



Circle of Fifth's
Odyssey

But-the-Pieces Plan: 12 Week Circle of Fifths Odyssey

Overview

This 'But-the-Pieces' lesson plan will take your students on a fantastic journey through the circle of fifths. On the way they'll be learning not just scales, but also how scales relate to harmony and what we can do with them. By improvising consistently in different keys, students learn a functional use of scales, keys signatures and chords – they're not just thinking of them as a drill in a particular finger number pattern.

But-the-Pieces Plans cover aspects other than repertoire. These plans will work well one on one with a student, or in partner, buddy/overlapping or small group lessons. Wherever there would be a significant modification for working with multiple students, this has been noted. All other activities will work with multiple students sitting side-by-side at one piano or at separate keyboard without much alteration.

Quick Look Lesson Plan

WEEK	FOCUS	ACTIVITY	NOTES:
Week 1	<i>C & G Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • C & G scales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cadence catch
Week 2	<i>D Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • Whiteboard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signature Sprint
Week 3	<i>A Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • I-V vamp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cadence catch
Week 4	<i>E Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • I-V vamp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale Engineer
Week 5	<i>B Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • Musiclock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composing
Week 6	<i>G\flat Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • Composing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Elephant • Musiclock
Week 7	<i>D\flat Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • I-V vamp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whiteboard
Week 8	<i>A\flat Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • Solo improv 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musiclock • Cadence pass
Week 9	<i>E\flat Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • Composing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signature Sprint
Week 10	<i>B\flat Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composing • Improvisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop vamp • Scale drills
Week 11	<i>F Major</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale drills • Improvisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop vamp • Signature Spiral
Week 12	<i>CoF Celebration!</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvisation • Composing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student's choice • Scale Engineer

TIME EST. ACTIVITY

DIRECTIONS

- 10 min Improvisation
- Tell your student you're going to be improvising in the key of C major. Ask them if they know what this means – some will know that they can play all the white keys.
 - Accompany your student while they improvise, using a simple vamp/accompaniment. You can use this one if you prefer things written out:

Repeat lots of times!

- If you have two students together, have one play a simple accompaniment (try just I-V for beginners) while the other improvises, then swap.
- Next, tell your student you're going to improvise together in G major. Do they know what that means? Explain that in G major we play F sharp instead of F. If they ask why or how, encourage them to try out the F while you're playing and notice how it sounds "off".
- Here's the accompaniment pattern from above transposed to G major:

Repeat lots of times!

- Don't worry about them using the correct fingering when working on these improvisations. It's all about exploring the keys and the shape of the scale.
- Move back and forth between the 2 keys as many times as you can to allow for lots of experimentation.

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
5 min	Cadence Catch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a V-I and IV-I cadence for your student. Ask them to describe how they sound different – does one sound like a more definite ending? Does either remind them of a particular song? • Tell your student that if they hear a V-I cadence they should put their hands on their hips (superhero looking over the city style) and if they hear a IV-I cadence they should put their fists in the air (flying superhero style). • Play lots of examples of each cadence in many different keys (not just C and G) until your student is very confident identifying the two cadences. • If you like, you can also tell your student the names of these cadences (perfect and plagal) but V-I and IV-I are sufficient labels for this stage.
5 min	C & G scales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach your student the fingering for these scales. If your student already knows the scale, add a new way to play it such as contrary motion, 2 octaves, Russian/formula pattern, etc.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Improvisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure your student can access the improvisation backing tracks at home for C and G major. • Encourage them to play around with the tracks, and to experiment without the tracks too.
C & G scales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign practice of the two scales hands separately, together, contrary motion or in whatever other pattern you taught your student during the lesson.

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
7 min	Improvisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start your improvisation in the key of C major, then move to G major, repeating the same process as last week. • Ask your student what key they think you're going to improvise in next. If you have a circle of fifths displayed in your studio, hint that they should look around for the pattern you've been following so far: C – G. • Once they figure out D major is next, ask them to guess what sharp is going to be added to the F sharp when we play in D major. • Improvise together in D, using this pattern or vamping in your own style:

Repeat lots of times!

