

Grades K–6



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How to Use This Book

So, you have some ukuleles? Great! We're here to help you introduce this fun and versatile instrument to your music students. We talked to some great music teachers and got their best ideas for ukulele instruction. For every idea, you will also find any music, visuals, or recordings you'll need to implement it, so you can spend more time strumming and less time planning!

How to get started

First, read the introduction on page 5. Consider what kind of tuning you want to use—whether to start with the standard tuning in your area or to try the open tuning idea on page 8. You'll also want to check out the tech resources that Brigid Finucane reviews and explains on page 9. If standard tuning is your jam, start with *My Dog Has Fleas* on page 10 and continue on with the early lessons starting on page 18. If open tuning is for you, start with *Ukes for Little Ones* on page 12, and after progressing through the three lessons there, continue on with the *Strumming Warm-Ups* on page 39 to play more songs and eventually transition to standard tuning. Continue with the warm-ups if you want, or use the early lessons on page 18 to reinforce the chords with standard tuning.

When your students are ready for more than just strumming and singing, introduce them to *Falling for the Pentatonic scale* on page 31, which will help to develop their plucking skills as well as adding a new chord (Am). Explore ensemble playing with *Inch Worm* and *Cedar House Blues*, and keep your older elementary students singing with the aptly titled *Keep 'Em Singing*.

These lessons provide a great jumping-off point for the ukulele, and you will find tons of songs out there for them to play after they have these basic skills.

Help! I don't have enough ukuleles!

Like everything in the music classroom, you can adapt this book to fit your needs. In fact, *Keep 'Em Singing* on page 36 is a great example of how to teach when you only have enough ukuleles for one per pair of students. You may even find that this works better than giving each student a ukulele, especially in the beginning.

Where can I find the digital resources?

Turn to page 40 for your password, and all the details you'll need to download the digital files that go with this book. And be sure to browse through the resources to see what's there. We think you'll find them incredibly useful as you teach each lesson.

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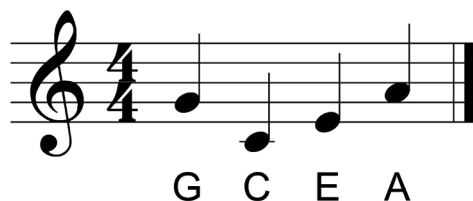
More notes, more instruments, more fun!

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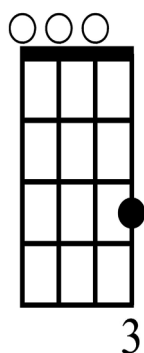
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Chord Charts

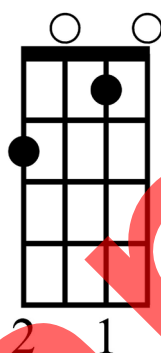
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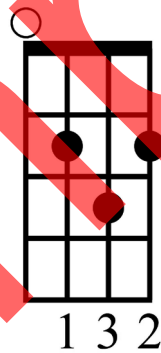
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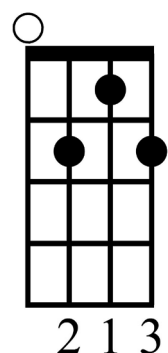
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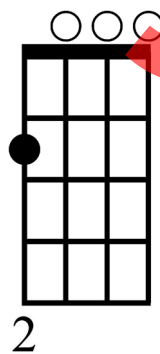
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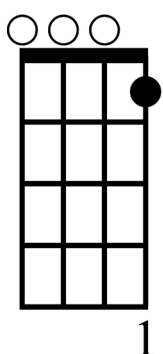
G7



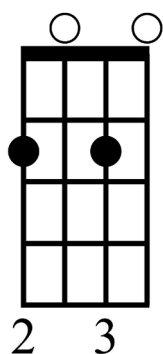
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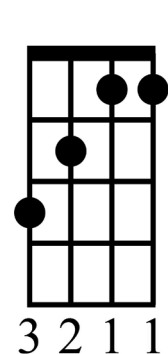
C7



D7



B^b



Teaching Ukulele

Finding early success with beginning ukulele classes

Mari Schay

When my son Tyler was in seventh grade, he took a six-week ukulele elective at school. As summer began, he asked if he could have a ukulele. Since I'm a music teacher, I'm sure he figured he would have one by the end of the day. But I said, "Ukulele?! No way. Choose a real instrument and we can talk." He insisted that the ukulele was really cool and a real instrument and that he would practice all the time. We went back and forth for a month while my husband was taking bets from the other kids on who would win the battle. Then my neighbor, Pat, asked, "Have you seen The Mighty Uke?" He went on to explain how cool ukuleles are, and how he had purchased ukes for everyone in his family and they played them all the time. I looked at Tyler, shook his hand, and said, "You win." That day he and I each bought a ukulele, and the next thing I knew, I was hooked too! A short time later I wrote a grant to get a class set of ukes and now I love teaching my students how to play the ukulele.

