Analysis

I developed this set of lessons for a beginning strings class. I had an early middle school class in mind when designing it, but it would work for most grade levels with a few adjustments. These lessons would be used for the first five times that the students have their instruments. This would most likely be about a month into the school year, possibly less depending on the amount of music training that has taken place in the school system. It could be possible to start with the instruments as soon as each child is fitted for one.

The objective of these lessons is to have each student performing on their instrument with basic proficiency in posture, grip, tone, and technique. It is critical to start beginning students with the right habits, as it is only harder to break bad ones. Once good habits are in place, there is a potential for very high achievement and fast learning.

In developing these lesson plans, I tried to create a synthesis of the Suzuki approach for strings and integrating it into a classroom setting. Suzuki relies heavily on individual instruction from expert teacher and also relies on involvement from another family member. Usually a family member attends the lesson so they can monitor the student practice at home. This is almost impossible in the public school setting as there is not enough time in the day to give everyone a private lesson, and more than likely the parents could not make it to school once a week. This is not the most important aspect of Suzuki, and the Suzuki method is a valuable tool for other aspects of teaching beginning string players.

Since this is a beginning instrument class, I have to assume that every child knows nothing. Depending on the school system, it might be the first music class they have had the opportunity to take, or maybe they had a general music class where all they did was sing songs. In either case, nothing is a good thing to assume. There are tests that measure musical potential,
mainly developed by Edwin Gordon, but lots of spin-off by major music companies like Yamaha and Marshall’s. If there is a student who has been playing a string instrument, they will most likely not be in the class. The main focus of the class is starting students on a new instrument.

Since music is an elective in almost every school, most students choose to be in them. The issue of motivation is somewhat diminished. Most students are really excited to get a shiny new instrument and can wait to learn how to make music. The only problem is keeping them excited about playing, when you have to teach them how to do the boring stuff like bow grips and instrument holds. There are certain games that are used in this regard. For the instrument holds it is easy to use imaginative language to hold their interest.
Lesson 1
Introduction of instruments

Objectives

- Students will unpack and pack instruments properly.
- Students will sing melody and root song of Monkey Song accurately.
- Students will know string names.
- Students will position instruments properly.

Materials

Teacher instrument, equipment box: sponges, rosin, rubber bands, replacement strings, cello pucks.

1. Learn Monkey song melody singing
   a. Establish tonality.
   b. Teacher plays melody.
   c. Teacher sings on “bum.”
   d. Teacher sings ascending, descending lines. Students echo each.
   e. Students sing entire song.

2. Learn root song
   a. Lap pats on macro beat.
   b. Echo on instruments: DDAADDGG, GGDDAAD (all open strings).
   c. Sing root song.
   d. Sing root and melody together.

3. Show parts of the instrument

4. Learn to pizzicato
   a. Show proper rest position and position for pizzicato fingers.

5. Learn string names
   a. “This is the string that we call A.” Pluck string on macro beat.
   b. Do for all strings: A, D, G, E, and C.

6. Pluck Monkey Song root song
   a. Teacher models, students echo.
   b. Students play root song while teacher plays melody.

7. Learn instrument holds
   
   **Chin instruments**
   a. Zip/step feet
   b. Grab instrument about
   c. Swing out and up
   d. Land on shoulder, head down
   e. Look Ma, No hands!
   
   **Cellos**
   a. Stand tall
   b. Sit like an elegant horseback rider
   c. Bring cello in
   d. Take a nap in the peg box.
   e. Look Ma, no hands!
   
   **Basses**
   a. Stand tall
   b. Turn to bass
   c. Bring the bass into pocket
   d. Adjust stance
   e. Look Ma, no hands!
Lesson 2
Bow and instrument holds

Objectives
- Students will demonstrate proper instrument position
- Students will demonstrate proper bow hold
- Students will bow on open D string

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box

1. Warm-ups
   a. Sports movements

2. Tuning
   a. Individual tuning with teacher and peer-aid.

3. Review instrument holds from previous lesson.
   Chin instruments
   a. Zip/step feet
   b. Grab instrument about
   c. Swing out and up
   d. Land on shoulder, head down
   e. Look Ma, No hands!

   Basses
   a. Stand tall
   b. Turn to bass
   c. Bring the bass into pocket
   d. Adjust stance
   e. Look Ma, No hands!

4. Review Monkey Song
   a. Sing.
   b. Sing and shake hands for bow motions.
   c. Pluck root song.

5. Bow hold formation
   a. Use pencils first.
   b. Bunny formation.
   c. Shake off the water.
   d. Pick a strawberry.
   e. Shake-downs with partners.

