

Grades K-3

Beginners at the Bars

**Introducing the basics of barred percussion technique
with age-appropriate structure for beginners**

Katie Grace Miller



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Dear Teacher,

So you have Orff instruments...Congratulations! You will be amazed and thrilled at the incredible things that your students will be able to create and achieve at these amazing instruments. But how should you go about teaching your beginners how to play these instruments?

When I first started in the music classroom I was given some tools and strategies on how students should take the bars off the instruments, how to hold the mallets and how to correctly play the bars. But it was a mish-mash of stuff and none of it went together which drove me crazy! I needed strategies and words that would be memorable to the students so that I could use one word and it would fix a specific problem for that child.

One of the first words I heard in my training was bellybutton: "Tap the bar in the bellybutton." That always stuck with my young ones. Then, when students were playing the bars, I would always tell them, "Don't forget to bounce your mallets!" A few years later I was trying to get my students to keep their elbows up and not at their sides and I started saying "Make your elbows bright! Not sad elbows, bright elbows!" That's when I realized there was a pattern to these reminders that worked so well: the letter B. From there, an alliterative list of reminder words was born, forming the foundation of my Bar Basics. My students are quick to remember these words and concepts when they arrive at the Orff instruments.

Beginners at the Bars includes all of my Bar Basics and strategies for implementing them. It also includes a ton of lessons that you can use with your beginners, to start them off with success at the Orff instruments, and also keep your Orff instruments in good condition for years to come. Believe me, even Kindergarteners can use melodic instruments successfully if we put the proper tools in place to give them success!

I know that your "beginners at the bars" will be advanced level players in no time with these helpful lessons and useful reminders. Remember, you have to start somewhere. And a good beginning will always produce a great ending!

Musically,

Katie Grace Miller

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Acknowledgements

My Bar Basics finally all came together after 14 years of teaching in the elementary music classroom. But I did not come up with them independently. The following people inspired me, helped me to develop these ideas, and made this book possible.

My Aunt Artie is found in every aspect of my teaching. She is my inspiration and motivator in every single thing that I do. She encourages me every step of the way and there is absolutely no way that I would have created any of my ideas without her. I am the teacher I am because of her.

I have been very blessed to have many interns from the University of Central Florida. I absolutely adore having these learners in my classroom because not only do I love to mentor, but they give me a mirror to see my own teaching and they make me a better teacher through and through. My senior interns especially need to be known because not only are they incredible teachers on their own, but in some way they have helped me shape many of the lessons I share in this book and in my clinics. Thank you to Kelsey Mercer, Christina Torrez, Andrea Wellmaker, Meredith Barnes, Kat Mathis, Brandon Norman and Deborah Parsons. I am forever grateful for each of you.

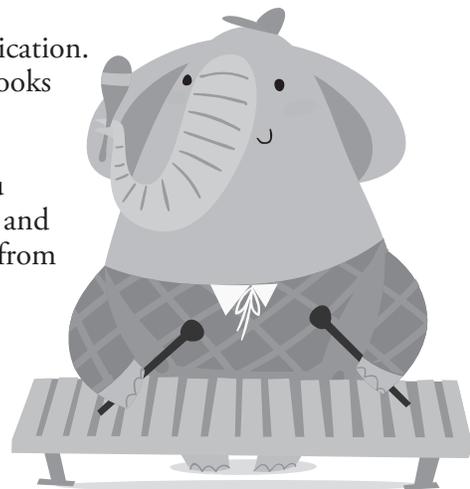
Thank you as well to Deborah Parsons and Artie Almeida for being my amazing videographers.

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Also thank you to my amazing Orange County Public Schools colleagues. You all inspire me in many ways and I am so lucky to work in a county that supports their arts in such a grand way.

Thank you to Erika Popp for agreeing to edit this publication. Your knowledge and incredible insight has made my books so reachable to so many teachers!

Also, thank you to my family. I am so grateful that you all allow me to follow my other love of teaching music and sharing with others because I know it takes time away from you. I love you all more than you know.



How to Use This Book

You will notice that the lessons in this book don't have grade levels listed, and that there is not a specific order in which you should present them. That's because it's going to be different for each teacher at each school. So where do you start?

First, you should introduce the Bar Basics. Introduce them one at a time, using a lesson of your choice from this book. It's tempting to try to introduce a few Bar Basics at a time, but trust me, your students need time to really focus on just one of the concepts at a time.

