

Approaching Fifth to Sixth Grade Flute Pedagogy Considering VARK Learning Styles Model

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**Abstract**

The benefits of learning an instrument for childhood development intersecting with the positive growth trend in homeschooled families generates increased demand in value for supporting resources. Creating resources that would include learning styles defined by the VARK model (Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, Kinesthetic) designed to engage students during their particular developmental stage enhances at-home music education. The compiled research surrounding VARK learning styles and flute specific pedagogy would provide a foundation for specialized flute exercises and activities for fifth to sixth grade students learning to play the flute in a homeschooled or private lesson setting. The structure of the thesis is as follows: a presentation of the purpose for this research, an examination of each learning style in the VARK model, general and critical observations of 10 existing flute method books, and the application of findings resulting in 10 pages of activities and exercises to engage young flutists.

### **Approaching Fifth to Sixth Grade Flute Pedagogy Considering VARK**

Studying an instrument such as the flute generates an increase in the brain's comprehensive quality, which is comprised of "attention, observation, memory, imagination, and thinking ability."<sup>1</sup> Multiple areas of the brain are engaged as one completes the numerous tasks required to play a musical instrument. In a study on how music effects brain plasticity, two groups of children were tested before and after a two-month period with one group engaging in musical activity, while the other did not. The group participating in musical activities showed perceptible improvements behaviorally and in the physical structure of multiple brain regions in comparison to the control group.<sup>2</sup> In light of the notable advantages of learning an instrument, considering ways to improve this in the underemphasized education structure of home schooling would be beneficial.<sup>3</sup>

Most American public schools offer band and orchestra classes that teach students to learn an instrument, but there has been an increased rate of families choosing to home school their children over the past three years; therefore, the opportunity to learn an instrument in the public school large ensemble setting is not present.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of households in the United States homeschooling students in February 2020 was 4.5 percent, while the Fall of 2020

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<sup>1</sup> Mengyu Shi, "The Role of Mastering Musical Instrument Playing Skills Combined with Student Behavior Data Mining and Analysis in the Digital Campus Environment to Improve Students' Comprehensive Quality," *J Environ Public Health* (2022): 9. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/7724675>.

<sup>2</sup> Hyde, "The Effects of Musical Training," 183.

<sup>3</sup> Krista L Hyde, et al, "The Effects of Musical Training on Structural Brain Development: A Longitudinal Study," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1169 (2009): 183. doi:10.1111/j.1749-6632.2009.04852x.

<sup>4</sup> Tareena Musaddiq, Kevin Stange, et al., "The Pandemic's Effect on Demand for Public Schools, Homeschooling, and Private Schools," *Journal of Public Economics* 212, (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpube.2022.104710>.

presented 7.3 percent.<sup>5</sup> Largely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other ethical determinants, families are choosing to educate their children at home instead of in the public school system.<sup>6</sup>

Not every student learning at home has access to a capable teacher with the specific skill required to play and teach an instrument such as the flute. Learning the flute outside of a band or orchestra class requires instruction from specifically qualified teachers. If instrumental instruction is not readily available to students at home, would a resource designed for beginner flutists that engages all learning preferences be beneficial? Education Professor Katie Burke's research suggests that "engaging in the arts learning experience through the provision of resources" supports the music education process.<sup>7</sup> There are numerous resources already accessible for learning to play the flute; however, many are not designed for beginner students who are studying at home. This is the gap in research this paper seeks to fill.

The discussion will flow from the VARK model explaining learning styles, to existing flute method books, and conclude in the combination of the findings into ten pages of a flute method book for fifth to sixth grade aged students learning the flute at home with their limited availability to professional instruction. The goal of the resource is to build a solid foundation for students of all learning styles that leads to early musical success while fostering their desire to learn the flute so that they continue past their formative years.

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<sup>5</sup> Musaddiq, et. al., "The Pandemic's Effect on Demand," 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Katie M Burke, "How Do Homeschoolers Approach Creative Arts Learning and How Can They Be Supported? Developing a Flexible Framework for Homeschool Contexts," *British educational research journal*. 48, no. 5 (2022): 992.

### Learning Styles

In order to discuss what makes features of a method book effective, one must understand how students learn. There are many models discussing learning styles as developed by theorists throughout the last century.<sup>8</sup> A model that stands out as regularly referenced to and more generally understood is Neil Fleming's VARK model, developed in 1987 from Walter Burke Barbe's VAK model.<sup>9</sup> VARK stands for four learning preferences: Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic.<sup>10</sup> Students can be unimodal learners learning most successfully via one of the four styles, bimodal meaning two of the four styles, or multimodal meaning three or four of the styles.<sup>11</sup> The legitimacy of the VARK model has been questioned, but a 2016 study "to show objective evidence of the effects of learning styles on recognition tasks" found validity in the objective differences between visual and read/write learners within their brain operations.<sup>12</sup> One literary reviewer separates the language of people *being* visual, auditory, etc. learners versus *having a strength* in visual, auditory, etc. learning asserting that the latter being more helpful.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Coffield, David Mosseley, Elaine Hall, Kathryn Ecclestone. "Learning Styles and Pedagogy in Post-16 Learning." *Learning and Skills Research Council* (2004). <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/69027>.