My students are very successful on ukulele because the chords are easier than on the guitar and the instrument is more manageable for smaller hands. In addition, it is very easy to differentiate for multiple skill levels within the same song. And while I would never offer a recorder to a four-year-old, even my preschoolers and kindergarteners can manage some simple activities with the ukuleles. By adding a few skills each year, I end up with some very competent ukulele players by fifth grade.

If you don't know how to play the ukulele yet, you should definitely choose a beginner book and work through it on your own. There are many ukulele resources available, both in print and online. Before you introduce the ukulele to your students, you should master the following skills:

- Be able to tune ukes quickly, both with and without a tuner
- Shift comfortably between C, F, and G chords
- Play a few simple melodies

Before you begin teaching ukulele, here are a few things to consider:

Tuning Options

In the United States, most people tune their ukuleles in the key of C (G, C, E, A). In Canada, I believe the key of D (A, D, F#, B) is more common. The key of D is better for kids to sing in, while the key of C has the advantage of being standard, so there are many tutorials available online for any song you can imagine. I use C tuning for this reason, but I re-tune to D for our school assemblies so that the singing sounds better. (So far, no one has caught me.)

Another tuning idea is outlined on page 8. Open tuning (G, C, E, G) allows for early success because students can play a chord on open strings. More chords can be played using a barred chord method, so students can strum lots of songs before you add the complexity of fingering chords. If you use this method, you will probably want to switch to standard tuning eventually, but it can be a great tool for beginning players.

Electronic Tuners

Kids naturally want to play with the tuning pegs. My best strategy for dealing with this is to help them to understand what the tuning pegs do. I keep a headstock tuner on my guitar, which I play in the classroom almost every day. Even kindergarteners love to help me tune my guitar by watching the tuner and calling “red” when it is out of tune and “green” when it is in tune. I think this helps them to understand that the tuning pegs have a job. In the younger grades, I tell the kids that only fourth and fifth graders are allowed to touch the ukulele tuners. The combination of understanding how tuners work and knowing they will learn to tune when they are “big kids” seems to be enough to keep little hands off.

I also use electronic tuners when it’s time to teach tuning. I have enough clip-on headstock tuners for every pair of students. The kids each get a ukulele and they partner up, working together to tune one ukulele and then the other. Because they have been singing *My Dog Has Fleas* for years, they can generally tell if the tuning is correct or not. We also practice singing the string names, “G, C, E, A,” so that the students know the right note for the right string, and I keep a picture of a ukulele with the strings labeled at the front of the room.

The first day of tuning instruction takes the whole class period. I let the students un-tune and re-tune several times. Each time they believe they are in tune, they raise their hands and I check their strings. If they make a mistake, I can help them figure out what is wrong (usually the wrong octave, or the strings are tuned backwards) and they can try again. In the next class period I give five minutes for tuning, then have everyone play *My Dog Has Fleas* together. If anyone thinks their ukulele is out of tune, I check it. In future classes, kids “check their fleas” before they get a tuner so we can move right into playing together. (Otherwise they would spend the whole class tuning and un-tuning because apparently it is really fun!)

Learning to Shift Chords Smoothly

When you add a second chord, the challenge is to switch back and forth between the two chords you know. Start by teaching the two chords independently, then ask your students to analyze what they need to do with their fingers in order to switch between the chords. For example, when switching from C to F, you have to lift the ring finger off the first string, put the first finger on the first fret of the second string, and put the second finger on the second fret of the third string. Practice playing the C chord for eight strums, then count eight beats of rest while shifting the fingers to the F chord. Play the F chord for eight strums, then count eight beats of rest while shifting the fingers back to the C chord. Gradually reduce the number of rests from eight to zero, but keep strumming each chord for eight beats. That way, the stragglers still have a chance to get the chord before switching again. After a while, gradually reduce the number of strums from eight to four, or even two.