You will also notice that there are no specific assessments for each lesson, just some assessment ideas on page 11. Each assessment will go with any of the lessons, and once again, you will choose which ones work for you and which ones don't. There is no right or wrong way to go about that.

Each lesson is designed to have a group of students playing the Orff instruments (onstage) and a group of students doing something else while they wait for their turn at the instruments (backstage). I developed the lessons this way for a number of reasons. One reason is that I want to assess a small number of students at a time when they are just starting to learn their Bar Basics. This way, I can go over and manipulate their hands if they are having trouble, and give individual praise when they are doing it correctly. It is much easier to do all of this if I am focusing on only half of my students at a time. Another reason is that there may not be enough instruments for everyone. Maybe your music schedule includes double classes, and you have too many students for the number of instruments you have. Or maybe you're just starting to collect Orff instruments and you only have enough for a portion of a class to play at a time. By splitting your class into two groups, you can give everyone a turn to play. The last reason for splitting the class into two segments is motivation. Perhaps you have one or more students whose behavior needs some improvement before they can handle playing the "big kid instruments" that day. You can put them in the backstage group, and they'll have an incentive to improve their behavior so they get to play the Orff instruments. They are also using their precious time in music to actually make music, rather than just sitting out while everyone else plays.

Remember there is no right order or right way to present these lessons. Find the ones that your students like best and use them year after year to give your students the foundation they will need to play the Orff instruments with proper technique. The Bar Basics will be planted into their vocabulary and can be used each and every year you bring them to the Orff instruments!

Video Vibes

The videos that go along with this book are meant to show you one way I prepped and performed some of the lessons. But it is not the only way. Depending on the type and size of your group, you might prep the lesson differently, or perhaps have more repetitions than what you see. Please do NOT think of these videos as the only way to present a particular lesson. The reason I love these lessons is that they are flexible and fabulous and there isn't just one right way to teach them.

Please note that the videos are meant to help you prepare each lesson for students, and they are not meant to be shown to your students.

I hope that you will also see some classroom strategies that I use in my classroom on a regular basis. It's a great peek inside what I do every day and what my expectations for my students are. These videos were taped after school during the last two weeks of school with some of my kindergarten and first grade students, who were hungry, tired, and ready to go home. You will see behaviors and you will see me correct them. I didn't edit these parts out because I hope you see things that are familiar to you, and perhaps you will pick up a few new tidbits for your classroom. We work with kiddos and every day they are different, but every day they are excited to be in our music spaces and learn no matter what their bodies or behaviors tell us.

When Should They Start on the Bars?

My kiddos start on the Orff instruments in kindergarten. We work on steady beat using unpitched percussion at the beginning of the year, which gives them much-needed gross and fine motor control practice that they will need to hold those mallets. Then we start on the Bar Basics in November or December. If you decide that your kiddos won't start until first grade, that is fine! Or you may be starting at a new school where students haven't used Orff instruments, or where your youngest students are third-graders. Any of these lessons can be presented in any order to introduce the Bar Basics and then practice technique for the rest of the year. I even use snippets of them as warm-ups for my performing groups in fourth and fifth grades.

So how do you know when it's the right time to introduce your beginners to the barred percussion instruments? First, you need some time to get to know your babies. (That's why I don't start until after a few months of school.) What are their capabilities? Are they independent? Do they love to impress you? Or are they needy, requiring more hands-on attention? You will have to evaluate these things to figure out when they will be ready to begin practicing with the Orff instruments. It may not be the same for every class, or every year.

You also need to instill some prior knowledge into your beginners before you set them loose on those beautiful barred instruments. Make sure they understand these things before they begin.

- **Procedures/Routines:** Your beginners should know what to expect in your room. They should know how to line up, where to sit, how to sit, and what your daily expectations in the music room are. These things are absolutely essential to have before putting them in front of the Orff instruments.
- **Unpitched Percussion:** My students have lots of practice with many different unpitched percussion instruments before even considering Orff instruments. We make sure to cover the four instrument families: shakers, woods, metals, and membranes; and I ensure that they have a solid understanding of these instruments before we move on to pitched percussion.
- **Steady Beat:** When they get to the Orff instruments, they should already be on their way to steady beat mastery. They don't have to be perfect at it, but you definitely shouldn't be teaching about the steady beat while also teaching the Bar Basics.



