e. What do you think some First Nations communities used drums? (Are the reasons similar or different?)

3. Explain to students that in some First Nations there are usually four reasons for drumming:
   a. Social occasions:
   Social events bring communities together. They strengthen family, clan and community bonds and create solidarity. Events can be purely for fun or be tied to ceremonial and sacred activities. The round dance is designed to bring together men and women so they can get to know each other. At this social function, the singer and drummers stand in the centre of a circle using hand drums. Everyone dances around them. Iroquois’ dances were for men and women, but they also had dances for each gender to perform.
b. **Personal:**
Drumming can be a way for people to meditate, or to provide focus for difficult situations or times.

c. **Healing:**
The drum has played a major role for healing in some First Nations.

d. **Ceremonial:**
There are different ceremonial drumming types: religious, social, political and civic drumming.

Religious drumming is a part of traditional events, important events in the year and other religious events that are an important part of many First Nations. Social, political and civic drumming is a part of welcoming new chiefs and other important figures, including honouring political visits from other First Nations People.

4. Explain to students that drums are used for similar reasons across many cultures around the world. First Nations cultures use drums for some very important reasons. Across Canada different First Nations have unique and different types of drums. Ask students:
   a. Have you ever seen a First Nations drum? (Check out the drum gallery for images of different First Nations drums: www.native-drums.ca/index.php/Drums?tp=a&bg=1&ln=e)
   b. Do you remember what it looked like?
   c. Does anyone know what First Nations drums are made out of?

5. One drum used by some First Nation People today is the frame drum. It is a small, single-person hand drum. The large pow wow drum allows groups to play together. First Nations People of the West Coast, Iroquoian nations of Eastern Canada and Cree nations north and west of Lake Superior had their own distinct drums. The following examples explain how First Nations People across Canada traditionally used and made their drums:
   a. On the Plains: To make pow wow drums, Plains people would hollow out a large log and stretch a deer hide over it. There are several stories about how this type of drum originated.
   b. In Central North America: The Ojibwe and Iroquois would traditionally use water drums in their ceremonial practices. These cultures also often used many types of rattles, for example the turtle rattle.
   North and west of Lake Superior: Cree Nations use the beating of the drum to mimic a beating heart, since the first beat a baby hears is that of the mother’s heart. Cree drums are often made of birchwood and deer hide, which creates a harmonious buzz.

6. Tell students they will have the chance to make their own drums. Ask students to take out any materials they brought from home for the craft activity. Distribute any remaining materials students may need.

7. Have students either paint the coffee can one solid colour or cover the can with construction paper. Leave the plastic lid on the coffee can. This will be the drum head.

8. When the cans are dry (if painted), add decorative embellishments with more paint and drawings. Glue strings, feathers, beads, etc. onto the drum.

9. Using wooden dowels or wooden sticks, students should test their drums.

10. Share with students a music or video clip on the Canadian Heritage: Native Drums website: www.native-drums.ca.

11. Instruct students to assemble in a large circle. Hold a drum circle at the end of the lesson. Reach out to community members. Invite a local drumming circle to perform or invite an elder to speak about drumming.