



## STRUMMING THEIR WAY TO SUCCESS

By Mrs Adela Josephine Tandar

From playing the ukulele to composing songs, Mrs Adela Tandar helps students with no formal training outside school discover their passion and talent for music.

### Winning them over with music

It was 7 a.m. and I had just reached school when a group of primary six students approached me to check the tuning of their ukuleles. One of them enthusiastically asked, 'Cher, have you heard this song by Shawn Mendes? Can you give us the chords?'

Yes, this is a typical start to my day.

Juying Primary is special because every primary five and six student owns a ukulele—I have made sure of it. I do this because I want them to love music and to be able to play an instrument so they will continue making music even after graduation. They carry their ukuleles with pride, with some decorating theirs with stickers or hand-drawn art.

Owning an instrument, however, is just half the battle won. 95 per cent of my students do not have any music background. So what do I do to win their interest, while keeping things relevant and meaningful?

Through the pop music package, I taught my students how to play the ukulele and, at the same time, learn musical concepts. I also taught my primary six students songs from around the world, but not before showing them slides and videos of each song's country of origin, so that they can develop a deeper appreciation of its cultural context.

I used music for classroom routines as well. I created greeting songs that students sing when I enter their class, which start the lessons on a cheerful note. For Circle Time—when all the students in a class gather in a circle for a sharing session—I got them to form a circle by singing familiar Nursery Rhyme tunes with different lyrics. They would sing, march, and form the circle automatically. I did not have to tell any of them where to stand!

I also integrated music into other school programmes. Juying's Learning for Life Programme is Environmental Education, so I got primary four students to write short, eight-line rap songs about the

4Rs—reduce, reuse, repair, and recycle. They recorded their lyrics over backing tracks they created using Apple's GarageBand software.

Whenever I watch a musical or hear a song on the radio, I think of how to use it for my lessons. I really like the movie 'The Greatest Showman', so I taught my students the song, 'This Is Me', on the ukulele. I took the opportunity to share its inspiring message about self-acceptance when teaching them the lyrics.

### Learning on their own

I always tell my students that they are lucky to grow up in an era where information is easily accessible online. When I was young, I had to spend hours on the piano to figure out the chords of my favourite songs. Nevertheless, I picked up instruments like the guitar, ukulele, and cajón on my own, because being able to play and sing my favourite songs makes me happy.



**Adela Josephine Tandar**  
Juying Primary School  
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**Mrs Adela guiding the students on the ukulele**

I want to pass on this gift to my students. I believe in teaching practical skills that they can carry with them even after they graduate.

They may not remember all the music theories offhand, but it will all come back to them when they play an instrument. Besides mastering the ukulele, I also want them to be able to learn songs by themselves. So I taught them how to use the available resources on the Internet. I also created music booklets for them containing resources like chords and lyrics, and updated them with the latest songs each year. I also uploaded video tutorials into an online Googlesite that I created which my students can easily refer to.

My passion in teaching music drives me to conduct Teacher-Led Workshops almost every year to inspire other Music teachers in the fraternity. As a Singapore Teachers' Academy of the aRts (STAR) Champion, I also co-facilitate yearly zonal workshops for music teachers. These sharing opportunities have helped me grow professionally to become a more effective music teacher over the years.

## It's Showtime!



**Mrs Adela orchestrating a mini-performance with students**

Beyond teaching my students how to play well-known songs, I have also coached a few groups in songwriting. They may have had no formal music training, but they showed a passion for music. So I have spent several afternoons guiding them in the songwriting process—from brainstorming the idea, to writing the lyrics, and putting in the melody.

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I am proud to say that in both 2017 and 2018, my students emerged as finalists for the Singapore Youth Festival Theme Song Writing Contest. Besides the commendable achievement, what I was proudest of was their creativity in expressing themselves through music. For example, in 2018, one group wrote the song 'Rainbow after the Storm'. These girls wanted to encourage their peers who were sitting for the PSLE Examination that year and their song conveyed the message of perseverance and hope. It was a beautiful song that touched my heart and I believe it impacted other students and teachers who heard it too.

In my own little ways, I will continue to inspire the joy of learning and playing music with my students.



**Mrs Adela playing her students' composition with them**