Picks

I use felt picks for my upper-grade students. Otherwise, the most enthusiastic practicers will end up with thumb blisters by the end of the class period. The younger students don’t play for long enough at a time to have this problem.

Differentiation

For students who need some extra support, you can simplify the strum pattern by having them play only on the first beat of each chord. Likewise, introduce a fancier strum pattern for students who need a challenge. The chords can also be simplified, by figuring out if there is a finger or two that can be left off of the strings. As long as most students are playing a chord correctly, you won’t hear the one or two that are not. For example, a struggling student can play an Fmaj7 chord instead of an F chord, by just putting their finger on the second fret of the G string. Yes, there will be an E in the chord, but it shouldn’t cause a big problem.

Year-to-Year Progression

My students play ukulele every year, though the experiences of the younger kids are short and sweet: just a few minutes for preschool and kindergartners, and 7–10 minutes for first- and second-graders. Once the kids can handle picks, you can extend the lesson so that it fits with your daily routine. Below is the progression I follow with my students.

Preschool/Kindergarten

- Read the Pete Seeger story *Abiyoyo*. Let the class strum open strings to the steady beat while singing the song, and also any time the boy plays his ukulele.
- For now, don't worry about how they are holding the uke.

Grade 1

- Teach correct position (neck pointing left, left hand cradling neck, right hand strumming)
- Strum open strings to the beat for *sol-mi-la* songs (ukulele is tuned *sol, do, mi, la*)

Grade 2

- Review first grade skills.
- Add *My Dog Has Fleas* lesson on page 10.
- Teach the C chord with three fingers down: all on the A string, hold first finger on the first fret, second finger on the second fret, third finger on the third fret.
- Play songs with one chord (most rounds will work).

Grade 3

- Review previous skills
- Re-teach the C chord with correct fingering (placing just the third finger on the third fret).
- Teach the F chord.
- Model and describe the action of the fingers to make shifting chords smooth.
- Play songs with two chords (C and F) in the key of F.

Grade 4

- Review previous skills
- Teach the G7 chord.
- Play songs with three chords (I-IV-V7) in C.
- Accompany the school song at assemblies. (We use Ziggy Marley's *Give a Little Love*.)
- Teach students to use electronic tuners.

Grade 5

- Review the use of electronic tuners.
- Learn a current pop song. I have students suggest songs (must be school-appropriate), then vote on one to learn. In between suggesting and voting, I figure out chords and determine which songs will be most successful. Some years, I introduce three pop songs to the whole class, then let each student choose which song to learn and have students work together in small groups on the song they chose.

Tyler is now in college. He took his acoustic and his electric ukuleles to school with him and he still plays all the time. He even has several dorm mates taking lessons from him! I guess we both won.

Open Tuning and Color-Coding

Finding early success with beginning ukulele classes

Blake Siskavich

Open tuning has gained tremendous popularity in recent years, and it is not hard to see why. This approach allows young students to play a familiar song in their very first lesson. Rather than going through several lessons of drills and skill-building in order to play *Hot Cross Buns*, students can jam along to a familiar tune on their very first day. This quick access to music making works as a driving force, motivating kids and building excitement about the instrument.

To use open tuning, you will tune the ukulele to a G chord (G, B, D, G). This tuning allows kids to strum a major chord without placing any fingers on the frets. You can play *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* with just one chord. Get your kids to strum down the strings with a steady beat, and—bam!—they are playing and singing a song in the first lesson.

When you tune the ukulele to a G chord, it also sets up several more bar chords along the frets. Students can learn to press their complete finger across the fifth fret to make a C chord, across fret seven to make a D chord, and fret ten to make an F chord. Viola! You have the I, IV, and V chords you need to play an endless number of folk and popular songs. I use tape and markers to mark each of these frets with a color, so that kids can play “the red fret” rather than counting to the seventh fret every time they need to play a D chord. Then, I add color-coding to song lyrics to indicate where each chord should be played. See the downloads page for an example of how I color-code the instruments, as well as an example of how to present *Happy Birthday* in color-coded notation. You will also find an accommodation for visually impaired students.

