MY FIRST PIANO ADVENTURE

FOR THE YOUNG BEGINNER
by Nancy and Randall Faber

Teacher’s Step-by-Step FIRST LESSON PLAN for the A Books

Also includes
- Pedagogy Article: Keys to Connect
- Sample Student Assignment

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What is this world of the young beginner? It is fun, fantasy, and exploration. Seriousness? Teacher-driven rules? Tight control? These close down a young learner’s intrinsic interest. Playfulness? Creativity? Adventure? These drive the youngster’s learning. And the multi-sensory world of music makes a perfect context for such a playful adventure. My First Piano Adventure® takes the young student into a musical “playground” where we explore, we hear, we look, we learn. To fully engage the child, the course presents visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (feel/touch) activities through a spirit of play, including playmates—the “friends at the piano” of My First Piano Adventure®.

These five musical friends, along with Tap the music firefly, pose a new adventure with each piece: swimming with a whale, climbing to a tree house, riding a birthday train! Listen to the CD track, featuring young children’s voices, and enjoy a large movement activity. Chat about the delightful artwork to open communication with the student and bring the musical page alive. Next, make it tactile at the piano. Feel the keys and together, sing finger numbers, letter names, and words. Laugh, imagine, and have musical fun with the student for a flying start.

The key is activity-based learning. A basic “rule of thumb” is that the length of an activity may roughly correspond to the child’s age (5 minutes for a 5-year-old). That being said, a teacher’s observations “in the moment” should always drive the rhythm of the lesson. If attention wanes, implement change. Hop off the bench, move to the Writing Table, go on a Quarter Note Hunt, play rhythm instruments in the Music Circle, go back to the piano! Keep your lesson plan varied and be flexible with your student. Celebrate student favorites and visit them from week to week to glean all their capacity for musical development. Well-paced activities combined with a “spirit of play” will create a lesson full of excitement and focused attention.
Rhythm and Pitch

While it is exciting to see the child develop good technique, it is equally exciting to observe development of rhythm and pitch perception. These skills progress most effectively with early-age exposure. My First Piano Adventure® puts special focus on this aspect of brain development with the audio CD that encourages singing and rhythmic body movement.

For rhythm, emphasize feeling a steady beat in the body. From the first song, Roll Call, which introduces the “friends at the piano,” we can tap, march, and play rhythm instruments. For the popular Monster Bus Driver (p. 23), children “honk the black keys” and “beep back” rhythm patterns. Students soon play the repeating and now notated rhythm pattern of Monsieur Mouse, (pp. 48-49) and “squeak” longer, varied patterns in Mouse Rhythms (Writing Book pp. 32-33).

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The audio CD recordings emphasize singing, with childrens’ voices showcasing a variety of tempi, moods, and keys. As the book continues, students are challenged to play a steady rhythm pattern against the busy melody of Boa Constrictor (Writing Book pp. 50-51). Later they play and chant the Music Alphabet in rhythm to If You’re Happy (p. 74).

Summary

The joy and reward of teaching young students more than offsets the challenges. And the challenges are readily addressed with an effective curriculum and a cheerful, playful environment. My First Piano Adventure® provides the curriculum. The best teaching advice is—keep it fun! The child’s life at this age revolves around fun and for good reason. Fun motivates play, and play is the child’s “magic formula” for learning. Enjoy teaching My First Piano Adventure®!

Creative metaphors for First Technique

Noodle fingers… small hands… no coordination… maybe we should wait until the child is older? This fallacy is remedied by recognizing that a child will never “grow” a pianistic hand. A pianistic hand is developed through guidance and practice. For the young beginner, we can adapt our teaching routine and use child-centered technique activities that smoothly guide development of the small hand.

For instance, the chant Stone on the Mountain (Lesson Book pp. 12-13) introduces essential aspects of technique that include a round hand shape, arm weight, (free-fall drop) and rising wrist motion. A few pages later, Cookie Dough (p. 17) addresses a firm fingertip—pressing imaginary chocolate chips into the dough. This prepares the student to play the white keys with a braced finger 3 for L.H./R.H. Donuts and the all-time student favorite Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star (pp. 18-21).

