

Lessons and Exercises

King of the Hill

King of the Hill is a lesson in which the student must audibly transcribe the music and echo it back to me. Each student will challenge the next, and whichever student echoes back better is the king of the hill.

For example, I will start by playing a short riff consisting of three notes. I will then ask a student to repeat the riff that I played. The student must use their ears and theory to identify the riff and play it back to me exact. I will then play the riff to another student. Whichever student plays it better wins.

If two students are continually echoing back well I will increase the number of notes and make the riff more difficult. This exercise is a valuable use of memory, theory, and ear training.



Boom Boom Click Click Click

This is a song that I teach in beginning bucket band. We will boom on the bucket twice and then click our sticks together three times in the air. We do this four times, and on the fourth phrase I will ask the students to improvise a drum pattern.

By starting simply, it gives the students lots of space to improvise and make it their own. Once they master it on the buckets, we take the form to instruments. Here, we replace the two booms on the buckets with two notes on our instrument. I will then ask a different section of the orchestra to provide the click sounds.

This interplay is a great way to get the students improvising and thinking about how different sounds work together. I will often ask the kids to come up with their own sounds for clicks. They may use sounds that are notes in the higher register or sounds that aren't notes, like pressing down the keys in a clicking style. Once we repeat the phrase three times the students will improvise the fourth phrase.

Melody Snake

This is an exercise where the students will compose a Melody together. It requires a keen memory and an excellent ear. Participating in this exercise allows my students to improvise melodies and create their own songs collaboratively. We start with a student improvising a three note riff, then go down the line. Each student plays that previous riff plus creates their own riff on top of it, and it gets longer each time.

After four students create riffs, I will ask another section of the band to participate, creating a counter Melody (something that cuts against the original melody or contrasts it in some way). Once we have a few lines of music I will have a student write them down. We save these melodies and over the course of the semester we put them together to form a complete song.