5 min	Whiteboard scales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your student to place tokens to create a C scale on the blank staff and keyboard. You can use erasers, game tokens or buttons for this or have them create their own using play-doh or plasticine. • When they have this in place, ask them to move the tokens down/up to create the G major scale. What else do they need to change? Get them to draw the sharp or add a different type of token to represent the sharp. • Now move it to D major. What do they need to add now?
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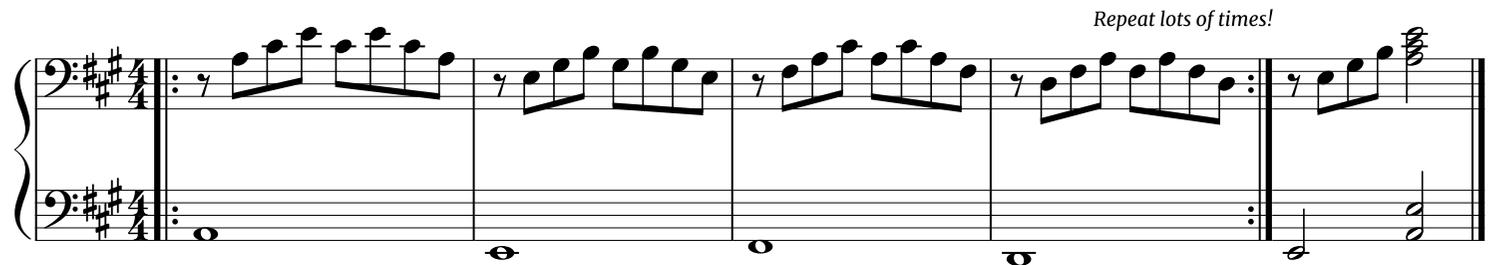
8 min	Signature Sprint	• Play this game using only the C, G and D major cards. You can find full instructions for the Signature Sprint game in the library here.
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Notes to self:

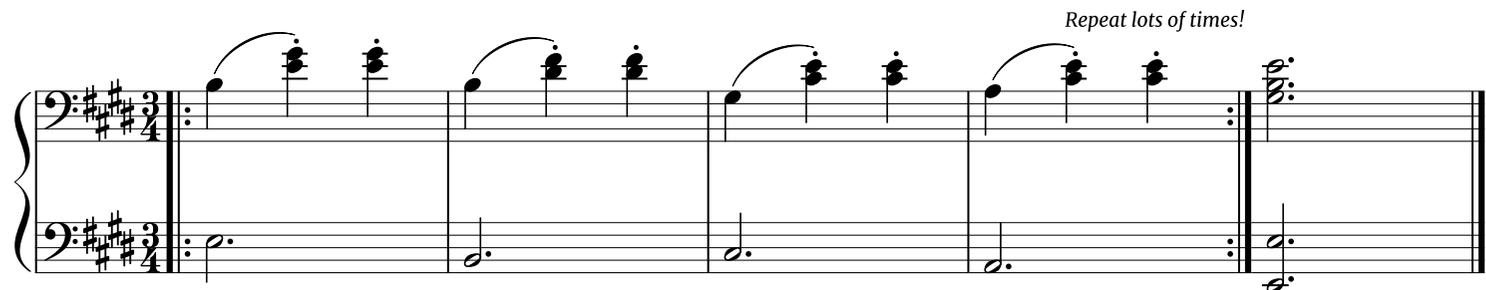
POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Improvisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure your student can access the improvisation backing tracks at home for C, G and D major. • Encourage them to play around with the tracks, and to experiment without the tracks too.
Notation	• Ask them to notate each of the scales they've explored so far on staff paper or on blank keyboards for younger kids.

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
8 min	Improvisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start your improvisation in the key of C major, then move to G major, then D major, repeating the same process as last week. • Ask your student what key they think you're going to improvise in next. • Once they figure out A major is next, ask them to guess what sharp is going to be added to the F sharp and C sharp when we play in A major. • Improvise together in A, using this pattern or vamping in your own style:



TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
8 min	Improvisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start your improvisation in the key of C major, then move to G major, then D major, then A major, repeating the same process as last week. • Ask your student what key they think you're going to improvise in next. • Once they figure out E major is next, ask them to guess what sharp is going to be added to the F sharp, C sharp and G sharp when we play in E major. (Always encourage them to say the sharps in the order we added them going around the circle of fifths.) • Improvise together in E, using this pattern or vamping in your own style:



TIME EST. ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

- 5 min Improvisation
- Repeat this process, starting from the key of G and working around to the new key: B major.
 - Use this accompaniment pattern for B or improvise your own:



- 10 min Scale fingerings & Musiclock
- Review the standard fingering and practise the first five scales together.
 - Introduce B major if they don't know it yet or introduce a new pattern to practise it in if they're already familiar with the scale.
 - If you have an iPad or iPhone download the [Musiclock](#) app. Try out some of the different styles of backing tracks together and get them to play their scales along with the tracks.