In Mitsy’s Cat Back (p. 25), an upward/forward wrist motion that drives the “bridge” over the fingers is practiced with an appealing, jazzy song. This wrist motion then progresses into an expressive “rainbow” gesture that carries the hand gracefully across the keys. The overall progression of technique throughout the book models the pianist’s hand structure and alignment of finger, wrist, and arm.
GET READY

LESSON PREP

TEACHER SKILLS:
• Learn and memorize the words to Roll Call (CD 1).
• Practice singing the song without the CD.

STUDIO SUPPLIES:
• teacher’s own copies of student books
• large drum, if possible
• MFPA Friend Posters
  Download at PianoAdventures.com/myfirst
• crayons
• tiny duck, or other small item, for The “I’m Great” Pose
This 12-activity lesson plan is approximately 45 minutes in length. For a shorter lesson plan, activities 3, 7, 11, or 12 could be optional.
(Welcome the students!) Let’s sit in a circle on the floor. We call this the Music Circle.

As we learn the piano, we’ll meet new friends who will learn with us. They’re special, just like each of you is special. Let’s meet them!

(Show each MFPA Friend Poster or picture in the book. Comment on items that each friend likes.)

This is Katie. Who is Katie holding hands with? (dog)
The dog’s name is Tucker. He loves to listen. Can you see his ear is up because he’s listening?
Let’s touch his ear. (Students point to ear.)

What is Katie holding? (paintbrush) Katie loves to paint. She’s wearing a smock. Have you ever worn a smock and painted?

What are some of the things Katie likes? (beach ball, easel, keyboard, doghouse, etc.)

(Choose the next friend, or let the student choose.)

This boy’s name is Carlos. What is Carlos holding? (bat and ball)
What is on his shirt? (dinosaur) I’ll bet he knows lots of dinosaur names!
What are some other things Carlos likes? (bongo drums, hamburger, slide, etc.)

Now, let’s look at the twins—Millie and Marta. One twin likes to curtsy and have tea parties. Her name is Marta.

Which twin is Marta? What are some other things Marta likes? (Discuss.)
The other twin is the opposite. Her name is Millie. She likes to wear mis-matched clothing and run and play. Her braids are always flying because she’s on the go!

What are some of the things Millie likes? (Discuss.)

It’s fun and puts students at ease to chat about the “friends at the piano.”

Dallas is another friend at the piano. What is Dallas holding? (binoculars) He looks like a scientist.
What are some things Dallas likes? (rocket, magnifying glass, globe, etc.)

All these friends have a piano teacher. Her name is Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle.
Can you say “razzle-dazzle”? You’ll see her in the book teaching her students.

What does Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle like? (CDs, black cat, glasses, keyboard)
Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle has a black cat named Mitsy, who loves to sit on the piano.

Last is a little music firefly called Tap. He loves to tap the beat. You’ll see him buzzing around in the book.
1. We have a special song for the “friends at the piano.” Before I sing it, I’m going to place their posters around the floor. (Do.)

“I’m putting the friends all around the room.”

2. Now, I’ll sing/chant the song. When you hear each friend’s name, you can run to that friend’s poster. Ready?

3. (Sing Roll Call. To allow time for movement around the room, sing/chant without the CD.)

Lyrics to sing/chant:
Friends at the piano, we’re a band of friends!
Meet Millie… Let’s run and find Millie.
Meet Marta… Can you find Marta?
They’re the twins.
Hey, Carlos… Where’s Carlos? He’s the guy that loves to play baseball.
Hey, Dallas… How about Dallas? He’s the scientist with the binoculars.
Katie, too… Let’s zip to Katie.
Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle is tapping with you…
Let’s find Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle.

Drum roll now for you, Yea!
Friends at the piano!

4. For the next part of the song, we’ll tap a steady beat on different parts of our body. Follow my motion. (Begin chanting.)

(Tap HEAD.) Tap the beat! Roll Call, please!
Millie 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8,
(Tap BELLY.)
Marta 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8,
(Tap KNEES.)
Carlos 2 - 3 - 4,
Dallas 2 - 3 - 4,
Katie 2 - 3 - 4,
(Tap BELLY.)
Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle, Razzle-Razzle-Dazzle.
( Drum on UPPER LEGS.)
Drum roll now for you,
Yea! Friends at the piano!
(Conradulate students!)

