

Standards

- New York State Music Standard #1: Creating, performing, and participating in the arts
- National Standard #2: Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music
- National Standard #3: Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments
- National Standard #5: Reading and notating music.

Learning Objectives

- The students will be able to improvise melodies and rhythms based on the G major pentatonic scale.
- The students will be able to label scale degrees.
- The students will be able to identify scale degrees by an alternate name.
- The students will be able to identify which scale degrees are used for the pentatonic scale.
- The students will be able to define the term "improvisation" using their own words.

Resources and Materials

- White board, black marker, eraser, violin, metronome/tuner, pencil, handouts

Pre-instructional Plan

- I will use the whiteboard to display certain notes that the students will play. Shown below are the notes:
- I will also write the word "improvisation" on the board.
- Greet the students with a friendly and welcoming "hello."
- Help the students tune their instruments.

Procedure

- I will review the students on the key signature of G major.
 - "How many sharps or flats are in the key of G major?" One sharp.
 - "What is the sharp?" F sharp
 - "How do we find out the key signature if we have sharps in it?" Take the last sharp in the key signature and go up a half step.
 - "How do we find out the key signature if we have flats in it?" Name the next-to-last flat in the key signature. Except in F major, which you must know that it is only one flat (B flat).
- Have the students play a two octave G major scale.
 - "For the first octave, are we using closed or high second finger?" High two.
 - "What about for the second octave?" Low two.

Scale Degrees

- Using what is written on the whiteboard, I will teach the students about scale degrees. I will also hand out the worksheets.
 - "Each note in the scale has a scale degree. Such as, the first note is the first scale degree, the second note is the the second scale degree, the third note is the third scale degree, etc. Write the numbers above the notes with the caret above the number."
 - "These scale degrees also give each note a special name. Does anyone know what the first and last note are called?"
 - "The first and last note are called the tonic."
 - I will write the term "tonic" on the board above the appropriate scale degree

number. I will have the students write it on their hand out as well.

- “The second scale degree is called ‘supertonic.’ Raise your hand and tell me why it’s called ‘supertonic.’”
 - “*Super* is Latin for ‘above,’ which makes sense in this context because this note is above the tonic!”
- “The third scale degree is called the ‘mediant.’ Raise your hand and tell me if you know why it’s called ‘mediant.’”
 - “It is called the ‘mediant’ because the third scale degree is located in the *middle* of the tonic and fifth scale degree.”
- “The fifth scale degree is called the ‘dominant.’ And the fourth scale degree is called ‘subdominant.’ Why is the fourth scale degree called ‘subdominant?’”
 - “Because the prefix *sub* is Latin for ‘below.’ Please label dominant and subdominant on your worksheets.”
- “The sixth scale degree is also known as the ‘submediant’ because it is in the middle of the subdominant and the upper tonic. What are the subdominant and upper tonic scale degree numbers again?”
- “The seventh scale degree is also known as the leading tone. When you play the scale, this note sounds like it *leads* into the tonic.”
 - Have the students play the G major scale, but have them stop at the leading tone. “Raise your hand and describe what seems to be the tendency when playing this note.”
 - “When we stop on this note, it feels like we *need* to reach the tonic. It is like when you see a teacher erase the board, but there is always one spot that the teacher misses and you’re just itching to run up to the board and erase it yourself. What other things make you have that ‘itch’?”
 - I will guide the students for responses.

