

LESSON PLAN: Playing By Ear

Objective:

Students will be able to play by hear after being exposed to a step by step approach to focused listening using chords.

Resources:

Only a keyboard!

Procedures:

- 1 Play the 7 chords in the key of C for the students. Name them as you play them “1 chord (C), 2 chord (Dmi), 3 chord (Emi), 4 chord (F), 5 chord (G), and 6 chord (Ami)”. Explain that the 1, 4, and 5 chords have a major or happy sound and that the 2, 3, and 6 chords have a sad or serious sound because they’re minor.
- 2 Next you are going to play a chord for them and have them tell you which one you played. Ask the class to answer together so that no one is singled out for being wrong; you’ll quickly see how easy this is for them to do. Tell them that there are only two choices, the “1 chord” (C) and the “2 chord” (Dmi). Play either of these chords in root position in the middle of your keyboard and ask “which chord was that?” They will excitedly answer “1!” or “2!” Encourage them for their correct answers. Pretend to trick them by doing the same chord over and over. This is providing them with a valuable ear training opportunity.
- 3 After you feel certain that they all understand how to hear the difference between the 1 chord and the 2 chord, add the 3 chord to the set of choices after telling the students that the game is getting more challenging. Play any one of these chords. After each answer right or wrong, play all the chords in order from the 1 chord to affirm the correct answer. For example, if you play the 3 chord, after everyone shouts the answer play the 1 chord, 2 chord, and finally the 3 chord to affirm that was the choice. Playing these other chords that lead up to what the answer was helps students build a “listening structure” in their imaginations that we call the “inner ear”. It gives them a way to compare sounds in their minds allowing them to play by ear successfully.
- 4 Continue building the exercise, eventually adding the 4, 5, and 6 chords. This is an excellent exercise to do with students as a warm up, at the end of class, or as a break between other activities. This will help them be able to identify the chord progressions used in their favorite songs. It also increases their authentic love of music as they find ways to make what they’re hearing more concrete and meaningful to them.

National Core Arts Standards (Music):

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work. Example: Harmonizing Instruments MU:Re7.2.C.1a (HS Proficient) Analyze aurally the elements of music (including form) of musical works, relating them to style, mood, and context, and describe how the analysis provides models for personal growth as composer, performer, and/or listener. Common Core Correlation: CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.B.4 Understand the relationship between numbers and quantities; connect counting to cardinality.

