

The Nuts and Saddles of a Ukulele Program

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Why Ukulele?

- The ukulele is relatively inexpensive.
- The ukulele is popular.
- The ukulele isn't easy, but it is less complicated than guitar.
- Success is immediate.
- There are devices to help students with physical limitations and disabilities to play the ukulele.
- There are thousands of free resources.
- There are many paid resources.
- The ukulele can be used to meet all state and national standards.
- Singers can use the ukulele to accompany themselves; "Portable Radio".
- The ukulele matches the pitch range of children.
- Students will start singing as they play the ukulele.
- The ukulele can be used for all kinds of music.
- You can embed music theory, the study of harmony, and music literacy into your instruction.
- You can teach melody, harmony, and rhythm.
- You can create "ukulele orchestras."
- You can teach non-traditional music notation.
- The ukulele can be a transition instrument to guitar, or to baritone ukulele.
- In the uncertainty of life these days, the ukulele represents a way to remember and recreate happy music where people sing together.
- You can always get better, and there are always more skills to add. Differentiation is possible.
- You can add a ukulele elective or unit in your school for little cost.
- The hope is that students will play music of their own.

Necessary Equipment

- Under \$2500 for a class set with everything!
- Ukuleles
 - Scale: Concert, Soprano, or Long Neck Soprano
 - Type: Laminate or Plastic based. (See the Peripole Classic or Enya Nova from Peripole)
 - Do not purchase solid wood instruments for schools
- Strings: They will break. Aquila offers KIDS stings in bulk at a low cost, and the colors make it easy to teach
- Picks: If you want to eliminate barriers to the instrument, consider the use of picks, felt or leather.
- Stickers (For sticker methods)
- Tools
 - Jovoom Smart Tuner T2
 - String Winder with Clipper
 - Work mat and head rest (Music Nomad or similar)
 - Music Nomad Octopus Tool
 - Tuner - TC Electronics UniTune
 - Laminate Ukuleles: Sanding Sponge
 - Fretboard Oil (and 0000 Steel Wool)
- Storage
 - Many options on the web
 - Personal choice: "U" Tool Hooks on 2x4 mounted to walls
 - Racks
 - Converted Boxes
 - Stickers for numbers
- Instruction
 - Projector and sound system
 - Chordette font (ukefarm.com)
- Optional
 - Assistive devices

Decisions about Curriculum

- Know your “Why”
 - If your answer is melody, harmony, and rhythm, look at [Ukulele in the Classroom](#)
 - If you want a “traditional” method, look at [Ukulele for All](#) or Alfred or Hal Leonard Ukulele Methods
 - If looking for chords in year 1 and melody in year 2, try [Ukulele at School](#).
 - If you want a harmony based approach, my organization (grades 4-12) is built on play along videos and skill drills, based on the most frequently used chords ([ukestuff.info](#)).
 - If dealing with chords, check out Rainbow Ukulele
 - If working with very small children, check out the ukulele course by Music for Kiddos
 - See the books [Uke Can Do It](#), [What Ukulele Players Want to Know](#), and [Ukulele for Music Teachers](#).
- DO teach about the history of the instrument.
- DO teach about parts and care of the ukulele
- DO teach your expectations
 - Fetching and transporting instruments
 - “Noodling”
 - Dealing with tuners
 - Know your level of tolerance
- Know how you will handle left handed students
- Assessment
 - Decide what you want to assess
 - Chords
 - Rhythm
 - Posture
 - Participation (e.g. sang and played at the same time)
 - Composition
 - Ukulele history/parts of the ukulele/ expectations/names of chords
 - Possible rubric components
 - Posture
 - Correct chord shapes
 - Location of strumming/ability to strum
 - Accuracy of rhythm or keeping the beat
 - Meeting criteria (e.g. composition)
 - Written or digital quizzes
 - Video Assessment
 - Teach what you need to see
 - Offer student choice (levels)
 - Decide what you want to assess

Best Practices

- Tune before class.
- Tune during class as needed.
- Teach how to tune, but do not let all tune. Perhaps offer an “outside” class to earn rights to “tune”.
- Get to know UkeBuddy.com.
- Get students playing as soon as possible.
- Once they have ukuleles in their hands...keep them playing.
- Watch for the 80%. When 80% demonstrate competency, add a new skill; otherwise, keep going back and reviewing and using materials that build that skill
- Eliminate barriers (picks, colored strings)
- Some students will just strum Am7 (C6) all the time - remember, they are still playing
- **Keep it fun**
- Cater to the interests and purposes your students have for the instrument.
- Include pop music as soon as possible.
- Ukulele can be adapted for K-4, but works incredibly well for grades 5 and beyond.
- Were I to teach college music theory, we would be using ukulele in our harmonic analysis.

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- Blog, materials, method: [ukestuff.info](#)
- Play along videos: [YouTube.com/ukeplayalongs](#)
- Other ukulele videos: [YouTube.com/ukestuff](#)
- Searchable index: [ukeability.org](#)
- Technology in Music Education: [techinmusiced.com](#).

