



Unit 6

Notes on the Staff

Unlock the secrets of reading music. Become familiar with the staff, treble clef (G clef), note names, their placement on the staff, and the Three-Step Process of making music.

Authors

Kirstin Anderson
Richard Mannoia

Contributing Editors

James Blachly
Sue Landis
Audrey Sherer
Marte Siebenhar
Nina Stern

Design

David Silva

Illustration

Sophie Hogarth

Associate

Managing Editor
Lora Dunn

Audio Production

Leszek Wojcik

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"A Simple Melody," music and lyrics by Nick Scarim, © 2000 Nick Scarim, © 2008 Carnegie Hall. Performed by Sue Landis and Michael Mizrahi.

"Tideo," traditional American song. Performed by Sue Landis and Shane Schag.

"De Colores," traditional Mexican song. Performed by Sue Landis and Shane Schag.

"Ode to Joy" by Ludwig van Beethoven. Adapted by John Whitney. Performed by Sue Landis and Shane Schag.

"Au Claire de la lune" by Claude Debussy. Arranged by Richard Mannoia. Performed by Sue Landis.

"Hot Cross Buns," traditional American song. Performed by Sue Landis.

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Unit 6: Notes on the Staff

Composer: You are both getting really good at rhythms. Let's take another step by learning the names of different pitches and how to read them like musicians do.

Elvis: Names of pitches? I'm not sure I understand.

Composer: No worries! Music is made up of high and low sounds called **pitches**. Each pitch has a name, and the cool part is that you already know their names!

Elvis: We do?

Composer: Of course! The names of the pitches are just like the letters of the alphabet! Start with A. The next highest pitch after that is B, followed by C, then ...

Violet: Wait, I've got this. As you keep going up in pitch, C is followed by D, D is followed by E, E is followed by F, and F is followed by G ...

Pitches are also called **notes**.



Elvis: And G is followed by H!

Composer: Hold on there, Elvis. That's where it doesn't continue like the alphabet. After G, the pitches start over again with A. Musicians only use the first seven letters in the alphabet, from A to G, and after that, they repeat, like a loop. It's easier if you look at it.



listen to **Track 32**

Violet: That's cool. Can we sing it too?

Composer: Of course we can.
Listen to me sing it and then repeat.

Elvis: Hey, it's like call and response.

Composer: Exactly! I'll go first, and then you try.



listen to **Track 33**

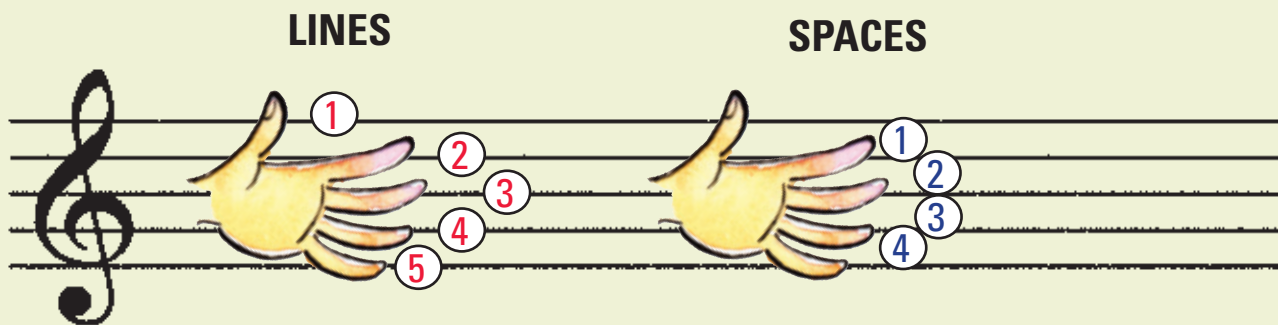


Ask your students to look at the keyboard as they listen to the piano being played from the lowest pitch to the highest pitch. Make sure to point out that the lowest notes start at the far left of the keyboard and get higher as you move to the right. Then, if you have a large version of the piano keyboard in your classroom, choose a volunteer to point at the notes as they go up, so the whole class can see.

do **now**

Elvis: So, we repeated the A because that way, the notes can just keep going. But, wait, if the notes repeat, how do musicians know the difference between all the different A's?

Composer: Another great question, Elvis. When musicians read music on a staff, they know which notes to play because each note is put in its own place, on a line or space. Once you learn the notes on the staff, you can read music! You've probably seen a staff before. It looks like this:



Elvis: Oh yeah, I've seen a staff before. Why are those hands there?

