

FELT KEYBOARD PUZZLES

From our earliest classes, we have been teaching the students the white key names according to the arrangement of black keys and white keys on the piano. They have learned two groups of white keys: the “CDE” group and the “FGAB” group. To further their understanding of the concept, they have learned to “create” the keyboard from scratch as you see here. By placing groups of two and three black keys on the cracks between the white keys, the students recognize more fully how the CDE and FGAB groups are formed.

BUILD-A-RHYTHM GAME

In preparation for formally introducing time signatures, we have been teaching the children to add individual note values together to make larger groups. In this game, the number your child gives you to place on the left of your board is the number of counts that needs to go in each rectangular block. You will take turns drawing note values to place on your board. Whoever is the first one to fill all of the rectangles (or measures) with that number of counts gets the chance to clap and count it and become the winner of the game!

LETTER CHAINS

This center helps the children become proficient with the order of the alphabet letters A-G going both forward and backward. It also helps them make the connection from the visual way that music is printed on the page (with notes going higher and lower) and the way it is played on the keyboard (with keys progressing higher to the right and lower to the left). The wooden keyboard and black stone is here as an aid for the student and also helps solidify this connection.

TAP AND SAY HANDS

In addition to learning the right hand from the left hand, the children have to learn how that is represented in musical notation. For now (and until we begin reading on the grand staff), their music shows right hand notes with stems that point up and left hand notes with stems that point down. At this center, students will place notes appropriately over the letters and then practice tapping the pattern with a steady beat while saying “right” or “left”, strengthening the connection of cognitive recognition to physical response.

KEY NAME COLOR CODING

This center helps the children become comfortable separating individual keys from the larger groups they originally learned, CDE and FGAB. The stones will create a visual pattern that students can easily check with the bottom of each card. It is particularly interesting to watch the different ways the students complete the task. Some are very methodical, finding all of one letter and then all of the next letter, etc. Others will find an entire group and then repeat it twice more, and some prefer a completely random approach.

PRIVATE LESSON

This center is our weekly opportunity to work with the children individually. During this time, we work out new pieces and coach improvements to review pieces. We also address important technical aspects of piano playing. At this stage, those include sitting position, hand position and freedom of arm motion. Today we will focus first on the special piece to insure security for the performance later in class. Since there probably won't be time to work out a new piece today, we have assigned an optional "on your own" piece instead.

RHYTHM SORTING

Our students are strengthening their knowledge of note values and priming their addition skills through activities like this one. As they sort the rhythm cards into rows, they may choose to use the stones as a counting aid. The children are not expected to finish the activity, but they have made significant improvement in the amount they are able to complete from week to week. Before rotating to the next center, have your child clap and count (out loud) one of the longest rows completed to that point.