

BASS BASICS

LESSON/ACTIVITY PLAN

OBJECTIVE:

1. Students will identify the double bass by sight and sound, as well as demonstrate understanding of the instrument's features. Aspects of music literacy (ledger lines, bass clef, intervals) will be referred to and reinforced.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Start with an introduction to the instrument. Look at pictures (or a real instrument if you can), name the parts, and discuss how the sound is produced.
2. Dig a little deeper by learning a handful of facts about the bass. Tailor your list of facts to the age/skill level of your students. Below is a list of a dozen facts you might choose to use. The list gets progressively more advanced.
 - The bass is the largest—and lowest— bowed string instrument.
 - A standard bass is about 6 feet tall, from scroll to end pin.
 - There are four strings on a bass.
 - Bass players play either standing or sitting on a high stool.
 - Bass players can play *arco* (with their bow) or *pizzicato* (pluck strings with fingers.)
 - The instrument can be referred to as: string bass, double bass, contrabass, or bass.
 - Most good quality basses are made from maple, spruce, and ebony.
 - Bow hair on a bass bow is either black, white, or a mix of black and white. This is in contrast to violin, viola, and cello bows, which almost always have white bow hair.
 - Many basses have a C extension, which is an extra section of fingerboard mounted at the top of the bass. The extension makes lower pitches available to the player.
 - Notation for the bass is written one octave higher than the actual sound of the bass. Notating the actual pitches would use too many ledger lines. (Optional: demonstrate this concept by taking a bass part and writing it down an octave, using ledger lines.)
 - The strings of the bass are tuned in 4ths, unlike its string instrument “relatives” (violin, viola, cello) which are tuned in 5ths.
 - The tuning pegs of a bass are geared tuning machines, unlike its string instrument relatives, which have friction pegs. (Take a look at some close-up pictures to reinforce this concept visually.)

3. Use these facts to play a game of trivia, based on the bass.
4. Listen to or watch some standard repertoire for the bass. Here are a few to start:
 - Some jazz-inflected [Edgar Meyer](#), which is all *pizzicato*:
 - Camille Saint-Saëns' famous "[Elephant](#)," from *Carnival of the Animals*.
 - Johann Baptiste Vanhal's [Concerto for Double Bass in D Major](#) is a little long, but watch at least part of it to see great up-close footage of virtuosic bass playing.
5. Compare and contrast the acoustic double bass with the electric bass. Notice how the sound is the same and different. Notice the differences and similarities in the sizes and shapes of the instrument. Compare the physical posture and technique of playing each instrument. Here is some footage of the famous [Jaco Pastorius](#) at work:

STANDARD:

Various standards apply, depending on which facts you select, demonstrate, and reinforce. All activities support the following standard:

1. Grades K – 3.1. Artistic Foundations. 1. Demonstrate knowledge of the foundations of the arts area. Music. 0.1.1.3.1. Identify the elements of music including melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, tone color, texture, form and their related concepts.



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