

Teaching Elementary Piano Course

Sample Articles

Each module has between five and ten comprehensive articles with images, sound clips, musical examples, and interactive graphics. Here are a few excerpts from the Elementary course.

WEEKS 1–2: Fundamentals of Piano Pedagogy

Activities to Consider for a First Lesson

The Hand

How do new students learn most quickly about hand shape? In the lesson and at home, students can form a “cluster.”

1. Place the hand flat on a solid surface.
2. Slowly draw the fingers in until they are touching, with fingernails lined up. Move the thumb inward until it gently touches the side of finger 2.
3. Look for the many curves. Each finger is curved. There is a curve over the top...



WEEK 5: Musicianship

Creative Exploration

Melodic tendencies and harmonic progressions can be learned during exercises in harmonization. For preparatory students, this can begin from simple melodies based upon three notes ($\hat{1}$, $\hat{2}$, and $\hat{3}$). From here, students can begin to hear how dominant resolves to tonic. The following list of folk melodies provides a basic framework for the elementary levels.

Preparatory A and B: “Hot Cross Buns” and “Au Claire de la lune” (A section only) ▼

Level 1: “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and “Go Tell Aunt Rhody” ▲

These five-finger melodies still utilize tonic and dominant but expand to $\hat{4}$ and $\hat{5}$. If students are ready, they can harmonize with open thirds, fifths, and sixths or complete triads.

Level 2: “Alouette” and “London Bridge” ▼

WEEK 8: Artistry and Expression

Storytelling

Movement

Connecting gesture and movement to music helps students internalize musical contour and connects them to the expressive freedom of phrasing. Encourage your students to participate in “off the bench” activities to experience concepts of rhythm, pulse, phrasing, and structure for a more deeply engaged experience.

The Marching Trumpets, Preparatory B

In *The Marching Trumpets*, by Boris Berlin, from Preparatory B, students can march to the music to reinforce the steady pulse. The bold character of the trumpets...

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Assignment and Personalized Feedback Sample

Personalized feedback from course facilitators helps you to consider new approaches and refine your teaching. At the conclusion of the course, you will have a comprehensive portfolio to showcase your accomplishments.

WEEK 4: Music Literacy

Lesson Plan Development



Word count: 500-700

Including elements of theory in a practical lesson is an important aspect of providing a well-rounded musical education. In this assignment, detail how you would integrate three theory components into a 30 minute piano lesson for a Level 2 OR Level 3 student. Use one of the following pieces for your plan. Consider spending two thirds of the lesson on this project. Refer to the appropriate level of the *Theory Syllabus, 2016 Edition*, for relevant considerations.

Level 2:

- Menuetto in C Major K 6, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- *Turkish Bazaar*, by Mark Mrozinski
- *Little Dance in Canon Form*, by Béla Bartók

Level 3:

- Polonaise in G Minor, attr. Johann Sebastian Bach
- *Variations on a Russian Folksong*, by Isaac Berkovich
- *Picnic 1920*, by Mike Schoenmehl



Template for Lesson Planning:

Piece Title: Menuetto in C Major K 6, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Theory
Description of Activity
e.g., identify scale passage in m. 3 and its connection to the key of this piece. Then find examples of other scale passages later in the piece.
1.

Submitted Assignment

THEORY

1. Discuss the key signature and have the student look for familiar intervals. Are there any major thirds? Any minor thirds? How about perfect fifths? What about octaves? Then look at the entire piece and see how many ascending and descending intervals the student can find.
2. Have the student locate the A and B sections. Point out that section A starts in the tonic key and moves to the dominant while section B starts in the dominant key and moves back to the tonic, which represents binary form. Identify where the melody starts to pull away from the tonic in m. 5 and have the student find the new note (F sharp) that will lead into the new dominant key of G major before the end of section A. We can then locate where the dominant key starts shifting back to the tonic in section B.
3. After allowing the student to take a good look at the piece I will ask how they might play the repeats differently? Some possible methods might be reversing the dynamics, turning the slurs into staccatos, or adding ornaments.