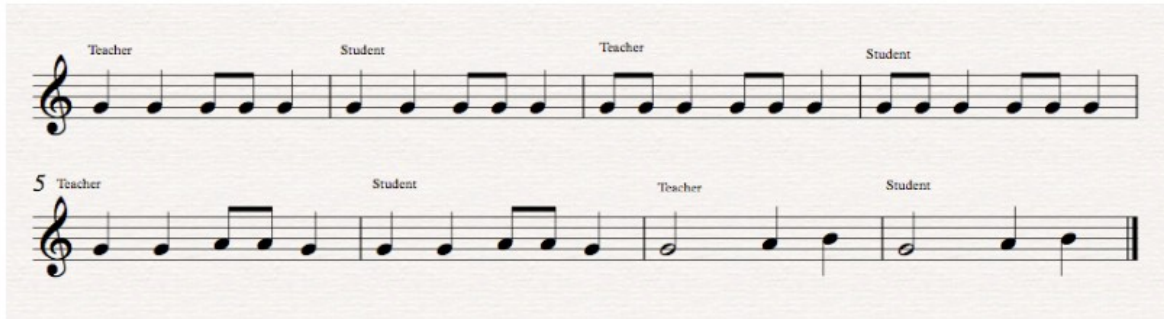
Major Pentatonic Scales

- “On your worksheets, circle the tonic, supertonic, mediant, dominant, and submediant, and upper tonic.”
- “[Student], tell me which scale degrees you circled.”
 - Answer: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 1 (or 8)
 - “Does everyone else agree with [student]?”
- Have the students play the notes they circled.
- “The scale degrees we just played make up the major pentatonic scale.”
 - I will write the word “pentatonic” on the board.
- “What is the prefix in ‘pentatonic?’”
 - Answer: Penta-
- “Raise your hand and tell me what the prefix means.”
 - Answer: Five.
- “This is called a pentatonic scale because it contains five notes. This is a very popular scale. It is used in many different types of music: Celtic folk, German folk, Jazz, Gospel, Rock, Chinese, Native American, Ethiopian. You name it! This scale is often used in today’s pop music also. Perhaps when you listen to the radio, you can scope out some tunes that use the major pentatonic scale.”
- Have the students play the pentatonic scale in two octaves with quarter notes. I may

have them sing the notes if they are struggling to play the notes on their instruments.

Play It Back

- I will play notes and rhythms to the students and I will have them play it back to me. The notes and rhythms will start to become more challenging as we go through this activity.
- The students will not read off sheet music for this activity.
- Below is a brief visual representation of what I will have the students play back to me:



Play It Back Differently

- I will play a rhythm for the students.
- The students will simultaneously play back the rhythm but with different notes within the key signature.

Improvisation

- "Raise your hand if you have ever heard of the term 'improvisation.'"
 - If a student raises her hand, I will ask the student to share a brief definition using her own words.
 - After words are shared, I will have them write down the actual definition of the term.
- "The definition of improvisation is 'the act of improvising or arranging anything without previous preparation.' Sometimes, in music, performers are given the opportunity make up music on the spot. Does anyone know any genres of music that have musicians improvising?"
 - Answers: Jazz, types of rock, blues, Irish music
- "Improvisation is not exclusive to music. Where else would you find acts of improvising?"
 - Answers: theater, acting, writing, visual art

Improvisation with Duets

- "Raise your hand and tell us what the word 'duet' means."
 - Answer: two performers having an equal part in a piece of music.
- I will have two students play an improvised duet while other students are playing a sustained chord. The students will be playing their improvised melodies based on the major pentatonic scale in their own free-flowing time.
- The students who are holding pitches may be asked to play one of the following notes: G B D.

- I will demonstrate an example of the task with another student.
- I may have to reinforce the students' posture.
- "Try to create your own melodies and rhythms while playing the pentatonic scales. If you happen to play wrong notes, play it loud and proud!"

Improvising a Musical Conversation

- "While improvising, musicians often have a musical conversation with each other using their instruments. There are many ways to have a conversation with musical instruments. The conversation can be back and forth with similar rhythms, notes, dynamics. Or the conversation can invertly mirror each other. For instance, if one player plays an ascending scale then the other player plays a descending scale. Or if someone plays something really soft and then another person plays something really loud."
- During the duets, the two students will take turns to play four notes each. Each four-note phrase will be "dialogue" in the conversation. The students playing may interact with each others' dialogue. I will have to demonstrate an example of how the activity should be executed.
- Each student will have a turn at improvising with another student.

Closure

- At the end of the lesson, I will ask questions to evaluate the students' learning from the lesson.
- "What is another name for the first scale degree?"
 - Answer: Tonic
- "What about the fifth scale degree?"
 - Answer: Dominant
- "And the fourth scale degree?"
 - Answer: Subdominant
- "What scale degrees are used in the major pentatonic scale?"
 - Answer: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6