I look at color-coded lyrics as a very simple form of a lead sheet. They combine the chord markings and lyrics into one color-coded system, without including the notation for the melody. In my classroom, we use familiar tunes or ones easily taught by rote as we begin this chord-reading journey. If students can read the differently colored words and press the bar chords of the corresponding color, then they can play countless songs by reading this style of iconic notation.

Color-coded lyrics will support young students in their journey to decode more challenging notation styles in music, but that’s not all. As a former early childhood educator, I can tell you that this approach will also build their reading skills. It supports their tracking of print in both literature and music. At this early stage, get students reading the lyrics and understanding that the color-coding has a meaning on their instruments. Keep them engaged with this process by playing fun songs.

Don’t worry that your students will be stuck with this type of notation forever. If you want them to be able to read tab or jazz chord lead sheets, these lyrics are a great start. By associating different colors with specific chords, students begin to acquire a simple context and structure. This structure can eventually be shifted into more sophisticated music notation. Next year, you could begin with a colored chord letter above the lyrics instead. Eventually, students can move to reading a traditional lead sheet. Just think, it all began with a few colors and a familiar tune.

Tech Resources for Ukulele Instruction

Brigid Finucane

Once a novelty, ukuleles are increasingly becoming part of the elementary music classroom experience. This shift in the musical landscape is in part due to the instrument's prevalence in popular culture, fueled by the artistry of Jack Shimabukuro at one end and the sincerity of Zooey Deschanel at the other. It also reflects music educators' desire to reach and engage students in the upper grades at a point when many become reluctant singers. What better than an accessible instrument to foster community singing and encourage musical interest? And a recent proliferation of user-friendly websites and apps have made it easier than ever to start playing.

Ukulele Hunt

Made by Alistair Wood
ukulelehunt.com

Alistair Wood's website is a monster of a site that encompasses all things ukulele. Select—and bookmark—the “new to uke?” tab and follow the directions to “Click Here to Download So You’ve Just Got Your First Ukulele (PDF).” This mini e-book contains a series of short lists that will help you to learn ukulele technique and gain exposure to the world of ukulele content available on the internet. Every section of the book has information that will not only help you as a player, but will be invaluable when you introduce the instrument to your students. For example, on page 3 there is a whole section on getting a good tone. It outlines some specific pitfalls that you can help your students avoid.

Wood's style is clear, inviting, and to the point. It's also humorous. “The number one mistake guitar players make,” he says, “is hacking away at the uke strings with a thumping great rhino's toenail.” It's easy to understand why he was tapped to write *Ukulele for Dummies*, a comprehensive and highly acclaimed resource.

Ukulele Toolkit

Made by EUMLab

Apple devices: requires iOS 6.1+

Not available for Android

\$3.99

The Ukulele Toolkit app is an intriguing collection of tools designed to expand and refine ukulele playing and practice. The app supports tunings for tenor, soprano, and baritone ukes. It includes a tuner, 80 scale diagrams, chord tablature, and even a chord transposer.

The tuner tool is straightforward, but the other icons open to multiple options. For example, double-tapping the Rhythm icon activates three choices: metronome, strumming, or loops. The strumming section models 13 different strum patterns with an audio component to reinforce what you see, and the loops provide repeating patterns that will help students keep their tempo.

The Chord Set section of the app is where things really get interesting. Start by choosing a song from the small song library or a pre-set chord progression. Add a playback style, which combines a drum loop with a strumming pattern. Then press play and watch as chord names and tablature scroll across the screen in real time. This is a great place for students to experiment, as playback styles and strumming patterns can easily be changed. The tempo and key can also be adjusted.

This app requires a fair amount of exploration, but it's well worth the effort. It's an exciting tool for those who want to dive into all things ukulele. Though it's intended for a sole practitioner, it also transfers well to the classroom via projection. The tuner, metronome, strumming patterns, and chord sets are particularly useful in a classroom setting. To learn more, visit the developer's page: <http://bit.ly/1NkZZ5T>

My Dog Has Fleas

The First Ukulele Lesson

Mari Schay

Grades K–5

Standard Tuning



Materials

Ukuleles (for each student)

Use this traditional song to introduce your students to the ukulele. Students will learn to pluck and strum.