6. Tip control games
   a. Windshield wipers.
   b. Pass the cup.
   c. Panda with partners.

7. Bowing on the D string
   a. Helicopter to highest string.
      a. Frog and tip together.
      b. Lower strings near frog.
      c. Upper at square of arm.
   b. Mosquito swat to D.
   c. Rock and roll the bow.
   d. Echo different rhythms, individual and together.
Lesson 3
Bow and strings together

Objectives
- Students will tune their instruments
- Students will demonstrate proper instrument position
- Students will demonstrate proper bow hold
- Students will echo teacher on the open strings with good tone
- Students will set hands

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box, paper cups, sticky dots

1. Warm-ups

2. Tuning
   a. Individual tuning with teacher and peer-aid.
   b. Group tuning.

3. Review instrument holds from last lesson

4. Review bow hold formation (pencils first)

5. Tip control games
   a. Windshield wipers.
   b. Pass the cup.
   c. Panda with partners.

6. Bowing on the D string
   a. Helicopter to highest string.
      a. Frog and tip together.
      b. Lower strings near frog.
      c. Upper at square of arm.
   c. Mosquito swat to D.
   d. Rock and roll the bow.
   e. Echo different rhythms, individual and together.
   f. Chewy elbows.

7. Setting left hand
   a. Playing position with in saddle
   b. Pluck open D at middle position, shuttle to first.
   c. Set 3rd finger on G for violins, violas, and cellos. 4th on F# for bass.
   d. Placement. Put sticky dots for 3rd finger (4th on bass)
      a. Upper strings: 2nd touching 3rd, 1st halfway back.
      b. Cello: 3rd near 4th, 1st halfway back.
      c. Bass: 4th, 1st halfway back.
   e. Play down G-F#-E-D.
Lesson 4
Hot Cross Buns, Monkey Song

Objectives
- Students will tune their instruments
- Students will play Monkey Song and Hot Cross Buns.
- Students will demonstrate good posture and tone with correct finger cuts.
- Students will transpose Monkey Song and Hot Cross Buns to A, D and G.
- Students will play the D major scale

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box, dots, *Essential Elements*

1. Warm-ups
   a. Surprise warm-up.

2. Tuning
   a. As a group, then individual.
   b. Match pitch aurally.

3. Monkey Song
   a. Review.
   b. Move Do to G (Bass fingering: G-1-4-shift 1).
   c. Move Do to A.

4. Introduce D major scale
   a. Combine Monkey Song in D with it in A.
   b. Basses: D-1-4-G-1-4-shift 2-4.

5. Hot Cross Buns
   a. Teacher plays.
   b. Teacher sings patterns, students echo singing.
   c. Teacher plays patterns, students echo playing.
   d. Whole song.
Lesson 5
D Major Scale, D String Patterns

Objectives

- Students will tune their instruments
- Students will play the D major scale with correct position, good tone, and proper intonation.
- Students will echo tonal patterns on the D string.
- Students will demonstrate good reading posture and read from Essential Elements.

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box, Essential Elements

1. Tuning
   a. Individually, before class.
   b. As group to start class.

2. Warm-ups
   a. Favorite sports.

3. Monkey Song Review
   a. Various strings.
   b. Individuals play introductions with descending tetrachord.
   c. Check for proper finger cuts.

4. Learn D Scale
   a. Try various rhythms (students get to pick).
   b. Bell choir version.
   c. Everyone practice sliding—Basses shift.

5. Echo patterns for Twinkle
   a. So La So; So Fa Mi; Fa Mi Re Do.
   b. Put Phrases together.

6. Read from Essential Elements
   a. Emphasis good posture and playing position.
   b. Read each phrase separately.
   c. Put each together.
Materials

The Monkey Song

Lesson 1

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box: sponges, rosin, rubber bands, replacement strings, cello pucks.

Lesson 2

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box

Lesson 3

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box, paper cups, sticky dots

Lesson 4

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box, dots, Essential Elements

Lesson 5

Materials
Teacher instrument, equipment box, Essential Elements
# Assessment

**Playing Mastery of Monkey Song**

___ A. Intonation

1. Student plays with 50-75% correct pitches.
2. Student plays with at least 75% correct pitches.
3. Student plays with at least 75% correct pitches and self-corrected pitches.
4. Student plays with nearly all pitches correct and adjusts when necessary.
5. Student plays in tune throughout.

___ B. Tone

1. Bow contact point is mostly inconsistent or incorrect; tone is either faint or scratchy.
2. Bow contact point is consistent or correct half of the time; tone is clear at least some of the time.
3. Bow contact point is consistent and correct 75% of the time; tone and articulation are clear but not robust or robust but not clear.
4. Bow contact point is consistent and correct; articulation is clear; tone is clear nut not robust or vice versa.
5. Tone is robust and refined and articulation is clear; contact point is consistent.

___ C. Posture and technique (One point for each that applies)

1. Student’s bow hold is correct: rounded fingers and thumb, correct contact points with bow.
2. Student used an appropriate length of bow for the piece and displays mobile joints.
3. Student’s instrument is placed correctly and contacts the body at proper points.
4. Student’s finger-bow coordination is clear most of the time.
5. Student plays smoothly, with tow or less pause for technical concerns.
6. Attention to musical concerns is evident in the performance.
Assessment
Written Test

Name: _______________________

1. What instrument do you play? Be sure to spell it correctly.

2. List the string names from lowest sounding to the highest.

3. What are the five steps to create the proper playing position for your instrument?

4. Write the ascending D major scale in the range you would play on your instrument on the staff provided. Be sure to include the appropriate clef and key signature.

5. Write the finger that you use to play each note under the staff.

6. What do you do when you tune your instrument?