

East Lake Elementary receives grant to study Aztec Indian culture

By [Kevin Hardy](#) Saturday, December 10, 2011



John Jaramillo leads the fourth-grade students of East Lake Elementary School in a drum performance using the students' decorated Aztec drums Friday. East Lake Elementary received a grant from the Arts Education Council to study the Aztec culture.

Photo by [Jenna Walker](#).

After each boom of John Jaramillo's drum, dozens of other booms follow from eager fourth-graders. They follow his lead, taking cues from his gesturing and his hornlike blowing into a seashell.

The thundering sounds fill the cafeteria at East Lake Elementary School.

Performance artist Jaramillo, along with all four fourth-grade classes at East Lake, performed ritualistic drumming and dancing of the ancient Aztecs of Mexico.

Jaramillo spent the week as an artist-in-residence at East Lake, teaching the students about Aztec culture, music and dance. His visit was sponsored by the Arts and Education Council of Chattanooga and funded by the SunTrust Foundation, Tennessee Arts Commission and the Southern Arts Federation.

He interwove his lessons with the fourth-grade social studies curriculum, including study of the arts and history of Aztecs, whose culture dominated Central America between the 14th and 16th centuries.

East Lake students made traditional-style drums out of cardboard and adorned them in colorful paints. Jaramillo then taught them several drumming and dancing routines.

"It's kind of an immersion into the Aztec culture," he said.

Students clearly enjoyed the experience. During the musical performance, those who were waiting their turn at the drums mimicked the movements from the audience.

"I think it was fantastic," said fourth-grader Milijah Williams.

Milijah, 9, said she most enjoyed learning how to play on the drums.

"It was pretty easy," said Aaron Sand, also a fourth-grader. "We just followed directions."

And they even learned a little about the art of stagecraft.

"They have to be able to see you," said 9-year-old Aaron. "If you're facing backwards, the audience can't see you."

The grants, which totaled about \$8,000, will pay for a week of residency from Jaramillo for four Hamilton County schools this academic year. He's already been at East Ridge Elementary and Calvin Donaldson Elementary, with a trip planned to Chattanooga School for the Liberal Arts, he said.