

NO BOOK

BEGINNERS



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TEACH DIFFERENTLY

NO BOOK BEGINNERS

LESSON 1

Objectives	Things to Remember
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get your student excited to explore the piano and start building rapport with them • Help them understand how to sit properly at the piano • Explore improvising on the black keys. This is fun for the child and allows you to assess their musicality, listening skills, ability to follow instructions, etc. • Ensure the child has things to go on with at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be as excited and enthusiastic as you can be • Encourage and praise lots • Have fun!

LESSON PLAN

Lesson Notes	Resources
<p>Get to know you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome the child to your studio. Show them around. Ask them about their favourite TV show, sports, things they do on the weekend, movies, food, colours. Have a chat! • Get to know the child - you'll be able to refer back to this and make future connections in subsequent lessons. • Depending on age, I always like to ask them why they decided to learn piano? What do they love about music? What music do they listen to? 	<p>Here's a great article about Relating to Children at the first piano lesson by Dr Julie Knerr.</p>
<p>What can you play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask them if they'd like to play something. If they hesitate, tell them it doesn't matter how simple it is - anything is good. • Be encouraging no matter how it sounds or how bad their hand position is! • Show interest and excitement that they are already playing. • This let's them show you what they can do and gives you a chance to assess their approach to the keyboard, their rhythm, technique, musicality and music they like. 	<p>Think playing "chopsticks" or similar pieces are a waste of time? Check out my post: Why Chopsticks are more than just a handy eating utensil.</p>

Exploring “What can you play?”

- If they *can* play something, I tend to work with them a little more on it. Eg. if they can play [chopsticks](#), then I’ll accompany them. If they can play Mary Had a Little Lamb, I’ll play along with some chords. If they can play part of a song melody from the radio, I’ll ask what it is try and play along. Maybe we’ll watch the video of the song on YouTube so I can make a connection with it and play something at the same time.
- ***Whatever they can play, see if you can enhance it with an accompaniment somehow.***
- Don’t worry too much about technique at the moment. This activity is about playing and making music.

Make sure you have a basic knowledge of how to play simple chords and a vamp. [Check these resources if unsure.](#)

Don’t get concerned about spending time on YouTube with a child in a lesson (esp. Teens and adults). It will help you understand what they like and are trying to play.

How to Sit at the Piano

- Now it’s time to help the student sit correctly at the piano. Helping the students find a comfortable sitting position is vital in lesson one. Make sure that parents also know the right position so that they can help their child get set up properly at home.
- Get the bench height correct first, use a footrest if they’re small and show them how to place their shoulders, arms, wrists and fingers on the keys (see lesson video).
- I introduce them to *Linda Ladybug* who is going to help them check their position as she travels down the students’ arm from the shoulder to under their hand and checks everything is in a comfortable, natural position.
- I put Linda on their shoulders and explain that she likes it when shoulders are relaxed. You can show get them to hunch up their shoulders and then relax them. Give them cues for when you’re not around - eg. what would Linda think of this position?
- Now move down to the arm (parallel to floor), wrist (parallel to floor or slightly angled down), 1st set of knuckles/bridge of hand (strong), fingers and thumb (comfortably shaped).
- Finally, ask them to lift up the garage door (thumb) and Linda is going to crawl under their hand which should give them a perfect hand shape. Remind them that they can also check this by placing their hand over their knee and bringing up to the keyboard in the same shape.
- Demonstrate LOTS. Students love to copy and will often do it perfectly.
- Demonstrate the *wrong* way and get them to correct you. Kids love this, especially the more over-the-top you act the mistakes out! Have fun with it.

I use “Linda” Ladybug, but you can just as easily use other toys/animals/etc. Anything that can tell a little story and remind them when they’re at home.



Image: Diane Hidy

[Here’s another great PianoSafari resource about technique setup.](#)

Improvising on the Black Keys

- Time to get creative!

Improv
Accompaniments
(below)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Let the student know that they are going to be playing on the black keys. Show them that the black keys are divided up into groups of 2 and 3 notes. Can they play all the pairs of black notes up and down the piano (playing notes together with fingers 2-3 or 2-3-4)? What about the groups of three black notes? ● Try playing the notes separately starting with all the black key pairs, making sure that they are always playing in a detached style. Avoid legato playing for any of this first period of beginning teaching. Read more about why this is important here. ● Demonstrate a non-legato touch with a light arm bounce. ● Find the improvisation accompaniments below. Explain that you're going to play some cool accompaniments in a variety of styles either on a second instrument or as a secondo part (low down) on the student's instrument. ● Students need to listen to the "feeling" of the accompaniment and then decide how their improvisation might go. Timid students might start on just one black note. Are they feeling the mood? Are they in time? Are they trying to do too much? Help them out :) ● Make sure they are sitting correctly and using a non-legato touch. ● Try exploring loud and soft. Demonstrate by playing the accompaniment loud or soft. Try short and jumpy. What about slower/faster. Can they change their approach to suit? Are they listening? 	<p>If you've got a young beginner and would like a really fun off-bench game for understanding the black keys, check out this game from Nicola Cantan: Dogs and Gates and Piano Builder: Seeing Black Key Patterns.</p>
<h3>Animal Improvisation Story</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A great way to get young children improvising in their first lessons is through the lens of animals. ● Explore the different registers of the piano by demonstrating rumbling down low v twinkling up high. What animals would you associate with these areas of the piano? ● Learn about the different sounds and registers on the piano. Which animal is the sound up the top of the piano? Which one lives down the bottom end? What's in the middle? What animal is slow and heavy? What animal is quick and jumpy? Make fun sounds and lots of music. You may like to use pedal or not. Again, keep exploring. ● Let's choose 2 animals to make a story. Eg. Elephant and ant. What's going to happen? The elephant comes walking along (big plods down low in steady rhythm) then he sees all the little ants running around (twinkly notes up high). Then one ant runs down the piano to him and then more (glissando). He gets freaked out and tramples them. The End! ● Kids love creative activities like this so make up your own with your student and have a ball. 	