Keeping a steady beat is the most basic musical skill.

Note: This activity requires MFPA Friend Posters. Download at PianoAdventures.com/myfirst
Roll Call Parade

Activity 3: Marching and Tapping a Steady Beat

• Now let’s listen to the same song again on the CD. You’ll hear all the friends singing together.
• This time, we’re going to have a copy cat parade around the room. Line up behind me and get ready to march. I’ll be the leader!

1  • (As the CD starts, march in place for the countoff. As the singing begins, start marching around the room with students following. Sing with the CD as you march.)
2  • (For the second half of the song, move quickly to the drum, if available, and begin tapping a steady beat.)
3  • (Or simply sit down and tap in your lap.)

Roll Call continued:
Tap the beat! Roll Call, please!
Millie 2 3 4 5 6 7 8,
Marta 2 3 4 5 6 7 8,
Carlos 2 3 4,
Dallas 2 3 4,
Katie 2 3 4,
Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle, Razzle-razzle-dazzle.
Drum roll now for you,
Yea! Friends at the piano!

Congratulations—good tapping!
Let’s go to the piano and sit on the bench. (Open the book to pp. 6-7 on the music rack.) The friends are also learning how to sit at the piano. Let’s copy them.

1. Who is starting off? (Carlos) (Children may need a reminder for his name.) Carlos says, “Sit straight and tall on the front part of the bench.” (Coach the student to do this step.)

2. Who is next? (Marta) Look, Millie with her wild braids is watching her sister. (Read the text and coach this step.)

3. Now who do we see? (Dallas)
   - Now let your loose fists rest on the white keys. We call this The “I’m Great” Pose. (Adjust seating height with a cushion, if necessary.)

4. And finally, who is at the piano? (Katie)
   - Keep sitting straight and tall as I balance a bird nest (or other small object) on your head.
   - Hold your “I’m Great” Pose while I count from 1 to 10. Ready?
   - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10. Great job!

Good posture is the essential first step to good piano technique.
Sounds on the Piano

Activity 5: Exploring the Keyboard

1. (Point to the first gold star on p. 8.)
   • Is that gold star on a white or black key?
     Let’s play white keys all over the piano.

2. • How about the next gold star?
     Let’s play black keys all over the piano.

3. • Look, there’s Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle and her friend named _______. (Children answer “Tap.”)
   • (Point.) This is the FALLBOARD.
     Can you say that word?
   • Let’s pretend to knock on someone’s door.
   • Now let’s knock and chant our names.
     I’ll go first!

4. • Look at the three little chicks. Do you think their peeps would be soft or loud?
   • Let’s make some soft little peep sounds on the piano. (Do together.)

5. • How about Mr. Tiger? Is his roar soft or loud?
   • Let’s make some loud sounds together!

6. Now look at this little mouse jumping around.
   • Let’s make short, bouncy sounds together.

7. • And finally, the long snake. Let’s create a very long sound. When I say, SNAKE, we’ll each play a key and hold it down.
   • I’ll time the sound with the second hand on my watch until we can’t hear it anymore.
     Ready? SNAKE! (Strike the key.)
   • Can you still hear it?... How about now?...
     (Hold until the sound completely fades.)

Imitating animals is an imaginative way to express soft, loud, short, and long sounds.
• When two people play music together, it’s called a duet. Will you say that word?
• For this duet, I’ll ask you a musical question. Together, we’ll create a musical answer by making lots of different sounds at the piano.

1

2

• Listen for my first question! (Play and sing, coaching as you go. Feel free to vary the tempo to accommodate the student.)
• (Take a bow together at the end.) We just played our first duet!

“Will you play some white keys SOFTLY please?”

“Will you tap the FALLBOARD now with me?”

“Will you play some BLACK KEYS now with me?”

“Will you play some LONG sounds now with me?”

“Will you play some SHORT sounds now with me?”

“Take your fingers gently off the keys.”

“Will you take a bow now with me, please?”

Improvising within a four-hand duet can begin right at the first lesson!
Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Activity 7: Singing and Body Motion

Note: This activity is optional. However, many students will benefit from a larger movement activity after the previous keyboard activities. It also prepares children to play the melody on the piano at the next lesson.

