

# “10 Ways to Motivate and Inspire upper primary or elementary students”

A free report based on research and development by The Fun Music Company

## Introduction

Congratulations on downloading this free report on ways to engage and motivate upper primary or elementary students in music lessons.

Through talking with lots of music teachers, I know that the upper primary or elementary age is one of the most challenging groups that teachers have to work with on a regular basis.

In most situations these are students who are not really old enough to be in full band programs or learning instruments, yet they are too old for many of the general music activities they did in the early years.

We are talking about kids around the age of 10 to 12 years, who are generally given one or two general music classes every week in their school.

Its a real challenge, as these kids can be way too ‘cool’ to sing songs and play tunes on xylophones and recorders... yet they really aren’t ready for band instruments or drums and guitars like they might be ready for in high school.

### ***So what do you do?***

We’ve spent a good part of the last year talking with teachers, evaluating what is happening, and developing resources, and we’ve come up with ten distinct activities that work for this age group, and what we suggest is using a good mixture of these things, and keep them motivated with variety.



Janice Tuck  
*Creative Director,*  
The Fun Music Company

# #1 Engagement activities

What are engagement activities?

Engagement activities are quick general knowledge or aural awareness activities which are used to break the ice when you start a class in a non-threatening way.

Something like a pop-music trivia quiz, where they have to work out what musician belongs with what band, or an aural training game where they have to work out what sound belongs with what instrument.

We do this on the interactive whiteboard, but you don't really need an interactive whiteboard to do it... you just need to be creative!

The key to this is to keep variety there. If you've always got something new to interest them at the start of the lesson you'll have them there on time, ready to go every week!

# #2 Vocal Percussion

One of the great ideas we've been working on really hard this past year is our beatboxing program.

Beatboxing is a great way to engage and motivate kids at this age group

There are a couple of real benefits of this:

**They can use their voices in non-threatening way.**

Most Kids (particularly boys) at this age really shy away from singing. If you think about it, its easy to understand why. Boys voices change at this age, and they feel very self concious about it. Beatboxing allows them to use their voice in a positive manner, and they're making real music.

**They can learn rhythm notation without the need for co-ordination**

Playing rhythms on the drums requires co-ordination and technical skill.. neither of which is very easy to develop at a young age. By using the voice they can master quite complicated beats without having to be able to co-ordinate their hands and feet to play them.

FREE Resource available for download here : <http://funmusicco.com/beatboxing-activity/>

# #3 Playing Ukulele

In the last few years there has been an explosion of interest in this humble instrument... the ukulele.

It used to be that a ukulele was an obscure variation of the guitar that might be seen in some old Hawaiian movie, but not any more. The fact that you can get a reasonable quality instrument for around 20 to 30 dollars in any music store, and the fact that anyone can learn to strum a few chords on it in a few minutes means that it is absolutely super for music education.

Students at the upper primary or elementary level are really still too small for full size guitars - their hands are just too small, so the ukulele is a great alternative.

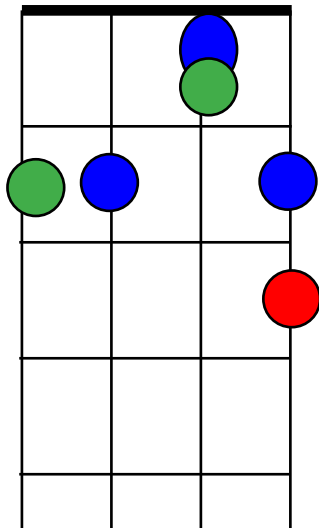
In our upper primary module we have kept the scope of our Ukulele component deliberately small - we have not gone beyond the three primary chords of C major: C, F and G7, and we've built that up over the weeks of the course.

A teacher shouldn't feel worried or threatened if they have never even picked up a Ukulele themselves. It is relatively simple to master those three chords, and pretty soon you'll be playing along with the class!

If you want to make it easier to remember, you can get small dot stickers from office supply stores, and label the frets on the Ukulele with three different colours:

We suggest blue, red, and green, but you can use whatever colours you wish.

Here is the pattern for the stickers:



In our program each lesson has a "Ukulele Jam" track, for them to practice their skills. They start out with just one chord, and build up to quite fast changes by the end.