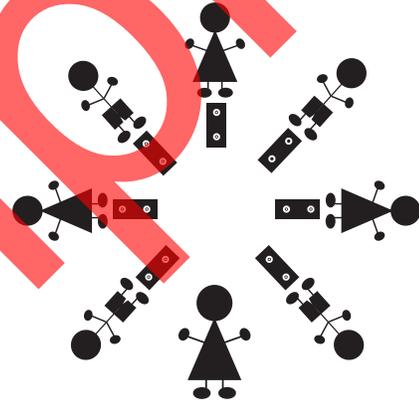
- **Silent Position:** It sounds so obvious, but unless you have given your babies weeks and weeks to perfect their understanding of silent position, you will get very frustrated with them at the Orff instruments because there will be nothing but noodling. No, it won't be perfect even if they know silent position because this is a new, exciting instrument. But by pairing silent position with classroom procedures, you can make sure they know that if they noodle too much they are not following directions, and that means they will not be able to stay at the instrument.

Instrument Groupings

When your students are ready to begin, the next step is to figure out what instrument groupings to use for each lesson. Below are the groupings that I go through, in order. Sometimes I need to use specific groupings for two weeks, sometimes longer depending on how quickly my kiddos are catching on. Every school and class will be different in this capacity, and you will need to make adjustments to fit your classroom needs or abilities, as well as the instruments that are available.

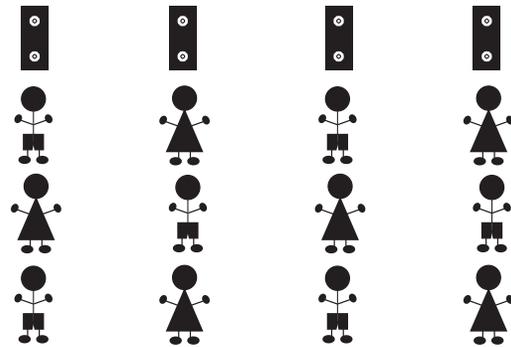
1. Circle with Tone Bars/Resonator Bars:

I love to start with one tone bar for every child. If this is not possible for you, keep the circle formation, but allow the tone bars that you do have to travel from student to student. You can do this by moving the tone bars themselves or having the students scoot around the circle to the next spot and spread out the tone bars so there is one every two or three students. I do think about the sound when I distribute tone bars. I usually use the first and fifth notes of the scale, or three different notes that create a triad. You can also use all five notes from any pentatonic scale. (I refer to these bars as tone bars throughout this book, but you may find that they are called resonator bars if you want to purchase them. They are simply one bar from an Orff instrument, mounted on a resonator box.)

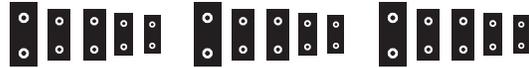


2. Relay Lines with Tone Bars/

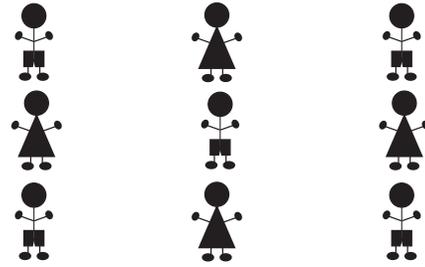
Resonator Bars: Students line up and wait for their turn at the front, where the tone bars will be waiting for them. This is usually when I like to have students use two tone bars at a time. I sometimes have students do the movements that the backstage students are doing while waiting in line, or I hand out mallets to everyone and have them pantomime the steady beat pattern on their lap or on the floor so they can practice holding their mallets.



3. Relay Lines with Small Groupings of Orff Instruments



- I use a small group (usually six) of glockenspiels when we first use the relay lines. I love the sound. I know most people do not care for the sound of several glockenspiels, so feel free to use soprano xylophones or a mixture of glockenspiels and xylophones.
- Set these instruments up away from the regular Orff instrumentarium that you may have set up for other classes. I find that it helps them to stay focused and also builds great suspense when it is finally time to go to the “big kid” Orff instruments in the instrumentarium.
- I usually do two weeks with me taking off the bars for them, and then we do the circle formation to teach how to take off the bars and put them back on with our chant (see page 9). After that, we do the relay lines again, with the kiddos practicing taking the bars on and off.



