

# 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 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.
- 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.
- 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 \$2000 for a class set with everything!
- Ukuleles
  - Scale: dependent on age; concert a good bet
  - Type: Laminate vs. Plastic based. As the session is sponsored by Peripole, let's look at ukuleles in the Peripole Catalog - in particular, the Peripole Classic and Enya Nova. Both options come with accessories including a great bag.
  - 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. My favorite are leather from Stones Music in the UK, and can be customized for your school. About \$1.25 each. These can be sold to students.
- Stickers? (Sticker methods)
- Tools
  - Jowoom 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
- 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](http://ukefarm.com))

## 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 you want a harmony based approach, try my organization of ukulele play alongs...great for 4-12. It is built around play along videos and skill drills based on the most frequently used songs ([ukestuff.info](http://ukestuff.info)).
  - If dealing with older elementary, my method works, also check out Rainbow Ukulele
  - If working with very small children, check out the ukulele course by Music for Kiddos
- DO teach about the history of the instrument. There are many videos of historical players that can be used to make this interesting.
- DO teach about parts of the ukulele, and ukulele care
- DO teach your expectations
  - Fetching and transporting instruments
  - “Noodling”
  - Dealing with tuners
  - Know your level of tolerance
- 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
  - 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
- Do teach how to tune, but do not let all tune. Perhaps offer an “outside” class to earn rights to “tune”
- Get them 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-12, 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.

## Christopher J. Russell, Ph.D.

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

