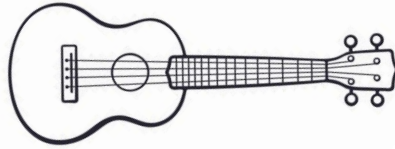


How to Add Ukulele to Your Orff Classroom

by Kaitlin Beck



- Do you already have ukuleles at your school?
- Are your students playing ukulele in class?
- Have you been considering adding ukulele to your classroom?
- Are you interested in incorporating a new instrument?
- Do all of these questions confused and/or excite you?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, it may be time to consider adding ukulele at your school ☺

Let me start by saying that my approach to implementing ukulele is by no means fool proof, but just one way of doing so. I hope these tips can be used as fodder for reflection on how the ukulele can be added to your program and the beginning of a conversation on using this instrument in the Orff classroom. If you make the leap, I'd love to chat about what you did that worked (or didn't ☺).

In short, here are my **top 5 reasons** for why you should consider ukulele:

1. Borduns, color parts, melodic ostinati, and basic sol/la/mi patterns can be played on ukulele very easily, especially for the younger kiddos
2. Originating in Spain and popularized in Hawaii, the uke has lots of music from around the world that students can play along with; ukulele also pairs well with all of the World Music Drumming ensembles
3. Teaching basic chords opens up a new world for your students with many of them running home to practice or do play-along songs via Youtube
4. It's an easy instrument to pick up, even if you don't consider yourself a guitarist
5. For older students, uke can be a stepping stone to guitar or a great first exposure to chord progressions and other high order concepts from Orff Level III ☺

Why I Implemented

Because my students at school had no previous experience playing the instruments, despite having a large number of them, I thought uke would be perfect. Moreover, my older students frequently remarked that they could not wait until 4th grade because that meant learning recorder, so I knew that I needed at least a new something to add in the meantime. Not only did the buy-in in music skyrocket when we brought out the ukuleles, having those instruments also helped me address the issue of "What do I do with the 40 kids in my room that all need to be doing something while we're learning this thing so that mass chaos doesn't ensue?". Pairing the ukuleles with other instruments in the room, I was able to do rotations so that everyone learned each part and had something to be doing at all times.

I obtained my ukuleles through Donors Choose and a grant from the PTSA at my school. The instruments belong to my school, but you may also consider having students who are interested and able to buy their own instrument. If you give students the option to purchase,

I highly recommend sending out information to parents with brand suggestions and pricing options so that you do not end up with ukuleles that are not very functional.

How I Implemented

Before adding ukulele at DC West, I had been teaching it for 3 years with my K-5 children's church choir, so I had some idea about how I was going to implement things. I had looked through resources online and method books, but decided that pulling from a variety of sources would be best. When preparing, I used Bernadette Teaches Music on Youtube, Nathan Cahill's wonderful website, and videos from Ukulele Underground. To start, I borrowed Nathan Cahill's approach and introduced the string names with students only playing songs that used the strings. To get comfortable with the strings, we did a lot of I play, you play with partners; while one played, the other was the ukulele doctor who had to watch their partner and diagnose if something was going wrong.

This year, my Kindergarteners experimented with the strings on call/response and question/answer, 1st graders got as far as the C chord, 2nd graders began exploring C and G, and 3rd graders learned C, G, and F so that they could play a standard I-IV-V progression. In my after school club for 3rd graders, we did C, G, and F and then moved on to Am, D, A, and Dm. With these extra chords they were able to play different chord progressions and have some sing and play along jam sessions with music from the radio. Throughout my teaching, I utilized Powerpoint slides with the chord fingerings and song text to help students visualize where the changes happened.

Things to Consider

- Ukulele brands and supplies (tuners, gig bags, storage, etc.)
- Curriculum (create your own or find a method a book)
- How to integrate it into what you are already doing (what concepts can be further practiced on the ukulele?)
- How to introduce the instrument (will you start with finger picking the strings, playing sol and mi patterns, 1 chord with songs, open strumming patterns?)
- School or student owned instruments (will you write a grant, use your budget, have students purchase, or a combination of these?)

Online and Book Resources

Nathan Cahill's Website: <https://www.nathancahillmusic.com/uke-resources>

Bernadette Teaches Music Youtube Channel and IPT:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHF88ovFEPFIzNtFUbgGBuw>
<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Bernadette-Teaches-Music>

Ukulele Underground: <https://ukuleleunderground.com/>

Uke Can Do It! Methods: <https://ukecandoit.ning.com/>

Ukulele in the Classroom Methods: <https://ukuleleintheclassroom.com/>

San Jose Ukulele Club Free Song Books: <http://www.sanjoseukeclub.org/>

2018 AOSA National Conference Presenter, Jeri Crosby's Website:
http://youkulelenotes.blogspot.com/2016/08/ukulele-love_12.html

AOSA Reverberations, January 2019 – Elemental Pathways to Ukulele:
https://aosa.memberclicks.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=359:january-2019-feature&catid=43:reverberations-2019&Itemid=439

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