

Notes for teachers

Guitar Basics introduces skills in a fun, step-by-step way. The following tips and activities may be useful:

- Always encourage a relaxed right arm. The arm should lightly rest on top of the guitar, forming a gentle arch at the wrist. The thumb should rest on the thickest string and form a tunnel shape with the fingers. Use the movements in tunes such as 'Shaky' to encourage a relaxed right arm from the very beginning.
- Learning the location of the high and low open strings on the guitar can be counter-intuitive. For this reason it can be helpful for some pupils to talk about the thickest, thinnest, plastic and metal strings.
- Try to encourage pupils to be creative by composing and copying rhythms from the outset, such as in 'Copy Cats'. This call-and-response is the beginning of improvisation.
- When introducing the first fretted note A, ensure that the second finger presses the string with the fingertip and check for a 'groove'. Try not to name the note 'A' until the action of playing the note has been learnt. Stickers can be used to show the exact spot the finger presses. The 'thumbs-up' sign is a good way to remind pupils of the correct left-hand thumb position.
- In order to keep such basic repertoire interesting we have introduced syncopation very early, for example the melody of 'Mild Thing'. However it is very important to reinforce this with lots of clapping practice. Use the words to aid memory of the rhythm.
- Some pieces encourage pupils to explore the guitar as a percussion instrument. In 'The Soldier's March' you can make a snare drum sound by crossing the two thickest strings and strumming them with your thumb. With the teacher's accompaniment, this can make for a very good performance piece.
- If you are teaching in groups and some children learn the pieces quicker than others you could ask the quicker ones to play a harmony part. 'Rock the Boat' and 'The Windmill Song' are good examples of these.
- Improvising is an excellent skill to learn at the early stages of music-making. 'Open All Strings' is ideal for improvising with open strings, but also to return to when new notes are learnt. 'Chunk of Funk' is also suited to this and works well as a call and response activity between teacher and pupil.
- It can sometimes be quite challenging to get children to practise their scales! You may find it useful to encourage pupils to create their own rhythms to go with each note of the scales. Thus, when studying 'Scaling the heights', 'A goat got stuck up a mountain' might be an entertaining rhythmical idea to employ!
- Once the idea of the stave and its notes has been fully introduced, 'Note Reminders' have been strategically placed throughout the book for reference. Try to encourage pupils *not* to write out note names under the pieces.
- Some notes have been introduced before we would normally expect pupils to be able to identify them on the stave. For example, 'Scaly Fish' incorporates the high E on the fret twelve. Although hard to read, once explained it is relatively easy to play, sounds pleasing and encourages the pupil to explore the fret board.
- The thumb is introduced playing freestroke (*tirando*) in Stage 9. Pupils could choose other animal names for E, A and D. Refer back to the earlier use of the D-string and explain that it is played with fingers or thumb depending on context.
- Employing an ostinato is a very useful tool to develop ensemble and listening skills. 'Chinatown' and 'Hannibal's Elephants' are good examples of these. With some imagination and development they both work very well as performance pieces.
- Three-string chords enable pupils to change chords easily right from the start. In addition to the songs we have included in Stage 15 'Thumbs, strums 'n' chords' you can use these basic chords for other earlier pieces in the book. We have found it helpful to introduce full chord forms only when the pupil is fluent with these basic forms.
- In 'I Spied a Spy', the chords follow the same rhythm as the melody.
- Some of the more advanced pieces rely heavily on the teacher accompaniment part, such as 'Sore fingers' and 'Giuliani and Aunty'.

The backing tracks

- At first, the backing tracks* may be too fast to play along to. Use them for pointing, clapping, and singing activities. When the pupil can play the pieces confidently by themselves, or along to a slower teacher's accompaniment, encourage them to play with the backing track.

Open All Strings

2 Em⁷ Bm⁷ Am⁷ Bm⁷ Play 4 times

7 Am⁷ Bm⁷ Em⁷ Play 4 times

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Big Blue Bear

Big Blue Bear

4 walk - ing home, he is sad on his own.

Am B7

7 Make him smile, make him wish, he was eat - ing smel - ly fish! *Urgh!*

Em Am B7 Em

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Joe Cool

Swing

5

10

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The House of Doom

5

Bats and rats, big black cats, witch - es on their

9

brooms. Light - ning strikes, in the night, at the House of Doom!

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