- 5 min Composing
- Get your student to compose a 4 bar melody in the new key, B major. Encourage them to use little riffs or ideas that came up during the improvisation if they're not sure what to play.
 - Write it out for them or ask them to do it if they're fairly comfortable with notation.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

- Composing
- Ask your student to compose 4 bar melodies, just like the B major one you did together at the lesson, in two more keys of their choice.
- Scales
- Assign practice of the 6 scales covered so far, using the Musiclock app if possible.
 - If the parent is at the lesson with their device – get them to download it right then and there and help them learn how to use it!

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
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| 5 min | Improvisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeat this process, starting from the key of D and working around to the new key: G flat major. Use this accompaniment pattern for G flat or improvise your own: |
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Repeat lots of times!

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| 5 min | Composing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check out your students' compositions and give them lots of praise! Help them to compose a new 4 bar melody in G flat major. |
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| 5 min | Major Elephant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play Major Elephant with only the keys you've covered so far. Find full instructions in the library here. |
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| 5 min | Musiclock | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach your student the fingering for the G flat major scale. Review each of the scales your student has learnt so far with the Musiclock app or other backing tracks. |
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Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

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| Composing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask your student to compose two more 4 bar melodies, using whichever two keys they have not composed in yet. |
| Scales | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign practice of the 7 scales covered so far, using the Musiclock app if possible. |
| Vamps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage them to try out the vamp patterns in the new keys at home and see if they can figure them out. |

TIME EST. ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

- 5 min Improvisation
- Repeat this process, starting from the key of A and working around to the new key: D flat major.
 - Use this accompaniment pattern for D flat or improvise your own:



- 8 min I-V vamp
- Check in with the vamp patterns they've been practising and make sure they can do this fairly steadily in every key up to G flat major.
 - Pick one of these keys and ask them to keep the left hand I-V pattern going while starting to improvise with their right hand.
 - Encourage them to just add a few right hand notes at a time – the simpler the better! The most important thing is to keep their left hand playing at a steady tempo so they should only add more when they feel confident.

- 7 min Whiteboard scales
- Ask your student to place tokens to create a D flat scale on [the blank staff and keyboard](#). You can use whiteboard markers, erasers, game tokens or buttons for this or even play-doh or plasticine.
 - When they have the scale, get them to move the flats into the key signature from accidentals or visa versa.
 - Go backwards through the circle of fifths repeating this process for each scale done so far.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

- Composing
- Ask your student to compose an 8 bar melody, in the new key, D flat major.
- Improvisation
- Encourage them to practise improvising hands together at home. They can use the backing tracks for this to help them keep a steady beat and explore each key.

TIME EST. ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

- 5 min Improvisation
- Repeat this process, starting from the key of E and working around to the new key: A flat major.
 - Use this accompaniment pattern for A flat or improvise your own:



- 5 min Solo improv
- Check in with the solo improvisation they've been practising. Help them to add more interest to the left hand if they're ready for it.

- 5 min Musiclock
- Teach your student the fingering for the D flat and A flat major scales.
 - Review each of the scales your student has learnt so far with the [Musiclock](#) app or other backing tracks.

- 5 min Cadence Pass
- They already know how to play a V-I cadence from their vamping work. Teach them the IV-I cadence and ask them if they can spot this pattern on the circle of fifths.
 - Get them to go through the keys they know so far and play the IV-I and V-I cadence for each.
 - You could also let them test your ears by having them play cadences for you to identify while you face the other way!

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

- Composing
- Ask your student to compose an 8 bar melody, in the new key, A flat major.
- Scales
- Assign practice of the 9 scales covered so far, using the Musiclock app if possible.
- Improvisation
- Encourage them to practise improvising hands together at home. They can use the backing tracks for this to help them keep a steady beat and explore each key.

TIME EST. ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

- 5 min Improvisation
- Repeat this process, starting from the key of B and working around to the new key: E flat major.
 - Use this accompaniment pattern for E flat or improvise your own:

Repeat lots of times!