Ukulele - Learning the C Chord

Learn the C Chord:

C

0 0

2 3

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Ukulele Jam #4

4/4 C F

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# #4 Untuned Percussion - In a 'cool' way

We've come up with a new concept for getting kids at the upper primary level more engaged with playing untuned percussion instruments.. and we've called it 'Bucket beats'

This is because students at upper primary or elementary have probably hit tambourines and claves in music class since they were in grade one, and are most likely "over" it, and might take the chance to misbehave.... is that right?

For this reason we have to treat them with more respect, and give them something to challenge them, yet at the same time keep it easy enough so that they can achieve it right away.

So, the answer is.... challenging them to get **multiple sounds** from one instrument.





From the very first lesson the students have to think about different ways of playing the instrument to get different sounds.

For example, if you can use "junk percussion", and have some sturdy plastic buckets available, you can get obviously two different sounds from hitting the end or hitting the side.

If you are using a tambourine, you can shake it, and you can hit it.

If you're using a boomwhacker, you can hit it on the floor, and hit it into your other hand.

Even if you have no instruments at all, then you can still do activities like this with body percussion, if you're thinking creatively. You can have them pat their legs, clap hands and click fingers.

	A low Sound	A high sound
	Hit it on the end	Hit it on the side
	Shake it	Hit it with the other hand
	Hit hands on thighs (sometimes called a 'patsch')	Clap
	Hold the boomwhacker vertically and hit the end into the ground.	Hit into other hand

here is an example score from our whiteboard program, so you can see how it works:

# #5 Composition

One thing I truly believe is that all students should not only be involved in making music, but they should also be creating their own music through composition.

As a teacher there is nothing more pleasing than hearing a student come up with something that is theirs for the first time.

This doesn't have to be a big drain, if you think about it logically.

The best sort of activities for composition I've found start with ordering and mixing up premade segments of music. You can do this a number of ways. Its easy to make up flashcards with music notation on them, or have them learn little riffs on their instruments and decide the order to play them.

The interactive whiteboard makes this super easy, and we have shared numerous of these ideas with our mailing list before.

**Composition**

Click to listen to the four music cells below, then drag them to the grid to make a short clarinet solo composition:

FREE Resource available for download here : <http://funmusicco.com/two-part-composition/>

# #6 Aural Games

Training the musical ear is very important. We need to get our students to be able to distinguish between high and low pitches, loud and soft sounds, and short and long durations.

The number and quality of distinctions about music that students can make is critical to their overall musicianship, and their ability to recognize and enjoy music as adults - it doesn't matter whether or not they go on to become musicians or play an instrument.

Aural training doesn't have to be a complex thing: We have given away lots of free aural training ideas in the past, and they should be quick five minute activities done regularly, with lots of variety!

**Aural: Rhythm Matching**

Work out which beatboxing sound matches the notation:

FREE Resource available for download here : <http://funmusicco.com/aural-skills/>

# #7 Keyboard Raps

Keyboards are an excellent way to get students at this age playing a pitched instrument.

However, there are a few difficulties in working with students on keyboards at this age:

- Working with a class on a range of limited equipment
- Working with a limited number of notes
- Making the music sound 'cool'
- Dealing with enormous range of abilities in one class

Students at this age need to be treated with more respect and dignity, and they need to play real chromatic instruments, and they need it to sound 'cool' right away.

If you're lucky enough to have a keyboard lab in your school, then this activity is an ideal use for your facilities with the upper primary/elementary classes.

Many schools have a couple of smaller keyboards, and these activities don't need a huge range, so you can have 3-4 students to one instrument, and you won't necessarily need one per student.

Another way to do it is... iPads!

There are a lot of free or low cost piano apps available for iPad, and if the students have those that will fulfill this need nicely.

We know that a lot of schools couldn't even dream of having a full set of keyboards, so this activity won't be suited to everyone, but for those that do let's have a quick look at how these little tunes work.

We use pieces that are all structured in exactly the same way:

- Section A has a small 2 bar riff that is repeated 4 times
- Section B has 8 bars of improvisation over a pentatonic or blues scale variation

The intention of this is that it should make it possible for the whole class to participate. One of the issues at this age level is that students will be enormously mixed in their abilities.

There will be one or two who learn music, probably even doing grade levels on piano, and then there will be those who have never been near an instrument in their lives.

The improvisation can be done in several different ways:

- 1) Everyone improvising together. This can sound like a big cacophony at first, but as long as you're using electronic keyboards and can keep the volume turned down it will be ok.
- 2) Taking 1 or 2 bars each around the room. This works really well, as long as the teacher points and uses eye communication to make sure everyone knows who's turn it is.
- 3) Giving selected students the 8 bar solos. This is a great way to challenge and feature students who play piano in the class, and giving them some challenges. Often piano students will be quite challenged by this, even if they have been playing a long time, as improvisation is often not part of their studies.