4. Orff Instrumentarium in Small Groups

- This is where the backstage parts of the lessons will be very important. Split the class in half and have half of the students use the same small group of instruments that they played in the previous setup, but this time, have the instruments located among the rest of the instruments in your Orff instrumentarium (that’s the place in your classroom where your Orff instruments are set up).
- By now, kiddos are taking off and putting on their own bars, but you still want them to be in small groups to help you deal with corrections if you need to, so that is why the backstage group is so important. It keeps half of your babies busy so you are free to help the instrument players.

5. **Full Orff Instrumentarium:** This is the big time! All students are at the Orff instruments and showing off their stuff! I like to reuse lessons during this time so that they are using something familiar and they can focus mostly on being successful at the instruments instead of asking “What are the words to this new song?”

Quick Tips to Make the Instrumentarium Work

You’re sweating a little and hoping that they have been paying attention for the last six or eight weeks as you gave them all of the Bar Basics! Here are some quick tips to help make the transition to the full Orff instrumentarium smooth and successful!

Adjust for Your Students’ Height: My instruments are on rolling stands and some of my littles can’t reach the instrument properly. If this is your case, put the stands at an appropriate position for success.

Help with the Bass Bars: If you have the ability to do so, I would wait to add bass bars until they get older and their arms are long enough to handle the big bars. But if you are using the bass bars, be close by to help them make sure both hands and both sides are taken care of when they are putting them on or taking them off. Sometimes the bass bars are so long they might need some assistance.

Keep Close for Comfort: I have a great Orff instrumentarium, but I know that my kids still might need my help so I ask them to not choose instruments in the back row. The only reason for this is to keep them close to me so that I can quickly help where needed. Keep this in mind if you have more instruments than students or when you set up your Orff instruments.

Practice Makes Permanent: I love this saying! I would most definitely do the relay grouping with a few lessons so that students have a lot of practice taking the bars off and on in a small group setting so you are able to correct errors in reasoning. Once they are all at the Orff instruments at once, they should have already had a lot of practice in taking the bars off and be ready to show off what they know!

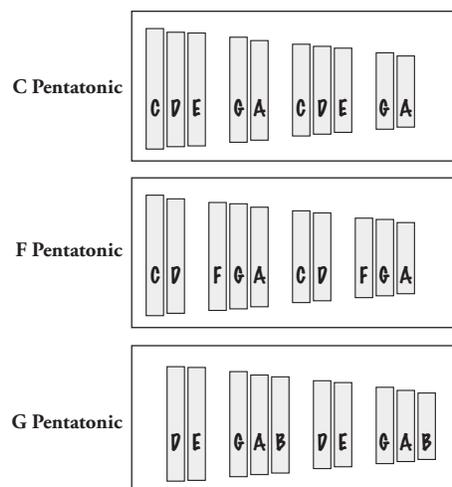
Pentatonic Scales

Many of the lessons say to set up the instruments in “C pentatonic” or another pentatonic scale. That means you or your students will remove two bars from each instrument in order to create a five-note scale. I love using pentatonic scales especially with these exploratory lessons, because students can play any of the five notes without the sound becoming too dissonant. As I mentioned in the section on instrument groupings, I usually set up the instruments myself at first, and then gradually teach students to remove the bars themselves. I use the Orff Cheer below to remind them how to remove the bars safely. There is also a video of the Orff Cheer available. See page 48 to access it.

Orff Cheer

Both hands, both sides
This is how you do it right
Lift up, yeah, yeah, straight up.

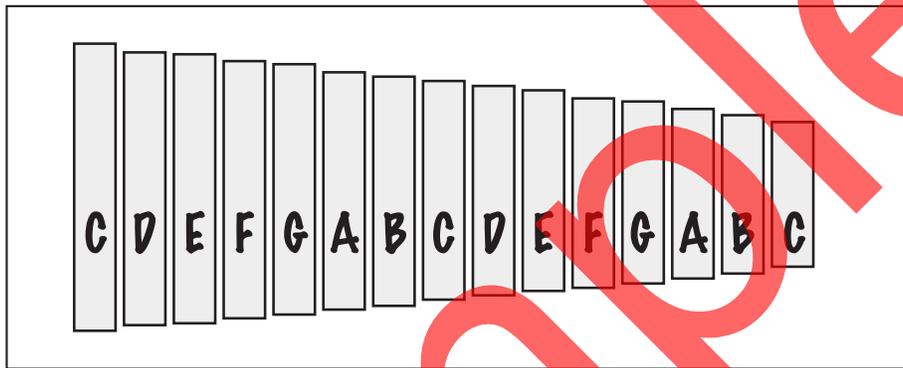
Both hands, both sides
This is how you do it right
Put down, yeah, yeah, straight down.