- 7 min Composing:
harmony
- They now know the I, IV and V chords in each of the keys covered so far. So let's put them to use!
 - Take out their compositions and ask them to pick their favourite.
 - Get them to experiment with the I, IV and V chords from the key while playing each bar/measure of their melody. When they choose a chord, write the number or the chord symbol above that bar/measure.
 - Have them practice a few times playing their melody hands together.

- 8 min Signature Sprint
- Play this game using only the keys covered so far (remove the B flat and F major cards). [You can find full instructions for the Signature Sprint game in the library here.](#)

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

- Composing
- Ask your student to harmonise another of their melodies at home using the same process you did together in the lesson.
- Improvisation
- Encourage them to practise improvising hands together at home. They can use the backing tracks for this to help them keep a steady beat and explore each key.
 - At this stage they may also like to explore playing chords in the left hand instead of single notes.

TIME EST. ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

1 min Composing • Listen to your student’s composition that they worked on at home. Tell them how amazing it is!

5 min Improvisation • Repeat this process, starting from the key of G flat and working around to the new key: B flat major.
• Use this accompaniment pattern for B flat or improvise your own:



7 min Pop vamp • Since they know the I, IV and V chords in each key we only need to add one more for them to play the progression we’ve been using to accompany them: I-V-vi-IV!
• Show them how to find the relative minor on the circle of fifths and create this progression in different keys.
• Get them to practise this in several keys during the lesson, playing steady crotchets (quarter notes) on the chord in the right hand, with the tonic as semibreves (whole notes) single notes or octaves in the left hand.

7 min Scale drills • Teach your student the B flat major scale fingering and review the previous scales.
• Try some of the scale drills from the [Supreme Scale Drills Cheatsheet](#) and the [Making Scales Stick Cheatsheet](#).

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Composing • Ask your student to compose an 8 bar melody with chords in the key of B flat major at home.

Scale drills • Pick a couple of scale drills for your student to practise at home in all 11 keys they know so far.
• Let them know that you’re going to be testing them on this next week!

TIME EST.	ACTIVITY	DIRECTIONS
1 min	Composing	• Listen to your student's composition that they worked on at home. Give them true and meaningful praise.
2 min	Scale drills	• Test your student's scale skills with the drill they were practising at home. Ask them to do this with all the scales, in a random order.
5 min	Improvisation	• Repeat this process, starting from the key of D flat and working around to the new key: F major. • Use this accompaniment pattern for F or improvise your own:

Repeat lots of times!

5 min	Pop vamp	• Review the I-V-vi-IV pattern that they learnt last week and ask them to play it in various random keys. • Add some spice to this by teaching them some of the patterns from the Stealthy Pop Ninja sheet .
7 min	Signature Spiral	• Play a round of this fun game together. Find full instructions and get the printable here.

Notes to self:

POSSIBLE PRACTICE ASSIGNMENTS

Composing	• Ask your student to compose an 8 bar melody with chords in the key of F major at home.
Pop vamp	• Assign practise of this vamp with their new rhythmic pattern. They should pick a new key each day to work in and loop the pattern until it feels really instinctive and natural.
Scales	• Assign practice of all 12 major scales (they can rotate through them during the week!), using the Musiclock app or other backing tracks.

Repeat lots of times!

Musical notation for the first exercise, featuring a treble and bass clef. The key signature has four flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The piece consists of two measures of music, each with a repeat sign. The first measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

Repeat lots of times!

Musical notation for the second exercise, featuring a treble and bass clef. The key signature has four flats and the time signature is 3/4. The piece consists of two measures of music, each with a repeat sign. The first measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

Repeat lots of times!

Musical notation for the third exercise, featuring a treble and bass clef. The key signature has four flats and the time signature is 3/4. The piece consists of two measures of music, each with a repeat sign. The first measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

Repeat lots of times!

Musical notation for the fourth exercise, featuring a treble and bass clef. The key signature has four flats and the time signature is 4/4. The piece consists of two measures of music, each with a repeat sign. The first measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

Repeat lots of times!

Musical notation for the fifth exercise, featuring a treble and bass clef. The key signature has four flats and the time signature is 6/8. The piece consists of two measures of music, each with a repeat sign. The first measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.

Repeat lots of times!

Musical notation for the sixth exercise, featuring a treble and bass clef. The key signature has four flats and the time signature is 4/4. The piece consists of two measures of music, each with a repeat sign. The first measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second measure contains a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand.