

Teaching Strategy 6

Objectives

Students will improvise different rhythms and pitches in a familiar melody.

Students will teach other students how to play open strings pizzicato on their instrument.

Correlation

National Standard 2: Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

National Standard 3: Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.

Relevance

Research indicates that students who are actively involved in creating and performing music are attracted to the school music profession. In addition, involving students in off-campus performances encourages interest in teaching among students. This strategy combines all of these elements. This can be a particularly effective technique if combined with a demonstration or recruiting concert. It allows future students to get excited about joining the orchestra, while current students get to teach younger students and see the excitement that this can create.

Strategies

1. Teach the class the melody by rote to *Pop, Goes the Weasel*.

Pop, Goes the Weasel

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Pop, Goes the Weasel" arranged for a string quartet. The score is written in G major and 6/8 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Violin, Viola, Cello, and Bass. The second system continues the same instruments. The Violin and Viola parts play the melody, while the Cello and Bass parts provide a steady accompaniment. The score includes various performance markings such as "pizz." (pizzicato), "arco" (arco), and "V" (violin/viola). The piece is in a simple, repetitive style, suitable for rote learning.

2. Once students have mastered the melody, let everyone play an accompaniment by playing the G and D strings pizzicato.

3. Divide the class into groups; some students play the melody while others play the accompaniment. Allow different combinations of instruments to alternate the melody and the accompaniment.
4. Demonstrate how the rhythm can be changed in a melody. Then let students experiment with creating different rhythms on their instruments.
5. Once this has been accomplished, demonstrate how adding or subtracting notes can change the melody. Then let students experiment with changing the melody. Allow students to create their own arrangements for the class by combining melody and harmony parts with various groups of instruments.
6. Arrange an opportunity for the class to perform for students at a younger grade level than the string program begins in your district. For example, if your program starts beginners in the fifth grade, arrange a concert for fourth graders. Talk to your class about the importance of enrolling new students in the string program.
7. Explain how to teach a person who has never played an instrument before to hold the instrument properly. Emphasize the importance of holding the instrument safely and plucking the string gently so as not to break it. There are two parts of the tune that can be played easily by someone who has never played an instrument before:
 - Playing the open E string pizzicato on the violin to create the “pop” sound.
 - Playing the open G and D strings pizzicato on the viola, cello, or bass to create the ostinato accompaniment.
8. Allow students to teach other students how to play pizzicato parts. Practice this first in your own classroom with students teaching each other a different instrument. Then use this as a performance for younger students. Ask for volunteers from the audience to perform with the orchestra. Let the violin students teach individuals how to pluck the E string to produce the “pop” in *Pop, Goes the Weasel*. Remind them to help the student hold the instrument and to tell them how to pluck the E string. They should stand with the new student as the remainder of the orchestra plays the tune, and then help cue him or her when it is time to play the “pop.”
9. This strategy can be used for any performance, but is especially effective in a recruiting or demonstration concert for younger students. This gives students a chance to be involved in the string teaching profession by attracting additional students into the program. Talk about the personal joy you have experienced from watching a student open the case for the first time. Describe the excitement of seeing students and parents at that first concert. Discuss how rewarding it is to be a string teacher as you get to see students learn how to play an instrument.

Additional Suggestions

1. Encourage students to continue developing their improvising skills by changing rhythms and pitches in other familiar tunes they may know.
2. Using an open string ostinato, allow students to improvise their own melodies.
3. Encourage students to play for younger students they know and talk to them about enrolling in the string program.