The sound of bells
Adapted from The Vancouver Courier

Level 1

You can make music many ways. The handbell is an old way to make music. In the 1600s, two brothers made handbells in England. People today use them, too.

How handbells work
A handbell has a leather or plastic handle. You hold the handle in your hand. There is a clapper inside the bell. Then you move your wrist. This makes the clapper hit the bell.

Ringing the bells
A person in a handbell choir uses both hands to ring different bells. Each bell makes a different sound, like the keys on a piano. For example, one bell makes a C sound. Another bell makes a D sound. The name of the note is on the handle.

Different sizes, different sounds
Some bells are big. These bells make low sounds. One handbell is very heavy. Two hands must lift it. Other handbells are the size of cellphones. These little bells are for high notes.

Handbells in B.C.
Burnaby, Prince George, Kamloops, Abbotsford and Victoria are some of the cities in B.C. with handbell choirs.

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A Vancouver handbell choir travels to Asia sometimes. This choir is called the Bells of Shaughnessy. They raise money for charity with their trips.

The Bells of Shaughnessy
Shan Shan Chen leads the choir. The choir has 14 young members. Chen’s daughter, Eileen Tian, is in the choir. Eileen, seven, stands on a chair to reach the handbell table. She is the youngest member. She rings a small bell.

Chen’s choir teaches teamwork. The choir teaches how to focus. Chen says, “Nobody is a hero in this group. Every part is important.”

The handbells of the choir
The choir uses 49 handbells. In a concert, each member must ring three to four of the bells. Sometimes two bells are in each hand. But only one bell is played at a time.

A tour
Chen’s choir went to Shanghai in China in March 2013. The choir learned a special piece of music. It is called “Butterfly Lovers”. The young people were the first group to play this piece with handbells. Chen said, “I think the whole Chinese population knows this piece.”

Vocabulary:
- clapper: the moving part inside a bell which makes the sound (see photo above)
- teamwork: working well with other people to do a project or job
- focus: to pay very close attention to something

Links:
The Bells of Shaughnessy handbell choir tour in 2009: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7zBKW4Px1E

“Butterfly Lovers” violin concerto: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK3jRo6aTbQ

Advanced handbell concert in Edmonton: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uD_13jv4vFg