Before the Lesson

Before you start the lesson, take the time to tune your ukuleles. From ceiling to floor, the pitches should be G, C, E, A in the U.S. (In Canada, it is most common to tune to the key of D, with the pitches A, D, F#, B. Traditionally, the 4th string (closest to the ceiling) is tuned to high G. If this string is thicker than the others, your ukulele should be tuned to low G. If you are unsure, you can always check out videos on YouTube, such as this one: <http://bit.ly/1OldoLz>

Lesson

1. Teach your students to sing this melodic phrase:



You can use this as a vocal warm-up, either ascending or descending by half steps.

2. Teach a rest position and ready position. In my classroom, rest position has the neck pointing straight up, body in your lap, with arms "giving your uke a hug." Ready position is correct playing posture and position with no sound. Practice these positions with imaginary ukuleles, including the left hand cradling an imaginary ukulele neck. While your students are playing their imaginary ukuleles, use an actual uke to model rest position and ready position. It will help if you mirror the students, with your right hand cradling the neck and your left hand ready to strum.
3. Pass out the ukuleles and practice rest and ready position again. Keep this step quick and fun so that your students learn the correct position without getting bogged down with too much information.
4. Explain how you need to switch your ukulele around in order to play correctly. Remind the students NOT to copy this movement.
5. Pluck the strings from ceiling to floor and challenge your students to figure out what song the melodic fragment is. If they don't, sing "My dog has fleas," as you pluck the strings.
6. Have your students give you a thumbs up, then have them use that hand position to pluck the strings one at a time. Some students will want to strum while others may pluck too hard and get their thumb stuck between the strings. Allow them a few minutes to experiment with the technique.

7. Ask your students to play *My Dog Has Fleas* in unison.
8. Model and explain the technique for downward strumming. The thumb position stays the same as you lightly brush the strings from ceiling to floor. Again, allow a short amount of time to let students experiment with the technique, then play four strums at a time in unison.
9. With students in rest position, demonstrate the full pluck and strum pattern below by singing and playing.

The image displays musical notation for the song "My Dog Has Fleas". At the top, a guitar chord diagram shows a G major chord (G, B, D) on the first three strings. Below this, a guitar staff shows the chord progression: G (0), C (0), E (0), A (0), G (0), C (0), E (0), A (0). The melody is written on a treble clef staff in 3/4 time. The notes are: G4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), D5 (quarter), G4 (half), G4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), E5 (quarter), A5 (half). The lyrics "My dog has fleas." are written below the melody.

10. Ask students to join you as you sing and play. With older students, you may want to shift from the phrase "My dog has fleas" to the words "G, C, E, A, now strum a chord" so that they will learn the string names as well as the vocabulary word *chord*.
11. Assess your students two or three at a time as they play the entire pluck/strum sequence. Since each repetition is only a few seconds long, an entire class can be assessed in just a few minutes.

Extension

Give your class a chance to extend the song by writing as many lyrics as possible that rhyme with "fleas" and fit the rhythm of the song. Alternate between singing and playing the new lyrics and strumming the chord. The longer the song, the sillier—and the more repetitions you will get for your students!

In future lessons, tell students, "Check your fleas!" to make sure they are relatively in tune before they play.

Ukes for Little Ones: Part 1

Strumming Your First Song

Blake Siskavich

This three-part lesson gives students the opportunity to play three songs that focus on strumming and expression on the first few days of beginning ukulele instruction. Students love the fact they are able to play something by the time they leave the first day. It builds excitement for the next lesson and increases engagement in class. Each lesson will take about 30 minutes.

Before you begin, download the visuals and either project them for the whole class, or make copies as necessary. Prepare the ukuleles with open chord tuning: from top to bottom, the strings should be tuned to G, B, D, and G. Be ready to play *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* for your students. Music is available in the downloads.

Grades 1–2

Open Tuning



Materials

Ukuleles (for each student)

Visual 

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star 

Introduce the Ukulele

1. Arrange students on a rug or in chairs so that they can all see the teacher and the place where you will display the visuals.
2. Introduce the ukulele by playing and singing *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. Ask these questions:
 - Does anyone know what we call this instrument? *ukulele*
 - How does this instrument make a sound? *with strings*
3. Tell students that the ukulele is in the string family. Explain that today we are going to learn how to play two songs on the ukulele that may be familiar to them.
4. Before giving out the ukuleles, teach students these two holding positions.
 - **Rest position:** Students gently place the ukulele across their laps, strings down. (This prevents students from playing strings while you are demonstrating or giving directions.)
 - **Playing position:** Students place the ukulele in their laps with their left thumb on the back of the neck and their right forearm at the bottom of the uke body. To help them find playing position, say, "Put your hands up with your palms facing out, and look at your thumb and pointer. Which one makes an L? Your L thumb will scoop up the long, thin part while your other hand reaches out to the body of the instrument that's on your knee and lifts it toward your belly. You are going to lift the side up so it shows a "big belly button" to me in front of your real belly button."

