Carlos Chávez
*Sinfonia India (Symphony No.2)*

**BACKGROUND:**
This symphonic work features some very interesting percussion sounds, as well as the strings and winds of the orchestra. In the original score, Chavez called for percussion instruments that were native to the Yaqui, Seri, and Huichole Indian peoples of Mexico. They were instruments made of materials such as deer hooves, butterfly cocoons, and clay rattles. Sometimes, orchestras substitute other instruments for these instruments, which are difficult to find (and sometimes, to hear) - but we can always clearly hear interesting percussion sounds throughout the work.

**OBJECTIVE:**
Students will hear the difference between percussion instruments that are in the drum category, the shaker category and the xylophone category.

**MATERIALS:**
Box of assorted percussion instruments.

**ACTIVITY:**
Empty the contents of a box of percussion instruments. Ask the students to sort the instruments by categories - without giving them any categories to work with! The object is for them to come up with different ways of sorting the instruments. The students may discover that they can be sorted by what they are made of - or how they are played - among other ways. Make a list of the different possible ways to sort the instruments.

After the students have explored various ways of categorizing - ask them to sort by the following categories:

1. Things that seem to be “shakers”
2. Things that seem to be “drum-like”
3. Things that are played with “mallets”

Have all the shakers play together, then all the drums, all the xylophone-like instruments. It is possible to have a student conductor direct your classroom orchestra of these sounds - playing with the combinations.

Create lists of words that describe the sound of each category.

Now the students are ready to listen to Chávez’s *Sinfonia India*. Have them indicate with hand motions when they hear shakers, drums or xylophones in the percussion.

**RESEARCH EXTENSION:**
Have students research the instruments of Mexico - keeping these categories in mind. Find out the names of the particular instruments and what they were made out of.
Adapting for Lower Grades:
Students might enjoy making simple shakers and drums out of coffee cans, plastic cups, rice or beans. They can discover the difference between shakers and drums by making these instruments and exploring the different sounds they make. The teacher can serve as a conductor for the percussion orchestra - and then students may try as well. If possible, a xylophone instrument might be brought in for the class to hear. Now they are ready to listen to the Chavez symphony - keeping their ears open for drums and shakers.