Summary

- Thank student for their story and all their beautiful playing.
- Finish lesson on a high note, give encouragement and set tasks for the week.
- It's great to ask two questions at the end of any lesson:
 - "What did you most enjoy about your lesson today?"
 - "What's one thing you've learnt about music today?"

PRACTICE PLAN

Practice Notes	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student has to teach their parents how to sit at the piano and how to shape their hands. Students love being the teacher. Reinforces lesson content regarding posture and technique. This will require continued refinement over the coming weeks and months. ● Students continue to explore the black key improvisations using the backing tracks. ● Choose 2-3 new animals for the story. Make them contrasting. Eg. Bird, Duck, Bee. Tell a story using the piano. 	<p>Students will need to keep exploring the improvising at home, so you'll need to record the backing tracks.</p> <p>This is as easy as finding the Voice Recorder app on your phone, hitting record and then sending via email.</p> <p>Of course if you want to save having to do this every time, then save the Backing Tracks to your computer/dropbox and just share each time you need to.</p>

EAGER TO LEARN MORE?

- If you've enjoyed the content of this lesson and want to know how to continue teaching in this way, then make sure you check out the rest of the course.
- This is just lesson 1 in a **10-part No Book Beginner Course** that is available right now in my [Inner Circle Community](#).
- You can **get access today and take 15% off a monthly or annual membership** by using the coupon code NBBROCK when you register. [Click here to find out more](#).
- For more information and videos about teaching beginners, head to timtopham.com/beginners

LESSON RESOURCES

Improv Accompaniments

Here are three simple improv accompaniments that I use. Feel free to alter them, expand them, cut them up - whatever you like! If students are improvising on black keys, any chord progression in Gb major or Eb minor will work. *If you're not familiar with playing in Gb major, please practice these before you teach.*

Improv 1: 2 black notes

This improv is just a 12 bar blues in Gb major with a walking bass line. Students can use any of the 2 black key pairs. You could put on a simple swing beat with GarageBand or Super Groove Metronome or from your own digital piano to make it really groovy. Add syncopation and rhythm to the right hand as you get used to it - the more you groove, the more your student will enjoy it!

I: Two Black Notes

Tim Topham

Fast + Jazzy ♩ = 80

The musical score is for a 12-bar blues piece in Gb major, 4/4 time, with a tempo of 80 beats per minute. It is divided into two systems, 'Piano' and 'Pno.'. The bass line is a walking bass line consisting of eighth notes. The right hand plays chords in the first system: Gb7 (bars 1-2), Gb7 (bars 3-4), and Cb7 (bars 5-6). The second system continues with Gb7 (bars 7-8), Db7 (bars 9-10), Cb7 (bars 11-12), and Gb7 (bars 13-14). The score includes a repeat sign at the end of the second system.

Improv 2: 3 black notes

A flowing and calm feeling in triple meter with students playing on any of the three black notes. You could alternate between the Ebm and Gb major chords for longer if you wish. The Cb9 chord has a really open feeling - you could also try substituting Bbm for a change or as well as the Cb9. Explore it - this is just one idea.

II: Three Black Notes

Tim Topham

Calm + Flowing ♩ = 60

The score is for piano and includes the following chords: G \flat , E \flat m, G \flat , E \flat m, C \flat ⁹, D \flat , G \flat , and G \flat (sus4).

Improv 3: any black notes

Another dreamy option with some warm, rich chords in a simple progression. This is a pop style which I'm sure will appeal. Students can play on any black note for this one. As you can tell, I love 9th chords (as per bar 4). You could easily take this approach and add other chords in G \flat major: eg. B \flat minor, D \flat major, etc.

III: Any Black Note

Tim Topham

Dreamy ♩ = 56

The score is for piano and includes the following chords: G \flat , D \flat /F, E \flat m⁷, G \flat , D \flat /F, C \flat ⁹, and D \flat /F. A "repeat 3x" instruction is shown above the E \flat m⁷ chord.

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