

Setting up for Success

Activities and Games for Beginning Strings

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Activities for the Bow Hand

- Achieving a proper bow hold is usually the most difficult step when learning to play a stringed instrument
- Using old, damaged, or wooden bows for the first few lessons is helpful and allows students time to find or be assigned a proper instrument
- Music reading and activities for posture can be done as a separate part of the lesson

How to Set Up the Bow Hand

- “Bow Bunny”
- Draping hand
- Thumb under (for students with fine motor issues)
- Other methods?



Activities with a Vertical Bow

- Spider
- Finger taps
- Number of holds per minute
- Roll a dice and attempt that number of bow holds
- Take a picture
- Pass a cup
- Bow dancing (Phyllis Young)
- Bouncing balloons (Phyllis Young)
- Ghosts!

Tipping the Bow

- Tapping left hand or partner's hand
- Tapping drum (Dr. Alice Ann O'Neill)
- Windshield wipers
- Hickory Dickory Dock
- Bouncing test
- Bow ninjas
- Bow fishing

Posture and Holding the Instrument

- Proper sitting position is essential for all instruments, and a chair of a proper height is important
- It is difficult and frustrating to play if the instrument is not held ergonomically
- Holding the instrument properly can take many weeks



How to Set Up the Instrument

- Assign specific shoulder rests and endpin holders to each student
- Mark endpins with a sharpie for each student
- Talk about a “triangle” shape
- Other methods?



Activities for Setting Up the Instrument

- Simon Says
- Standing and Sitting
- Secret signal
- Tapping the fingerboard
- Ski jumps



Developing Left Hand Strength



- If students do not begin with proper wrist and hand position it is very difficult to correct this later.
- Many students do not have very good fine motor skills or strength in their hands
- Significant numbers of students have difficulty with observing someone opposite vs. mirroring a motion.
- Developing independent hand motions can be difficult for many students.

Activities for Strength & Dexterity

- Clothespin strengthener
- Finger flicks
- Children's chopsticks
- Left hand finger sequencing game
- Music reading on opposite arm

Activities for Left Hand Setup

- Hug the string & slide into place (Suzuki technique)
- Left hand pizz
- Start with 4th finger
- Demonstrate strength of curved fingers/importance of fingertips.
- Show off finger lines
- Discuss “finger armor”
- Other ideas?



Activities for Hand Independence

- Drawing circles and squares going in opposite directions
- Swedish cello song
- Brain Gym Exercises



Placing the Bow on the String



- Students should have a strong bow hold before attempting to play with the bow on the string
- Beginning with a good tone is helpful when trying to replicate that sound in subsequent repetitions
- Students must have enough flexibility and strength in the hand to steer the bow on the string without too much squeezing

Activities With the Bow

- Play rhythms by rote on open strings
- Set bow on lowest string and rock to higher strings
- Silent rock and roll
- Freeze game
- Use dice to plan string crossings
- Play descending scales using simple rhythms
- Teach a simple song by rote (French Folk Song, Twinkle, or Jingle Bells)

Music Theory & Reading

- Students should understand the concept of intervals, the lines and spaces of the staff, and simple rhythms before trying to read music on their instrument
- Teaching basic music theory before moving to a method book allows students time to develop important technical ability before they have to also interpret the notes on the page.

Key Music Theory Ideas

- The lines and spaces in the staff are arranged alphabetically
- The circle part of each note (the note head) is what determines pitch, the stem (and sometimes the note head) determines rhythm.
- Notes can move by step, skip, or leap. If they move by step the note will be the next letter in the alphabet
- Drills to identify open string notes, whole notes, half notes, quarter notes and eighth notes as well as rests.