HISTORY

1. Show a picture of Mozart as a child and explain that he was only six when he wrote this piece – probably younger than the student! We would discuss how at age three, Mozart's father was encouraging him to play the clavier and before long he had taught himself to play the clavier, violin, and organ. He then toured all over Europe playing for royalty and was known as a child musical prodigy. Mozart became one of the most famous composers of the Classical period and he was able to listen to any piece and then reproduce it perfectly from memory! I will then demonstrate the first section of the minuet and ask the student to imagine being Mozart and playing it back for me without the music.
2. Using a short video of a traditional minuet dance, I will explain how the dance originated in the Baroque era but was so popular that it carried into the Classical period, where it continued to be written into sonatas and symphonies. Referring to the sheet music, I will point out that this piece is written in binary form, which contains two related sections of eight bars that are repeated (A-A-B-B). The repeated sections allowed the musicians to embellish the second time through by adding ornaments or changing the articulation, making the repeated section more exciting.
3. Inform the student that this piece was originally written for keyboard with violin accompaniment and is part of a sonata. Since Mozart would have composed this on the clavier, I will show the student pictures of the harpsichord, clavichord, spinet, etc. and explain how they differ from today's piano in construction and sound. Using a recording of the piece, I will point out how expressive the accompanying violin is and ask the student to imagine their RH on the piano is the violin. We will then consider how they can change the "colour" of the sound using slurs and dynamics.

RESOURCES

Althouse, Jay and Judith O'Reilly. *Accent on Composers, Vol 1*. Alfred Publishing.

Am4d3usMOz4rt. (2012, April 10) Mozart - Violin Sonata No. 1 in C, K.6 (complete) [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNuo4OsOjVw>

DancetimePublication. (2009, March 12) Minuet Dance | Excerpt from How to Dance Through Time, Vol.IV, The Elegance of Baroque Social Dance [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ik1b4jH9Rk8>

McDonough, Yona Zeldis. *Who Was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart?* Penguin Random House.

Feedback



Dr. Thomas Green

The activities in your lesson plan are relevant and demonstrate thorough research and thoughtful creativity. The components are realistic for a 30 minute lesson and content is appropriate for a wide range of ages and levels of study. The detailed descriptions and sequence of activities is logical.

Consider tying the identification of intervals into chords and harmonic structure/key. In the third history activity, clarify whether or not you would introduce the student to the original instrumentation in a recording.

Your presentation is otherwise comprehensive and, with adaptation for different student learning styles, will help everyone succeed.

Thank you!

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Discussion Forum Sample

Weekly discussion forums provide an opportunity for you to learn and share with like-minded colleagues in a moderated setting. In-depth conversations, aligned with each week's topic, allow you to exchange strategies and teaching tips with teachers from across North America.

Week 3: Posture and Hand Position

Suggest and discuss exercises and activities that you use in a lesson to instill an awareness of correct playing and hand position in your students. Describe assignments and activities that you provide to help ensure your students continue these good playing habits in the lesson and at home.

To reinforce a healthy hand position, I have students place their hand on a foam lady bug toy and I point out the tall bridge, curved fingers, thumb and pinky positions. At home they use the toy to strengthen their first knuckle joints by pushing on the lady bug's spots and making sure no knuckles collapse. I also use a toy mouse in the studio to show students that their hands make a "mouse cave." When they play pentascales, they make sure the mouse has room to breathe but can't escape out the front or back because of playing with a lifted pinky or thumb.



Connie

Wednesday, September 21, 9:39 PM

I've heard of the mouse cave before but I have not heard of making sure the mouse can't escape because of moving the thumb or pinky, . I'm looking forward to trying that with my own students!

I have to find those foam lady bugs, I like that much better than having them pretend they are holding a tennis ball, which is what I usually do. Thank you for sharing all your creative ideas.

Lee

Thursday, September 22, 12:06 AM



I first learned of the lady bug idea through Diane Hidy's blog and she has a link to them on Amazon. You can also search directly for the Ladybug Squeezie by ALPI.



Connie

Thursday, September 22, 5:14 AM

To help with playing posture, I have my students adjust the height of the bench until their forearms are parallel to the floor. I demonstrate two incorrect sitting distances: "The Frankenstein" – with arms fully extended, and "The Gerbil" – with elbows touching the sides of their body. This demonstration always solicits a laugh before we move on to find the "Goldilocks" distance, which is just right and would allow for a bird to fly under their armpit.

Nicole

Thursday, September 22, 10:04 AM



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