The riff sections should hopefully be easy enough so that anyone can learn to play them!

The image shows a digital lesson page for 'Keyboard Rap #6'. On the left is a vertical sidebar with four colored buttons: a purple 'Lesson' button with a document icon, a blue 'Tune' button with a guitar icon, an orange 'Game' button with a balloon icon, and a brown 'Whiteboard Music Lessons Module 3' button with a whiteboard icon. The main content area has a title 'Keyboard Rap #6' with a keyboard icon. Below the title is a musical staff with a 2-bar riff (C4, E4, G4, A4, B4, C5) and the instruction 'A: 4 Times:'. To the right of the staff is a keyboard diagram with the notes C, F, G, C, F, G highlighted in red. Below the keyboard diagram is the instruction 'B: Improvise using any of these notes:'. At the bottom right of the page are two navigation buttons: 'Previous Page' with a left-pointing arrow and 'Next Page' with a right-pointing arrow.

# #8 Directed Listening

In our programs we have a listening time which is called SQUILT.

SQUILT Stands for Super Quiet Uninterrupted Listening Time, and it is an activity where students are asked to sit quietly and listen analytically to a range of music.

While they are listening, or afterwards, they should fill in their SQUILT listening journal, which is simply multiple copies of the SQUILT listening journal page, which just has a few questions about the music they have heard. If you prefer, they can copy the questions from the board, and answer them in a notebook.

### S.Q.U.I.L.T. Listening Journal

Name of piece: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Composer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Performer: \_\_\_\_\_

This music is an example of which style or **genre**: \_\_\_\_\_

What sort of band or ensemble is playing? \_\_\_\_\_

What were some of the instruments you heard in this music?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

What were the special features of this music?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe the mood of this music?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Give this music a score out of 10.  
 Then, give a **reason** for your score.

my score

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

There are no 'right' and 'wrong' answers, as some of the questions are quite subjective.

You can then discuss it with the students, and the students should give a mark out of 10, expressing how much they like or dislike the music. Most importantly, the students must provide a reason why they like or don't like it.

Its important to give a range of music and musical styles in this activity. In our program we've chosen everything from a classical symphony, to a 'punk' style piece in the style of the Sex Pistols, and an operatic song. We have deliberately chosen pop style music from unknown bands, but music that is very similar in style to popular bands, so that students have to actually think about whether they like the actual music, rather than just liking the image of the band.

So, directed listening is very important - and students need to be encouraged to think about what they are hearing and be able to describe it.



# #9 Simplified Music Theory

Music Theory must be touched on... but only in a small way!

Its important that students can notate and record music on paper as well as with electronic devices. Them developing the essential musical language, so they can participate in intelligent discussion as they get older is really important as well.

Its not necessary to go into great depth with music theory at this age... however exposing them to terms like time signatures, key signatures, pitch and rhythm will be enormously helpful in their later life, if they decide to pick up an instrument.

Even if they don't you're still enriching them with a gift of music that can't be replaced!

**Scales**

A **scale** is a pattern of notes which ascends or descends step by step to the next note of the same name.

Construct the scale of C major:

—

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# #10 Lots of GAMES!

Probably THE most important of all these activities, at least from an engagement point of view is to have lots of games ready at a moments notice.

When we structure our whiteboard lessons we always have a game at the end of the lesson, and its the one thing on the board that has a quick link, so you can get to it in an instant for the end of a lesson.

Playing games is great fun.. but I want to make the point here that this is different to a computer game. A computer game is a one-person experience. One person interacts with a screen and tries to complete a task, whatever that task might be.

The computer provides the interaction with one person. Playing one of these games on an interactive whiteboard will work, but effectively you'll have one student play, and all the others watching.

What we're about with our interactive games is providing a framework where the students interact with each other and with the teacher, and the whiteboard is simply a tool which brings the materials together in a really easy manner.

**Musical Tic Tac Toe**

Divide the class into two teams. A representative from each team takes a turn to place their symbol in a place on the grid, however to place it in a square, they have to be able to name the music note in that place.... without any help from the rest of the class!

