



Guitar

Three Methods for Young Guitar Students

by Whitney Pierce Takaba

In working with guitar students between the ages of four and seven years old, there are many differences that need to be considered when finding the right methods to use. There are some students in this age group who have mastered reading books, while others have just started to learn. There are many levels of attention span, and wide ranges of physical dexterity. Having several methods to use allows the instructor to tailor a program to fit the individual needs of each student. The instructor can also supplement areas that may be lacking in one method with another.

I have found three methods that have very different approaches which work well with the different needs of young students. These methods can work well alone, but are very useful when used in combination. There are other methods available, but it is easier for the instructor to narrow down the options and be very familiar with each method so that the best method or combination can be quickly found. Although some students in this age group have not learned how to read books, I believe it is important to start learning to read notation as soon as possible. All of the methods can be used to introduce students to reading notation.

Suzuki Guitar School Guitar Part, Volume 1 by Shinichi Suzuki, is published by Summy-Birchard Inc. This method works well for most students of this age. It focuses on developing auditory and technical skills before learning to read notation. Developing skills at the same time as learning to read notation can be very discouraging for young students. It does not take very long to learn several pieces before the student can begin to learn notation. Once the student learns the G major scale, they can begin to apply the

notes to the sounds they already recognize. Students can read the notation in the book after the first few pieces instead of continuing to learn by rote. The students are familiar with all of the pieces in the book because they listen to an accompanying CD. They can use their ears to figure out difficult sections of notation.

This method does not work as well alone without having other methods to help establish notation skills. One difficulty is that it is very easy for students to rely too heavily on their ears to play the pieces they know from listening to the CD. Also, many students become dependant on fingerings because these are provided with most of the notes. Dividing pieces into the keys of G, D and A major, gives the student a good background in these different keys. Students also are introduced easily to the higher positions of the guitar. This method is unique in that it relies on significant parental involvement. It is very helpful for students of this age to have a parent act as a teacher at home. Most children have difficulties structuring their own practice times, and having a parent involved makes practicing a special activity shared with the parent. If a parent does not have the luxury of attending every lesson and assisting at every practice, then this method is not effective. There are a few independent students of this age who can work better on their own.

Another method I have used for young students as well as students of all ages is *The First Book for the Guitar, Part One* by Frederick Noad and published by G. Schirmer, Inc. This method includes mostly original pieces that have duet accompaniments. The method begins with the first position notes on the first string and continues through the other six strings.

The advantage with this method is that it forces the student to rely completely on reading notation to play the pieces. This makes it helpful as a supplement to students using the Suzuki method who are tempted to use their ears entirely when working on notation. The duet arrangements encourage very strong rhythm skills, and are rewarding for students who enjoy being able to play with the instructor. There is a volume of duet arrangements for the Suzuki method which are helpful in this as well. The beauty of being able to discover a piece that they have never heard before can be exciting for students. Some students do not like playing familiar tunes, and want something more original to work on. One drawback to this method is that it can encourage a dependency on fingerings in order to recognize notes. Also, it introduces reading notes on the fifth and sixth strings at the same time, which can be overwhelming. The transition to playing two notes at the same time is rather abrupt as well. This method does not rely on parental involvement, and works well for independent students.

A Modern Approach to Classical Guitar, Book One by Charles Duncan is published by the Hal Leonard Corporation. This method works well with young students who enjoy playing pieces that are easily recognized by friends and family. Many of the pieces in this method are arrangements of familiar folk melodies and children's songs. However, the method does not start out with familiar pieces. It begins slowly with exercises on the open strings, which move on to some notes on the first and second strings. Actual pieces are introduced later on. This can test the patience of young students who are anxious to play something more interesting.

Using this method in conjunction with the Suzuki or Noad methods can help the student move past the dull parts without becoming discouraged. This method works well when used with the Noad method because students can try some unfamiliar melodies and the introductory exercises in the Noad book are more interesting. The Duncan method establishes more confidence on the fifth string before moving to the sixth than the Noad method. In addition, the Duncan method does not encourage as strong of a dependency on fingerings for note recognition. It

can be used to supplement reading skills with students using the Suzuki method, but the students may be tempted to rely more heavily on their ears with the familiar melodies. This method introduces playing the right hand fingers and thumb together very smoothly. It is similar to the Suzuki introduction to this technique, in that notes played by the thumb are open strings. The Noad method introduces this technique with notes that have to be held while being plucked by the fingers and thumb. Using all three of these methods together, or combining

several works very well for adapting a curriculum that meets the needs and personalities of young, beginning guitar students. The methods used together can supplement each of their weaker sections and result in a very well rounded curriculum.

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