Composer: Well, if you think about it, you carry around a staff with you all the time, your hand! You have five fingers and between your fingers you have four spaces.

Elvis: You're right! That's an easy way to think about it. You know, it's kind of hard to tell the difference between when notes are on a line or a space.

In Italy, during the late 10th and early 11th centuries, a Catholic monk named Guido d'Arezzo taught his church choir how to learn music, called Gregorian chant, by assigning notes to different parts of the hand. When it came time for the choir to practice or perform, he would simply point to the different parts of the hand, and the choir would know which notes to sing!



Violet: Think about it this way, Elvis. A line note has a line going through the note head, like this:

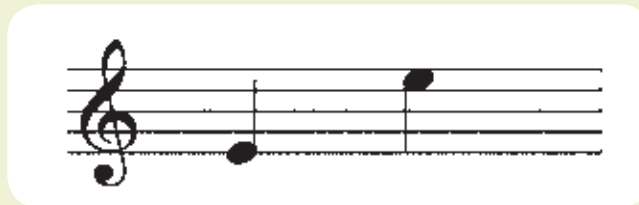


And a space note has its note head written between two lines, like this:



As the notes move up the staff, they sound higher. As the notes move down, they sound lower.

Elvis: So, on the staff below, the note on the first line sounds **lower** than the note on the fourth space, because it's placed lower on the staff?



Composer: Exactly! Look at these notes on the staff while you listen to them being played on the piano.



listen to **Track 34**

When you look at music on a staff, you might notice that some of the notes look upside down. That's because when the notes are above the third line of the staff, the stems belong on the left of the note and point down:



When notes are below the third line, the stems belong to the right of the note and point up:



Be sure to look at the line or the space to determine the note name.



Let's practice adding the stems for these notes:



teacher tip Refer to Gino's Music Decoder for explanations of note stems.

Elvis: Okay, now I understand how to draw the stems on notes now. But I've been wondering, what's that swirly thing at the beginning of the staff? I know I've seen that before.

Composer: That symbol is called a treble clef or G clef, because it circles around the line for the note G.



Let's practice drawing some treble clefs:

1. Draw a line about a quarter of an inch from the end of the staff that extends a little above and below the staff.
2. Starting at the top of the line, draw a small half circle.
3. Now draw a half circle on the left side of the line that connects the fourth line to the first line.
4. Continue with a half circle starting where you left off. However, draw it on the right side connecting it to the third line.
5. Loop around the second line, as shown below.

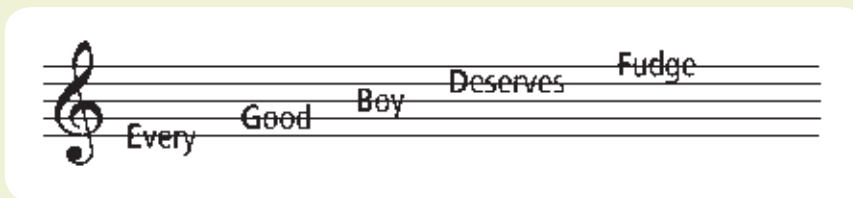


Composer: Now that we know where G is, let's take a look at the names of the other lines.

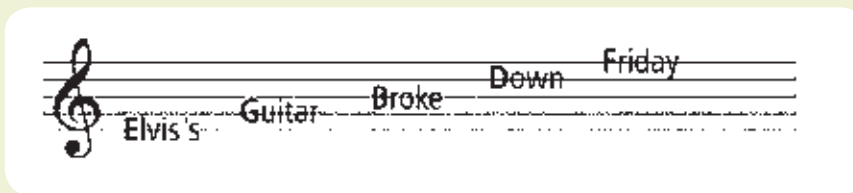


Violet: How are we going to remember the names of all those lines?

Elvis: I have an idea, Violet! I remember learning that musicians have a trick for remembering the names of the lines and spaces in the staff. My mom told me she learned how to remember the names of the lines by saying, “**E**very **G**ood **B**oy **D**eserves **F**udge.” The first letter of each word in the sentence is the name of the line in the staff. It looks like this:



But I like to remember the names of the lines by saying, “**E**lvis’s **G**uitar **B**roke **D**own **F**riday.” It looks like this:



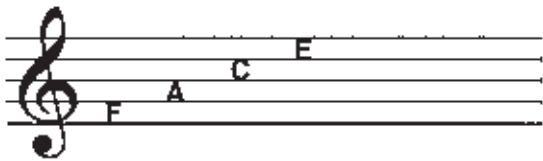
Composer: I can see why you like that one better, Elvis. Those are both great ways to remember the names of the lines on the staff.