Strumming

1. Hand out instruments in rest position on students' laps.
2. Demonstrate playing position, and have the whole group move to playing position with you.
3. Allow students to experiment with sounds on the strings for 30 seconds.
4. Call out, "Rest position!"
5. Demonstrate playing position again, having students move with you.
6. Show them how to downward strum. I start with just a down motion to a steady beat. That's all they need right now! I tell them to pretend to unzip their jacket, grab the zipper with their pointer finger and thumb, and move them down across the strings.
7. Practice the strumming motion repeatedly for about a minute. Remind students to be gentle with the strumming, and to support the neck of the ukulele with their L shape hand. Give individual feedback to students who need help with position or strumming.
8. Move to rest position.

Practice

1. Show students page 1 of the visual. Tell them that each time they see an arrow, they will strum down their ukulele, like unzipping your jacket. Ask how many times we will do this for number 1. *four times*
2. Move to playing position. Give a countoff, "One, two, ready, go!" and have students strum as you point to the down arrows.
3. Move to rest position.
4. Follow the same pattern with number 2 and number 3. Remember to move to rest position while you're asking how many arrows there are, then move to playing position to strum. Remind students to stop at the end of each exercise. You will have to practice each one several times.
5. Tell students, "This time I will sing a song while you strum the steady beat. Follow my pointer so we all stay together." Point to the arrows of number 3 as you sing *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. (Your starting pitch will be G.)
6. Say, "Great first time playing! Let's do that again. What do you think should be louder, the voice or the ukuleles?" voice "Let's try strumming softer with the ukuleles. Don't pull down so hard on your jacket zippers. We want the ukulele dynamics to be softer."
7. Sing and point to the arrows again, listening for students to adjust their dynamic level.
8. For a final performance, have students try to sing and play together. Often they will strum every word rather than the beat. That's okay. We want them to have the performance experience. If you feel your group is not ready to sing and play together, split the group in half and have one half sing while the other half strums. Then swap roles and do it again.
9. Respond with, "Great work, everyone! You just played your first song on the ukulele."
10. Have students put away the ukuleles in a way that works for your routine. I call students up in groups of three or four to put the ukes back on the shelves and racks in my classroom.

Ukes for Little Ones: Part 2

Strumming a Bar Chord

Blake Siskavich

Students will review their strumming skills from the last lesson, and with the support of tape or stickers on their instruments, they will follow iconic notation to change chords. They will leave this class able to play two songs with dynamic expression.

Before you begin, either project the visuals for the whole class, or make copies as necessary. Place red tape or stickers on fret 7. (See page 8 for more information about my color-coding strategy.) Prepare the ukuleles with open chord tuning: from top to bottom, the strings should be tuned to G, B, D, and G.

Grades 1–2

Open Tuning



Materials

Ukuleles with taped fret
(see directions below)

Red tape or stickers

Visual 

Review

1. Start with a quick review of rest position and playing position. I do this by demonstrating a position and asking which one I am showing.
2. Have students get ukuleles and come back to their seats with their instruments in rest position.
3. Play *Teacher Says* for about one minute. Say, "Teacher says playing position." Students will move to playing position. Practice with rest position too, giving children plenty of practice with both positions.
4. Display page 1 of the visual. Practice all three exercises.
5. Have students play exercise 3 while you point to arrows on the steady beat and sing *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*.
6. Say, "Let's play and sing together." This time, play and sing with the students, no longer pointing at the arrows for them.
7. Have students pair off to practice singing and playing with a partner for three to five minutes. They will take turns, with one partner singing while the other partner strums. The singer can also pat the steady beat as they sing to help the strummer. Give them a one-minute heads-up before moving back to whole group instruction.
8. Perform the song one more time as a whole group. Remind students to make their strumming softer than their singing. Listen for progress on strumming a soft beat while singing. Move to rest position at the end of the song.