1. Now, let’s come to the Music Circle and sing one of the most famous songs of all time.

   “Let’s all touch our feet. TWINKLE...”

2. Follow my motions and sing with me. (Sitting or standing.)

   Twinkle, (touch feet)
   twinkle (touch head)
   little (hands over head)
   star. (touch head)
   How I (touch shoulders)
   wonder (touch stomach)
   what you (touch knees)
   are. (touch feet)

   Up a- (touch head)
   -bove the (touch shoulders)
   world so (touch stomach)
   high. (knees)
   Like a (head)
   diamond (shoulders)
   in the (stomach)
   sky. (knees)

   “Twinkle, twinkle, LITTLE star...”

   “How I WONDER what you are.”

   “Like a DIAMOND in the sky...”

3. (Repeat the first part of the song with the same motions.)

   Twinkle, (touch feet)
   twinkle (touch head)
   little (hands over head)
   star. (touch head)
   How I (touch shoulders)
   wonder (touch stomach)
   what you (touch knees)
   are. (touch feet)

   (Congratulate.) Beautiful singing!

Large body activities allow children to move, sing, follow, and prepare to play songs on the piano.
1. (Comment on the art.) Look, Katie and Carlos are hiking and looking for beautiful stones. What color is Katie’s stone? (red)

2. Let’s pretend we’re holding beautiful stones. (Pretend to hold a stone with your palm up.)
   Mine is sparkly blue. What color is yours?

3. (Point to the first picture in the book.)
   Hold your R.H. up in the air like this and pretend to hold your stone. Follow me. (Chant.)
   Stone on the mountain, falls to the ground.
   (The hand drops freely into the lap. Practice dropping completely relaxed several times, if needed.)

4. Now, watch my hand and follow this motion. (Continue the chant.)
   Hold it, mold it, roll it around.
   (Keep fingertips in contact with your lap. Make gentle, circular motions.)

5. Copy my thumb. (Chant.)

6. Now pretend a big wind comes through and lifts our hands up to the keys. (Chant.)
   Whoosh! Goes the wind and land on the keys.
   Are you still holding your stone? Great! (Check for a round hand shape.)
   Let’s try it with the other hand. (Repeat.)
The Name Game

Activity 9: Playing the Piano

1. (Point to the large keyboard.)
   - There are the five friends on the five black keys.
   - Let’s name them:
     Millie, Dallas, Marta, Carlos, and Katie

2. My thumb and pointer finger make an “O.”
   - Now I’ll sing and play the piece on the piano:
     Let’s all play a game.
     Play and say your name.
   - At the end, I’m going to play the rhythm of “Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle” on the black keys.

3. Your turn to make an “O” shape!
   - (The student may use either hand.)
   - I’ll point to the keys and sing the words to guide you. (Student plays.)

4. What other names could we play?
   - (Make up variations.)
   - Let’s all play a game.
     Play your mother’s name!
     ...father’s name!
     ...grandma’s name!
     ...doggie’s name!

Use repeated notes:
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mf} & \quad \text{Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle!} \\
\text{Or use multiple black keys:} & \\
\text{mf} & \quad \text{Mrs. Razzle-Dazzle!}
\end{align*}
\]

“Use any black keys to play your own name.”

“1-2, ready, play. Let’s all play a game…”

“You just played your first song!”
1. (Sit in the Music Circle.) Do you think a tiger would roar loudly or softly?... I think so, too.
   - Listen to my big tiger song and follow my motions. (Sing forte.)

   (Cup hands to mouth and lean to the left as you sing.)

   Tiger, Tiger

   ROAR!

   (Cup hands to mouth and lean to the right as you sing.)

   ti-ger,

   (Open arms wide.)

   might-y roar.

   (Cup hands again and make a mighty roar.)

   ROAR!

   “Let’s roar like a tiger!”

2. Let’s do the song again. This time, will you sing with me? (Repeat.)

   “Open your arms wide and say, MIGHT-Y ROAR.”

3. You’re ready to play Tiger, Tiger on the big keyboard in your book. I’ll go first!
   (Sing and demonstrate with braced fingers 1-2.)
   - Your turn! (Sing and guide the student.)