Help Elvis and Violet by creating a sentence of your own using the following notes: E, G, B, D, and F.

F _____
D _____
B _____
G _____
E _____

Great! Now let's look at the letters in the spaces between the lines.



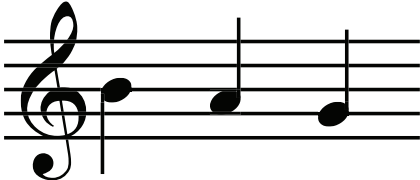
Violet: That one is easy! The spaces spell the word "FACE."

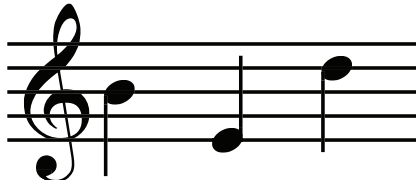
Composer: You got it! Now let's put your brains to work.





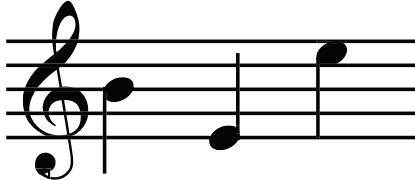
Help Elvis and Violet solve the pitch puzzles! Look at each group of notes and write the word the pitches spell. Remember, the pitches used are E, G, B, D, and F (for the notes on the lines) and F, A, C, and E (for the notes in the spaces).

1. 
B A G

2. 
B E D

3. 
C A B

4. 
E G G

5. 
B E E

teacher **note**

You can also have students make up their own pitch puzzles by creating words first and then notating them.

lesson **extension**

1. Divide students into groups and ask each team to come up with some other words that can be spelled using the notes on the staff (for example: dad, cage, beg, fade, and bad).


Elvis: That was pretty easy. What's next?


Composer: I think you're ready to start decoding real music now! Look at the notes on the staff below and write the name of the note on the red line below the staff.



Now that you have all the notes written in, we can begin to read the music. We're going to use something I like to call the **Three-Step Process**. It makes reading music much easier.

The **first step** is to  clap and say the rhythm.

The **second step** is to  speak the names of the notes.

The **third step** is to  sing the names of the notes.



Did you know that in some languages words are spelled and read from right to left and even up and down? In music, just like in English books, you read from left to right.

2. Have students write these words on the staff, remembering to draw the stem for each note in the right direction. Come back together to have students share their words.

3. Another idea is to have a speed game of writing "words on the staff." Divide the class into two groups and have one person from each group race to write a word on the staff. The person who finishes the word first wins. Add stems to make it even more of a challenge!

lesson **extension**

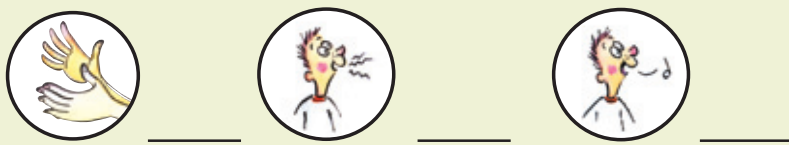
Composer: Let's try it with the example below. First, look at the melody as you clap and say the rhythm. Second, speak the names of the notes. Finally, sing the names of the notes.

Elvis: How do I know what note to sing when the notes change?

Composer: Think about it this way, if the notes go down, then your voice should go ...

Elvis: Down! And if the notes go up on the staff, then my voice should go up, too. I think I can do it.

Composer: I know you can. Let's give it a try. Mark off each step with your pencil as you go through the example.

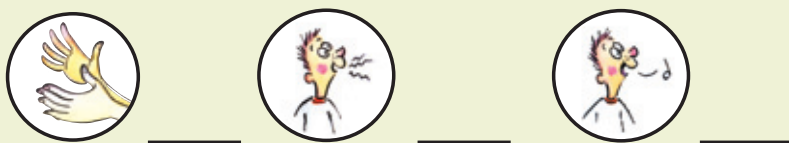


Elvis: That was a bit hard, but fun!

Composer: Can you guess what song the melody is from?

Elvis: Yeah, it sounded like "A Simple Melody"!

Composer: Right again, Elvis. Try this next example. Remember to use the same Three-Step Process.





Composer: You may have heard it before. It's called "A Simple Melody." Now that you know a part of the melody, let's follow along, then sing the whole thing.



composition activity

Two empty musical staves are shown, each with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The staves are blank, with no notes or rests written on them.

teacher tip