Learning the First Bar Chord

1. Introduce students to the red tape or sticker on the neck of the instruments. Show students the L cradle position again. Say, "We are going to keep the instrument safe and still by squeezing down on the red tape fret. We support the ukulele by pointing our pointer finger to the sky and pressing all the strings down. We push our thumb on the back of the instrument to squeeze all the strings down."
2. Move to playing position. Have students practice squeezing the instrument strings on the red fret and strumming. Students will really have to practice pressing their fingers on the red fret and work on their placement. It will come with time and practice. If students don't have enough strength in their pointer finger, have them press both their pointer finger and middle finger flat against the strings for more force.
3. Have them practice in pairs for one or two minutes. Working in pairs helps students to give each other feedback on making sure their finger is placed on the red fret.
4. Say, "Let's try our new red chord strum together." Display page 2 of the visual. Remind students that they will strum down on their ukulele every time they see an arrow. Students will notice that the arrows are red, and this is because they will use their pointer finger to press down all of the strings in the red fret while they strum. Give a count-off, and have students strum as you point to the arrows. Practice each exercise several times.
5. Say, "We can even sing *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* and strum the red chords. Let's do that now." Sing and play the red strum chord with your students.
6. Move to rest position. Say, "Now we are going to play the red and the black chord in the same exercise. This will lead us to our next song."
7. Display page 3 of the visual. Show students how they will strum the black arrows by hovering their pointer fingers over the red fret while they strum. Then, demonstrate how they will press their pointer fingers down to strum the red arrows.
8. Move to playing position. Give students one minute to practice pressing and lifting their finger on the red fret while they strum.

Practice

1. Practice playing the three exercises on page 3 as a whole group.
2. Show page 4 of the visual. This exercise will prepare students for the next song. Practice it as a whole group several times, then move to rest position.
3. Show the lyrics to *Strum on My Uke* on page 5 of the visual. Say, "Here is a familiar tune with words that will help you to remember when you have to change chord colors on your ukulele. Look at the words. What do you notice?" Students should notice that some words are red and some are black. Explain that they will play the black chord on the black words, and the red chord on the red words.
4. Sing and play *Strum on My Uke* for your students. Ask them if they know the tune, *Skip to My Lou*.
5. Split the class into two large groups. Have one group strum while the other group sings, and then switch roles so everyone has a chance to strum and sing.
6. Give students two minutes to practice in pairs.
7. Say, "Let's try it one more time as a whole group." Sing and strum the songs with students, as they practice singing and strumming together.
8. Move to rest position. Say, "Great job on learning a new song with two chords! Next week we will learn another song with two chords, and you will even get to make up your own two-chord musical idea."
9. Choose a few students at a time to put their ukuleles away.

Ukes for Little Ones: Part 3

Playing and Composing with Two Chords

Blake Siskavich

In this lesson, students have the opportunity to create their own musical ideas and get peer support in their playing. They will continue to practice their strumming skills, playing bar chords, and switching between chords.

Grades 1–2

Open Tuning



Materials

Ukuleles with taped fret
(see directions below)

Visual 📖

Before you begin, either project the visuals for the whole class, or make copies as necessary. The ukuleles should already have red tape or stickers on fret 7. Prepare the ukuleles with open chord tuning: from top to bottom, the strings should be tuned to G, B, D, and G.

Review and Practice

1. Have students get their ukuleles on the way into the room and sit with their instruments in rest position.
2. Play *Teacher Says* for about one minute, to practice playing position and rest position.
3. Prepare for the two songs students will play today by practicing the exercises on pages 7 and 8 of the visual.
4. Display the lyrics for *Strum on My Uke* on page 5 of the visual, and strum and sing the song as a whole group. Then, do the same thing with *The Little Ukulele* on page 6.
5. Move students into small groups and give them 3–5 minutes to choose and practice one of the songs. (Give them the first minute to decide on a song, and then they will spend the rest of the time practicing.) During the activity, look to see if students are doing these things:
 - Perform a downward strum on the steady beat.
 - Play softer than the singing.
 - Stay together as a group.
6. Have students share their performances with the whole group. Have students give feedback based on the same three expectations you were looking for above.