X O


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FREE Resource available for download here : <http://funmusicco.com/musical-instruments-game/>

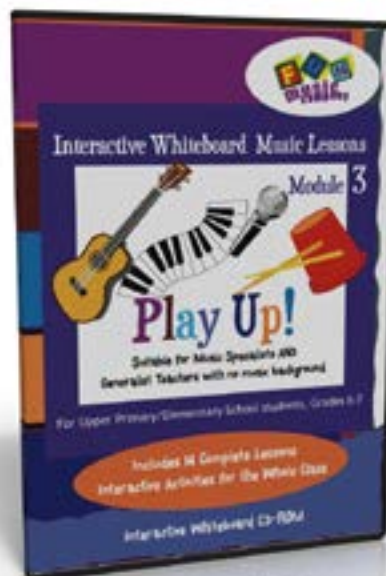


# Want it all prepared for you?

If you like the sound of the activities detailed in this report, but it all sounds like too much hard work, then check out the Fun Music Company's *Play Up!* module of lessons.

## *It Includes:*

- 14 Complete lessons
- Complete beatboxing program
- Ukulele jams
- Keyboard raps
- Interactive games
- Aural, listening, theory and more.....



## **Q. What year levels is this for?**

A. We have designed this program for upper primary/elementary - approximately grades 6 to 7. We have another program available for lower primary, and one for middle primary. Every school and situation is different, so of course it is adaptable to use in other grades if it suits your students.

## **Q. Are there any prerequisites? Do my students need to have done previous modules?**

A. NO! This is intended that you can start immediately with any class, no matter their level of experience. More experienced students will fly through some activities and be able to concentrate on some of the harder activities, and you can leave out harder ones for younger students. We deliberately assumed no prior knowledge when creating this program.

## **Q. What about Language Style and Terminology? I'm in \_\_\_\_\_ and want to make sure that the correct terminology is used.**

A. Music terminology varies slightly in different places around the world. For this reason we have TWO different versions of the program, which you choose from when you download it. We have an American terminology version that uses the terms staff, measure, quarter note & whole note and we have a European terminology version that uses the terms stave, bar, crotchet and semibreve. This is part of our commitment that YOU should choose what terminology you use when teaching your students - it should not be dictated to you from the materials you choose.

## **Q. Do I need an interactive whiteboard to use this program?**

A. Yes, ideally you would have an interactive whiteboard, however it can still be used without one, by simply using a projector attached to a computer, and having the students interact on the computer, instead of on the actual whiteboard. We also supply a bonus mp3 tracks so you can download them to your music player if you need to.

For more information: <http://funmusicco.com/whiteboardcontent/>

**Q. Can I use any brand of interactive whiteboard?**

A. Yes. We provide these materials in the two leading platforms: SMART notebook, and ActiveInspire (by Promethean). If you use a different whiteboard you can still load one of these programs onto your computer and it will still work just fine with your whiteboard.

**Q. Do I need any special software to use this program?**

A. YES. You need either SMART notebook or ActiveInspire. ActiveInspire personal edition can be downloaded for free by anyone - no hardware purchase is necessary, and it will work on any computer and with any whiteboard hardware.

**Q. How long will it take to go through this program?**

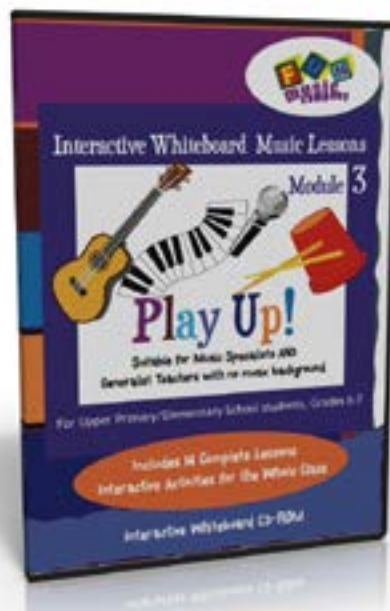
A. We designed this in 14 lessons - however with the amount that is in each lesson you could easily spread each lesson out over a number of weeks.

**Q. Can I customise this program for my students?**

A. Absolutely! As the files are regular SMART notebook or ActiveInspire files you can write in them, change the order of slides and customize the lessons to suit your students and your own teaching style.

**Q. Can I try it out?**

A. Absolutely! Rather than send you one lesson - we'd rather you purchase it, try the whole program, and then contact us for a 100% no questions asked refund if you find it isn't suitable for you. Trying the whole program is the only way you'll really get an idea of the amount of material included in this program.



Full Details at:

<http://funmusicco.com/interactive-whiteboard-music-lessons/upper-primary/>