

Theory at Your Fingertips: A Multisensory Approach to Music Literacy

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These handouts include:

- Unit Overview
 - Assessment
- Raised Line Staff Board Construction Directions
- Links to YouTube® Classroom-Ready Videos of “Sittin’ in a Staff”

Introduction

Theory at Your Fingertips is designed to address what is considered to be the formal part of music instruction. Skill at reading printed staff notation and realizing musical ideas from it is the bridge from participation-based music instruction in the primary years to instrumental and choral opportunities in the upper grades. In a traditional music classroom, theory meant teacher-led demonstrations at the board and related worksheet activities. For some learners, this approach is fine. These learners understand the concepts being taught this way and are ready to apply them to the upcoming instrumental or choral situation with relative ease. For students who do not benefit from the traditional approach, Music class can change from a source of enjoyment to one of frustration. A student with a great singing voice or someone who can play a melody by ear may be finding no meaning in all those dots and lines.

Theory at Your Fingertips is designed to engage learners in activities that involve movement, voice, touch, as well as visual input. Providing a variety of learning modes in lesson material expands the number of learning opportunities (Gurian, Stevens, Hanley, and Trueman, 2011, p. 182), increasing the chances for student success. Lessons designed as global experiences promote student interest, participation, and competence (Caine, Caine, McClintic, and Klimek, 2009, p. 161). Several guided and independent practice sessions in this unit allow for teacher observation and interaction with students (Hillier, 2011). These sessions are designed to accommodate learners who struggle as well as those who are fluent on their first try.

Implementing this Unit

The main body of this unit is organized into nine lessons that introduce basic music terms, staff letter names, note values, and numerical rhythm counting. The first eight lessons can be completed in 10-15 minute portions of instructional time, allowing for other activities to be planned into the same Music period. A classroom teacher using this unit could plan it as short, daily blocks of instructional or practice time. Each lesson can be followed with additional practice sessions in subsequent periods before moving on to the next lesson. Your observations during guided and independent practice activities will determine when your students are ready to move on.

There's an App for That . . . Martial-arts style shouts and motions are used to confirm mindsets for upcoming theory tasks. These tools are referred to as apps in this unit. In Lesson 4, "Staff notes!" establishes the use of five fingers to represent a staff. "Measure beats!" in Lesson 6 calls for four fingers to be used as beats for showing note values and rhythm counting activities.

With the templates supplied in this book, the necessary resources can be made from inexpensive materials. Each resource is reusable, so teaching this unit the second time around will not need as much preparation time as the first.

Assessment

Accurate and timely feedback is critical during the practice sessions in this unit (Saville, 2011). The teacher must be vigilant to catch errors, give corrective feedback, provide the learner an opportunity to revise their attempt, and experience success (Saville, 2011). Students can be encouraged to self-assess their competency following a practice session by using a rubric, such as the following example:

Skill	1 – Acquiring	2 - Developing	3 - Meeting	4 - Exceeding
	I am still unsure of what to do in this activity.	I can do this activity with the help of the teacher or partner.	I feel confident in doing this activity. I am able to figure out a correct response on my own while working with the teacher or a partner.	I am fluent in this skill. I can automatically show a response while following the teacher or working with a partner.

You can quickly check in with your students by having them show their self-assessment score with number of fingers following an activity. Emphasize that displaying a one or two is not a reflection of learning ability, but rather an indication of need for further instruction or practice. Conducting the survey with students' eyes closed would also reduce peer pressure during the display of self-assessment scores. If you see a number of ones or twos, consider review and additional practice opportunities, or implement a suggested intervention that follows each lesson plan.

References

- Caine, M., Caine, G., McClintic, C., & Klimek, K. (2009). *12 Brain/mind learning principles in action: Developing executive functions of the human brain* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gurian, M., Stevens, C., Hanley, P., & Trueman, T. (2011). *Boys and girls learn differently!: A guide for teachers and parents*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hillier, E. (2011, June). Demystifying differentiation for the elementary music classroom. *Music Educator's Journal*, 97(4), 49-53.
- Saville, K. (2011, September). Strategies for using repetition as a powerful teaching tool. *Music Educator's Journal*, 98(1), 69-75.

Fingertip Theory at a Glance

Lesson	Topic	Learning Activities
Story	Universality of Printed Notation	Imagery while listening to “The First Day of School, Again”. Discussion of reading music notation in a foreign country.
1	Basic Music Terms	Singing “Sittin’ in a Staff”, symbol hand signs.
2	Basic Music Terms	Acting hand sign to randomly-called music terms. Music terms acting game.
3	Printed Music Symbols	Matching hand signs to music symbol flash cards. Finding symbols in printed music.
4	Staff Letter Names	Finding letter names on a hand staff. Partner spelling list activity.
5	Singing Letter Names	Echo-singing while pointing to matching note locations on a hand staff.
6	Basic Note Values	Using fingers to show beats in a four-beat measure. Grouping fingers into whole notes, half notes, and quarter notes. Matching note value finger groupings to rhythm cards.
7	Numerical Rhythm Counting	Counting beats on fingertips. Counting of rhythms using combinations of whole notes, half notes, and quarter notes. Partner performer/guesser activity that matches finger groupings and counting demonstration to written notation.
8	Eighth Note Values	Using finger sides rather than tips to subdivide each beat. Partner performer/guesser activity that includes eighth note values.
9	Card Game Review	Playing matching and memory card games to review music terms, staff letter names, note values, and rhythm counting.
Staff Stomp (Opt.)	Review of Staff Letter Names	Counting rhythms. Using staff letter names to produce a percussive class performance.

Constructing a Raised-Line Staff Board



This tactile teaching aid introduced in Lesson 4 can be built from $\frac{3}{4}$ inch furniture-grade plywood and craft sticks like the ones used for ice cream bars. Plywood trimmings from a millwork shop or school woodwork shop will suffice for this project, saving a trip to the lumber yard. Producing a group or class set of these teaching aids could serve as an introduction to table saw techniques for a shop class. Talk very pleasantly to your colleagues who teach in the wood shop.

Using a table saw, cut a 6 inch (150 mm) by 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (115 mm) rectangle from $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (19 mm) plywood, with the surface grain parallel to the 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (115 mm) sides. Once the rectangles are cut, adjust the table saw blade to a height of $\frac{3}{16}$ inch (5 mm). Set the fence at 1 inch (25 mm) to the **centre** of the saw kerf. Pass the 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (115 mm) edge across the blade. Move the fence exactly 1 inch (25 mm) farther from the blade than the previous measurement, and pass the 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (115 mm) edge through again. Keep adding one-inch (25 mm) increments to the fence setting between passes, until there are five parallel grooves across the rectangle measuring 1 inch (25 mm) centre-to-centre. Sand the edges to a smooth finish, and paint the grooved surface white with a non-toxic but durable paint.

Five craft sticks will serve as the raised lines. Paint them black or use a black felt marker to do this job. Glue each stick on edge into a saw cut on the board, creating a raised profile of the staff lines.

If you are making a small-group or class set, perform each function at the table saw for all units being built before readjusting the saw for the next step.