Composing with a Partner

1. Students will now create a musical call and response with a partner. One partner will create a four-beat musical strum call idea using a combination of red and black chords. The other partner will create a four-beat musical strum response to the first partner's call. Start by giving them a demonstration of what they might do for a call and a response.
2. Have students notate their call and response ideas on paper using icons of their choice that they can read while they share with the whole group. The challenge is for them is to notate this so that they can read it later. Try not to give them an example of icons unless it is needed to support individual learning styles.

3. Give students five minutes to work with their partners to create their idea and write it down. Then, have each partner group perform their ideas for the group. Have the group listen to hear if it sounds like a call and response. If students feel that it doesn't sound like a call and response, encourage them to share why it doesn't sound that way. They are exploring the idea of artistic intent. While students share, check these things to see if they understand:
 - Each student has four steady beat strums.
 - Each student used red and black chords.
 - It sounds like a call and response.
4. Collect all of the students' notation, and choose a few students at a time to put their ukuleles away.

Check for Understanding

During the small group performance, I evaluate students in these three areas:

- Each student has four steady beat strums.
- Each student used red and black chords.
- It sounds like a call and response.

I give each student feedback on what stage of learning they are in. If they do one of the three things successfully, they are in the *Warm-up* stage of learning. If they do two things, they are in the *Rehearsal* stage. If they do all three things, they are in the *Performance* stage of learning.

Challenge

When students or groups are ready for a challenge, give them the lyrics for *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* that have not been scaffolded with red and black chords. See if they can perform the song.

Pairs who are ready to move on could compose calls and responses of eight beats each, instead of only four.

Apple Tree

Practicing the C chord and plucking a melody

Aimee Curtis Pfitzner


Grades 2–4

Standard Tuning



Materials

Ukuleles (for each student)

Apple Tree Cards 

Students should have experience with a C chord, strumming, and the downward thumb stroke before this lesson.



Ap - ple tree, ap - ple tree, will your ap - ples fall on me?
sol sol mi sol sol mi sol sol la la sol sol mi

I won't cry and I won't shout, if your ap - ples knock me out.
sol sol mi mi sol sol mi sol sol la la sol sol do

Introduce the Song

1. Teach the song using solfège.
2. Play the Apple Tree game.

Standing in a circle, all players hold hands. Two players create an apple tree. One player is inside the circle facing the other player, who is outside the circle. These two players touch palms above the circle. While singing the song, the circle moves clockwise. The two players who are the tree will lower their hands, capturing a player between their arms on the word "out." This captured player becomes part of the tree and stands beside one of the original "tree" players, holding their hands up to meet an imaginary partner. Play continues, with each captured player becoming part of the tree until only a few winners remain.

Add the Ukulele

1. Review the C chord on the ukulele. Have students strum the C chord on the beat while they sing Apple Tree.
2. Review strum patterns (down, down-up, down-up-down, etc.) and have students choose a strum pattern to play and perform with the song.
3. Review the solfège syllables with the song. Explain that sol will be the G string on the ukulele. Replace the sung sol with a downward thumb stroke on the G string. Continue to sing mi, la, and do when they occur in the song.

4. Replace the sung *mi* with the E string on the ukulele, played either as a downward thumb stroke, or an upward stroke with the middle finger, depending on student choice and ability. Perform the song, playing *sol* and *mi*, and singing *la* and *do*.
5. Replace the sung *la* by playing the A string. Perform the song, playing *sol*, *mi*, and *la* on the ukulele and singing the last note, *do*.
6. Replace the sung *do* with a downward thumb stroke on the C string. Perform the whole song on the ukulele.

Composition

1. Move students into small groups and give them a selection of Apple Tree Cards. Have each group create a four- or eight-beat rhythm. (Choose a rhythm length based on your students' skill level.)
2. Students will practice their rhythm by clapping and speaking the apple varieties.
3. Next, students in each group will transfer the apple rhythm to their ukulele's G string and perform the rhythm as a group.
4. Then, each group will transfer the rhythm to their G and E strings, choosing which string to play for each apple variety. Groups can decide whether to improvise their pitches independently or create a melody together.
5. Add the A string, having each group decide where to add A's into their melody.

Performance

The whole class will perform their apple compositions as a rondo, as follows.

- A Song*
- B Group 1 Melody
- A Song
- C Group 2 Melody
- A Song
- D Group 3 Melody
- A Song

*Groups can decide whether to perform the melody on the ukulele, or strum a C chord while singing.