   “Begin with your low hand.”

4. Let’s take the tiger to the piano! Come to the LOWEST white keys and watch me.
   - (Teacher raises L.H.) My L.H. thumb and pointer finger make an “O” and start on the LOWEST white key.
   - (Teacher raises R.H.) Then I make an “O” with my R.H. and find the third white key up from the bottom.

5. (Sing or chant the words as you play on the LOWEST A-C keys.) Notice when I say might-y roar, only my low hand plays.
   - At the end, I play hands together for the last big ROAR. Will you roar with me?

6. Your turn! (Help the student to form an “O” with each hand and play. Let the student play several times with less guidance each time.)

   Students use arm weight as they drop hands together for the ROAR.
Lesson Book pages 20-21

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Activity 11: Singing and Eye Training

1. (Sit in the Music Circle with the student book.) These pages have lots and lots of stars! (Comment on the art.)
   - Which friends are camping out under the stars? (Millie and Marta)
   - Who is peeking out of the tent? (Tap)
   - Do you see a shooting star?

2. As I point to the stars, let’s all sing the colors together:
   - Red-red, green-green, yellow-yellow, green___ etc.
   - Did you notice that lots of the stars repeat?

3. Now I’m going to make a moon with my thumb and pointer finger and touch the stars as I sing.
   - (Demonstrate, now touching the stars and singing.) Red-red, green-green, yellow-yellow, green___ Orange-orange, blue-blue, purple-purple, red__ (Continue singing colors. Repeat page 20 to end.)

4. Your turn! Point to the stars with your moon and we’ll all sing the colors.
   - (After the first page, congratulate.) Great!
   - Let’s go on to the next page and sing and point.

5. To end, we sing the first page once again. For fun, let’s make a “moon” with the other hand and point. Here we go!
   - (Give a star sticker to celebrate.)

Pointing to the stars uses beginning eye tracking.
Be the Teacher! pp. 4-5

- There are two pictures of Carlos. Circle the picture that shows good posture.
- Now draw an X through the incorrect picture. Tell me what needs to be improved!
- (Continue with the other friends.)

Secret Messages, p. 6

(Depress the damper pedal and knock “secret messages” on the wood underneath the keyboard.)
- Listen to my secret message and knock the same message back to me.
- For fun, let’s turn out the lights! (Note: This will add excitement and heighten listening for imitating rhythm patterns.)

Soft or Loud? Short or Long? p. 7

(Play your own keyboard examples.)
- (Examples 1-4) Is the music soft or loud? Circle the soft chick or the loud tiger.
- (Examples 5-8) Are the sounds short or long? Circle the short worm or the long snake.

(Optional: You may SING the examples rather than play them at the keyboard.)
- (Examples 1-4: Sing piano or forte using the syllable “LA” for the opening of such songs as Yankee Doodle, Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, Jingle Bells, Row, Row, Row Your Boat, etc.)
- (Examples 5-8: For short sounds, sing the word “pop” up or down the 5-finger scale. For long sounds, sing one long BEEP_____ on a held tone.)

Lesson Conclusion
- This is the end of our lesson. You were a good listener and a good learner!
- (Pass out Student Assignment for at-home practice. Explain it to the student and parent.)
- (Give a final positive reinforcement.) I’m already looking forward to your next lesson. See you soon!
Things to do:

1. p. 5 Roll Call, CD 1. Listen and point to the friends (p. 4). Surprise me! How many words can you learn?
2. p. 6 Do the I’m Great Pose.
3. pp. 8–9 Make soft, low, short, and l-o-n-g piano sounds.
5. p. 14 The Name Game p. 15 Tiger, Tiger
6. pp. 20–21 Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, CD 7. Point to each star with your “moon” fingers and sing the colors.

Date: September 6

Color a key each day you practice!
My First Piano Adventure®
by Nancy and Randall Faber

Written for ages 5 and 6, My First Piano Adventure® captures the child’s playful spirit. Fun-filled songs, rhythm games, and technique activities develop beginning keyboard skills.

Also available: My First Piano Adventure® Christmas Books

You may also enjoy…