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 (1, 2, and 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”
- Level 2: “Alouette” and “London Bridge”

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

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.

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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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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