Age Range: K-6

Learning Objective: Students will demonstrate basic understanding about how the piano works.

Note to Teachers: We encourage you to customize this lesson to fit your needs, resources, and teaching style. This lesson is designed to be a starting point. For younger learners, keep it simple! You might skip ahead to the hands-on learning. For older students, you can dive deeper into how sound is created. If possible, demonstrate the hammers and pedals in real life.

ENGAGE

SAY. “Raise your hand if you have seen a piano in real life. (Pause.) Keep your hand up if you have played a piano in real life. (Pause.) Keep your hand up if you’ve taken piano lessons. (Pause.) It looks like almost everyone has seen a piano, and many have played or even taken lessons! Today we’ll learn a little about how the piano works and have a chance to take turns playing it!

EXPLAIN

If possible, demonstrate on a real piano. If you don’t have access, download our Piano Visuals to show pictures of the hammers, pedals, and keys.

SAY. “The piano is one of many keyboard instruments. Keyboard instruments usually have keys that look like this.”

![Piano Keys]

“Sound on a piano is made by pressing the keys. There are tiny hammers covered with soft felt. When you press a key, the hammer hits a metal string, and the vibration of that string is what we hear.” (Show students hammers on a real piano or show page 2 of the Piano Visuals.)

“Pianos also have pedals. Pressing different pedals changes the strings in different ways that affect the sound. For example, pressing one pedal makes the sound quieter. (Demonstrate if possible.) Pressing another pedal makes each note ring out longer. (Demonstrate if possible.) Pedals on a piano look like this.” (Show students the pedals on a real piano or show page 3 of the Piano Visuals.)
EXPLORE

ASK. “Look at the picture of the keyboard again. Do you notice a pattern? The black keys alternate between groups of two and groups of three.”

WRITE. Print copies of this worksheet for students. Ask students to circle all groups of two in red. Then, circle all groups of three in blue.

PLAY. If you have access to a piano or keyboard, ask students to hold up their index and middle finger, like a “peace” sign. Taking turns at the piano, ask students to use those two fingers to gently bounce up and down on groups of two black keys. Depending on developmental stage, try each hand alone or both hands together. Use a steady beat chant to regulate playing: “Groups of two, kangaroo!” Use the imagery of a hopping kangaroo. Remind students that kangaroos shouldn’t hop too far off the ground. Students who are not in line for the piano can practice hopping back and forth between the two sets of double black keys on their printed piano.

Repeat this activity by adding the ring finger and using the three interior fingers to find groups of three. “Groups of three, hop like a bunny!”

CREATE. Allow students to start creating their own music. An easy way to start is by playing only black keys. “Black Key Music” can be played alone or with others. One player can start a pattern of sounds using the lower register (“see if you can find the low notes!”) while the other can play a melody using the high notes. Explain that this music is improvised, or that we just make it up as we go, so there are no wrong notes. Guide and structure exploration by giving a title to each improvisation. “Elephant Music” on the black keys might sound slow and heavy, using low notes in the bottom register. “Hummingbird Music” might be high, light, and fast. Integrate music vocabulary to help reinforce meaning and terminology.

EXTEND

LEARN. The organ is another kind of keyboard instrument. Check out Part One, Part Two, and/or Part Three of Class Notes Video Series: The Organ. After watching, compare and contrast the piano and the organ.

Follow along with this lesson online!
Visit our Class Notes Lesson Library for more lessons!
Need help adapting a lesson? Link no longer working? Contact Katie Condon, music education specialist.