

Building Musicianship Through Games & Activities

by Joy Morin

INTRODUCTION:

- Why use games?
- When to use games?

PART I: Considering the facets and goals of a teacher's Teaching Philosophy.

The **Teaching Philosophy** states (1) the teacher's GOALS for him-/her-self and the students, as well as, (2) HOW the teacher will lead students to achieve those goals.

Comprehensive musicianship involves:

- Sight-Reading
- Rhythm
- Music Theory
- Music History
- Playing/Harmonizing by Ear
- Improvisation/Composition
- Memorization
- Effective Practicing

Progression of Beginning Concepts for Piano:

- Steady Beat
- Music Alphabet
- Finger Numbers
- High/Low Sounds
- Loud/Soft Sounds
- Piano Keyboard Topography
- Meter & Rhythmic Values
- Staff Notation – line versus space notes; high versus low sounds; connecting alphabet & piano keys to the staff notation.
- Intervals – unison, 2nd, 3rd, etc.
- Keys, (Penta-)Scales, and Chords

Note: You can view a digital version of this handout with clickable links by visiting joymorin.com/games.

PART II: Examples of games and activities that will help you accomplish the goals in your Teaching Philosophy.

Concept: MUSICAL ALPHABET

1. [Musical Alphabet Card Snakes](#) – Students sort their cards in order and say musical alphabet forwards/backwards. Have students identify which card is missing.

Concept: KEYBOARD TOPOGRAPHY

1. [Black Key Sorting Cards](#) – Build the keyboard using these cards.
2. **Find That Piano Key game** – Ask student to play 3 different C's, etc. Can be played in a Round Robin version with a pair or group of students. Use [spinner](#) or [alphabet dice](#). Can be done on the keyboard or on a paper keyboard in groups.
3. [Amazing Keyboard Race](#) – You need a game token for each player and a way to randomly choose letters of the musical alphabet (Scrabble tiles, [spinner](#), or [dice](#)). Play it at the piano or use a [paper keyboard](#). On your turn, get a random letter and move your token to that key. Take turns and race to get to the top.
4. [Spell-A-Keyboard game](#) – Works great on the piano, a [paper keyboard](#), or a [floor keyboard](#) (chalk outside). Students spell the words from the cards by marking the corresponding piano keys. Works great in the lesson or in small group settings.

Concept: FINGERING

1. **Fingertip Tapping game** – This is a great activity for to use after completing the Trace the Hand worksheet with new students. Touch fingertips together between your hands. The instructor calls out finger numbers and students must tap the corresponding finger numbers together.
2. [Piano Finger Beanbag Toss game](#) – Students toss a beanbag onto a floor mat showing RH and LH. Students name which hand and finger the beanbag landed nearest to.
3. [Piano Hands Hunt](#) – Hide the cards around the room in advance. Students must find cards and then bring them to the piano to play a piano key using the indicated hand/finger.
4. [Piano Finger Twister](#) – A silly game for students to practice their finger numbers.

Concept: RHYTHM

1. **Find the Beat game** – Create a playlist of music. Students walk or tap to the beat; identify the meter as in 3 or in 4. Students can keep the beat on their head, shoulders, knees, etc.
2. **Add-A-Barline** (using [Rhythmic Value Cards](#)) – The instructor creates a rhythm with a time signature at the beginning. Students must add barlines and then clap the rhythm, audibly reflecting the meter. Or, let students create rhythms and see how they sound.

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3. **Rhythm Dictation** (using [Rhythmic Value Cards](#)) – Great solo activity or team game. Teams race to accurately notate the rhythm they hear.
4. **Rhythm Train Game** (using [Rhythm Cards](#)) – Great game solo or group game for learning to feel meter and connect basic rhythms into longer examples.
5. **BANG! game** – On their turn, students draw a card from the box. If they get a [rhythm card](#), they must clap the rhythm. If clapped correctly, they can keep the card. If they draw a BANG! card, they lose all the cards they have earned so far.
6. **Swat-A-Rhythm** – This solo or group game requires students to slap the correct card with a flyswatter. The first person to slap the correct card earns a bug point. The instructor can use rhythm cards, intervals, melodies, terms, etc.

Concept: STAFF NOTATION

1. **Floor Staff Activities** – The floor staff ([here](#) are directions to make your own) is a great tool for many concepts: high/low (treble/bass clef), line/space notes, guide notes, intervals, scales, chords, etc. Use foam discs or black paper plates for the notes on the staff. Use dice, spinners, or [flashcards](#) to create games where students must notate things on the staff.
2. **Floor Staff Toss** – Students stand behind a line, toss a beanbag or beanie animal, and then identify the line/space where it lands.
3. **Spell-A-Keyboard game** (mentioned earlier; adapted to staff) – Using [paper staff](#) or floor staff, students notate words that use the musical alphabet.
4. **Connecting Keyboard and Staff** – During theory work, use glass gems on a paper staff and paper keyboard simultaneously. Ask students to build scales, intervals, chords, etc.
5. **Grand Staff Pass** – A solo or group game to practice naming notes.
6. **DIY Music Whiteboard** – A great tool to keep near the piano during private lessons. Great for group dictation or [music trivia games](#), too.
7. **Floor Staff Interval Race** – Students race up the floor staff with their beanie animals by rolling the interval dice on their turn.
8. **Ice Cream Interval game** (Cost: \$8 PDF download) – SOLO PLAY: Students sort intervals. GROUP PLAY: Students sort intervals together without taking turns. Or, they take turns and compete to identify the most intervals correctly.

Concept: MUSIC HISTORY

1. **Composer Lapbooks** (PDF curriculum: \$10 per composer) – A creative, interactive way to approach music history! Great for monthly group classes or summer music camps.
2. **Music History Listening Game** – Make a playlist on YouTube and ask students to guess the time period when the piece was composed.

RESOURCES

- My blog, ColorInMyPiano.com.
- [Follow me on Pinterest](#).
- Blog posts about making your own worksheets/games [using png files](#) or [music fonts](#).
- Great blogs with games:
 - SusanParadis.com by Susan Paradis
 - Pianimation.com by Jen Fink
 - PianoAnne.blogspot.com by Anne Crosby
 - thePluckyPianista.blogspot.com by Melody Payne
 - sherylwelles.blogspot.com by Sheryl Welles
 - ComposeCreate.com by Wendy Stevens
 - theTeachingStudio.blogspot.com by Jenny Boster
 - MyTeachingAide.com by Wendy Chan
- More sources for games:
 - ThePracticeShoppe.com
 - [MusicMindGames](#) by Michiko Yurko
 - [Whirligig](#) games by Sallie Ritchie
 - [Music Educators Marketplace](#) by Karen Koch and others
 - [ThreeCrankyWomen](#) Resources (Kjos)
- [Piano Teacher FunMakers](#) group on Facebook, moderated by Susan Paradis and me.