Teacher Tools to Download

Before you begin your unit, take a look at these helpful files that are included in the downloadable resources for this book. (See page 48.) They are the practical tools that I use in my classroom every time I teach the Bar Basics.

Bar Diagram: One of my most useful tools is a Bar Diagram I created from poster board. You can use the Bar Diagram file in the downloads to make your own. Simply print the bar outlines on different colors of paper or cardstock, laminate them, and use little strips of Velcro® to stick them to a piece of posterboard in the order they appear on the Orff instruments. Then when you want to demonstrate a playing technique, or show students which bars to remove, you can show them on the Bar Diagram so they can clearly see what you're doing.



Posters: This book includes the posters I hang in my classroom to remind students of important bar skills. One of them lists all of the Bar Basics, and others display sayings that I repeat over and over throughout the years.



Assessments: My main assessment tool for the Bar Basics is just working with the onstage group as they develop their skills. I can easily see who's got what skill, and who is still struggling. If you want to implement a more formal assessment, you can use the Bar Basics Breakdown below (also available as a download). I also like to send home a few Positive Tags in each class. These are either small slips of paper or stickers that I print on adhesive labels so students can stick them to their shirt for the rest of the day. The files to print these are also available to download.

Bar Basics Breakdown

	BRAVO!	Building	Beginner
Bellybutton: playing the middle			
Bite: grip around the mallet with pincher fingers			
Blanket: other fingers wrapped loosely around mallet			
Balance: mallet is showing on either side of hand			
Bend: elbows are bent			
Bright Elbows: elbows are up and away from body			
Bounce: mallets are bouncing off of the bars			
Baby's Head: mallets are tapping the bars softly			



Sample



Bar Basics

Below is a description of each of the Bar Basics. Introduce each one in a separate lesson. You can use any lesson in this book to introduce each Bar Basic, so pick the eight lessons you'd like to start with, and use each one to focus on a specific Bar Basic. Make sure your kiddos understand all eight of them before you set them loose in a traditional Orff instrument setup, where they will all play at the same time. Take a look at the teacher videos for each of the Bar Basics first, for a video demonstration of each one.

Bellybutton

The bellybutton is in the middle of our bodies, and the spot where we should put the head of the mallet is in the middle of the bar.

Bite

To hold a mallet, bite it with your pinchers—your forefinger and thumb. I wanted children to get the sensation of a pinch grip with their forefinger and their thumb, but if I asked them to grip the entire mallet, they would wrap all of their fingers much too tightly. Asking them to bite it using their pinchers seems to really help them understand the feeling of a good mallet grip.



Blanket

After you get the bite, what do you do with the rest of your fingers? Wrap them around the mallet like a blanket. Talk about what it's like when you put a blanket over yourself. The blanket is not so tight that you can't move. It covers you to keep you warm, but it is loose enough that you can move underneath it.



Balance

Balance means having some of the mallet sticking out of the blanket on each side. At the beginning I try to tell them it should be even, with the same amount sticking out on each side, and this gives them more control with their little hands. As they get older, I tell them I would still like for them to balance but the mallet doesn't have to be even because everyone's hands are different sizes.



Bend

Bend your elbows. Sometimes my babies really don't know where to stand or sit in relation to the instruments, and I have found that reminding them to bend their elbows helps them to put themselves in the right spot. When they bend their elbows, they have to either back up or get closer to the instrument for their mallet head to tap the bellybutton.



Bright Elbows

Make your elbows bright, not sad. This means that you keep your bent elbows up and away from your body. I find that some students keep their elbows very close to their body, which causes them to tap the bar with the stick of the mallet instead of the mallet head, and having bright elbows eliminates this problem. We practice bright elbows (up and away from the body) and sad elbows (close to the sides of the body) so that they see the difference. Bright elbows also help keep the bite nice and tight. I like to say, "Bright keeps the bite tight."



Bounce

I remember my music teacher in elementary school reminding us to bounce our mallets, so this one has been around for a while. I have two bounce phrases that work well. One is, "Bounce like a basketball." We discuss what happens when you bounce a basketball on the ground, that it bounces back at you, and how this is what our mallets should look like when they tap the bars. One of my interns, Matthew Malhiot, who is a percussionist, said to the students, "Bounce so you don't get burned!" In Florida, we can draw a connection to how hot your seatbelt is when you first get in the car. You touch it, and then immediately retract your hand because the metal is too hot. You could also use a hot plate or a stove as an example.

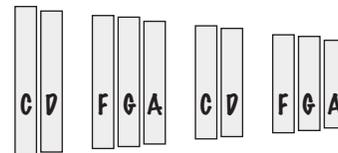
Baby's Head

When you see a baby and you want to say hi, you might pat it on the head. Would you tap the baby softly, or tap the baby hard? The answer is obviously softly, but this example helps my students to understand that they should tap the bars lightly. I am very silly about it and I tell them that we don't want any crying babies. Later on, I just have to say, "I hear babies crying!" and they lighten up their touch. This is the one that sounded the silliest when I first said it out loud, but by golly, it stuck like glue and my kids thought it was so funny!

- Students will demonstrate the bar basics at the Orff instruments
- Students will identify a quarter note as a note that has 1 beat and 1 sound.
- Students will play with hands alternating.
- Students will identify a pair of eighth notes that has 1 beat and 2 sounds.

BINGO

Materials
 BINGO Visual
 BINGO Teacher Video
 Glockenspiels or other Orff Instruments



There was a farm - er, had a dog, and Bin - go was his name - o.

B - I - N-G-O, B - I - N-G-O, B - I - N-G-O, and Bin-go was his name-o!

Whole Class

1. Show the BINGO visual and ask students to identify the letters on it. Sing the song with the students, giving them the job of singing just the B-I-N-G-O part.
2. Practice again, and this time have students clap the rhythm that they sing.
3. Ask what note the B sounds like. Guide them to the answer and use the visual to reveal that there is a quarter note under the B. Sing the song again, this time singing and clapping “ta” instead of the B.
4. Continue identifying the rhythm of each letter. Each time you reveal a new note, sing the song again, clapping the rhythms that have been revealed so far.
5. Teach the melody to students and practice until they feel comfortable singing the song. Teach them to replace a letter with a rhythm syllable and a clap each time you sing the song. Start with the letter B and clap for one more letter each time until the entire word is clapped. Careful—the N and G can be tricky! At first I take them both away at the same time and we clap the pair of eighth notes, but if you want to give them a challenge you can take one letter away at a time and see if they can clap a single eighth note.
6. Have students sing the song with you again, this time patting the rhythm on their laps while they sing “ta, ta, ti-ti, ta” in place of the letters in the song. Check to see if students are patting with alternating hands. (Or, if you want to use this lesson to practice playing with hands together, they will pat with hands together instead.)

Onstage

1. Set up the Orff instruments in F pentatonic (remove B's and E's), or use the Bar Diagram to show students which bars to remove and the Orff Cheer to remind them how to safely remove the bars.
2. Use a poster or an instrument to show students that they will use alternating hands to play on one note of their choice each time we spell the word BINGO. For example, they may play the word on F the first time, G the second time, and A the third time. (Note that they will spell BINGO three times each time they sing the song, so they will need to choose three notes.)
3. Or, if you are using this lesson to practice playing hands together, have students pick two notes to play each time they spell BINGO.



Giving students a choice of what note they play will free you up to be able to focus on the children's technique. Instead of worrying about them playing the wrong note, you can focus on correcting any errors with their Bar Basics.

Backstage

1. Choose an unpitched percussion instrument from the woods or skins family for students to play on the letters at the same time as the Orff instruments. Depending on how much time you have, you might have students go through the entire song on the instruments and then switch groups, or have them switch halfway through.



You might want to do this activity over two lessons. The first day, only do the unpitched percussion instruments. Next music time, add the Orff instruments. Either bring them to the Orff instruments all together or have one group start with unpitched instruments and the other at the Orff instruments, switching groups to give everyone a turn.

2. If you have room, set up your instruments so that one student can be at an instrument and another student can stand on the other side and be the "tutor," performing the same thing as the first student, but upside-down and with their fingers. Then the students trade places so that the tutor gets a turn to play with mallets. My Aunt Artie Almeida had a ton of success with this set-up because she had big classes and a room with enough space. If you have the capability, give it a try!

Time to switch! Make sure your onstage performers switch with the backstage students, then repeat the steps above so that everyone gets a turn doing both activities.