<sup>9</sup> Sarawin Thepsatitporn, and Chailerd Pichitpornchai, "Visual Event-Related Potential Studies Supporting the Validity of VARK Learning Styles' Visual and Read/Write Learners," *Advances in Physiology Education* 40, no. 2 (2016): 210. <https://doi.org/10.1152/advan.00081.2015>.

<sup>10</sup> Thepsatitporn and Pichitpornchai, "Validity of VARK Learning Styles," 210.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Samara Willis, "Literature review on the use of VAK learning strategies," *The STeP Journal Student Teacher Perspectives*, 4, no. 2 (2017): 92.

The educator can approach presenting the lesson information in two ways in light of understanding their students' learning style preferences. One, utilize that knowledge to present information in the style the student prefers. Benefits of this would include a rapid learning pace and quicker understanding of the material presented. A secondary option would be for the educator to encourage growth of the students' lesser favored modes of learning by incorporating those styles increasingly. This would equip the student with broader learning competencies. "Since students possess a wide diversity in learning styles, teachers should combine different educational strategies to meet the varied learning preferences of students."<sup>14</sup> The present project seeks to provide materials for teaching the flute that features each style in order to encourage the preferred and strengthen the unfavored learning style of the student.

The method books developed by the flute masters of the last century are each individually effective and with a range of intended audiences, which impacts the teaching methodology. In looking at each individual book available in the order of release date, consistencies are traceable, strengths based on the VARK model will be drawn, and improvements will be logged.

The four styles of learning in the VARK model will be their own individual category of analyzation to identify strengths and weaknesses in current flute method books and then to compile improvements into the new activities and exercises. A fifth category to analyze the flute specific pedagogical tactics in each book is added. The five categories of analyzation are visual aesthetic, auditory inclusions, personalization elements for writing and creating, kinesthetic components, and flute pedagogy.

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<sup>14</sup>Michael SA Prithishkumar IJ, "Understanding your student: Using the VARK model," *J Postgrad Med* 60, (2014): 186.

## Visual

Those who are considered visual learners prefer to visualize and see the information they are learning.<sup>15</sup> Trinity University Professor of Music Education, Diane Persellin, writes of “charts, books, the chalkboard, and other visual aids” as methods of visual learning.<sup>16</sup> Professors of mathematics describe how “visual learners will prefer using colors, images and so forth.”<sup>17</sup> Another beneficial teaching tool for visual learners in relation to learning musical form, and making musical anecdotes is a visual map. These are “an icon-like visual representation of a musical piece that encodes the intuitive, musical sense of the piece including certain melodic, rhythmic, and formal information.”<sup>18</sup> Research shows that “...different visualization may lead the students to build different strategies,” and that visual patterns results in positive testing results.<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> The current flute method books listed in this study will be looked at for these methods of visual learning.

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<sup>15</sup>Diane Cummings Persellin, “Responses to Rhythm Patterns When Presented to Children through Auditory, Visual, and Kinesthetic Modalities,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 40, no. 4 (1992): 307. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3345838>.

<sup>16</sup>Persellin, “Responses to Rhythm Patterns,” 307.

<sup>17</sup>Suha Ishabu La, I. K. Budayasa, and TY E. Siswono, "Creative Thinking Process of Female Elementary School Student with Visual Learning Style in Mathematical Problem Solving." *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 1265, no. 1 (07, 2019).

<sup>18</sup>Robert Dunn, “The Effect of Auditory, Visual, or Kinesthetic Perceptual Strengths on Music Listening,” *Contributions to Music Education* 35, (2008): 74.

<sup>19</sup>Ratih Ayu Aspari, et al., “Same pattern, different visualization: visual support does matter in pre-algebra,” *Journal of Physics: Conference* (2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1776/1/012026>.

<sup>20</sup>Persellin, “Responses to Rhythm Patterns,” 314.



**Auditory**

Lectures, listening, and processing material orally are the preferences of auditory learners.<sup>21</sup> Music educators suggest teaching “notation with sound may give the written note or icon more meaning.”<sup>22</sup> Auditory learning can be especially beneficial for young students who struggle with reading and focusing on purely visual stimuli. The existing books will be assessed in this category to see whether instruction includes listening, lessons on audiation, or alternative aural elements.

**Read/Write (Personalization)**

Personalization within a method book includes places for students to write, create, and teachers to notate specific tasks, notes, or instructions. In this category, accountability from teachers and opportunity for students to set goals, met, and exceed them ought to be present. “Students benefit from accountability, and given the right circumstances, they choose it.”<sup>23</sup> Teachers should lay out their expectations for next lesson, and reinforcement of expectations is helpful to have a student return the following week having improved. Certain students benefit from physically writing down their own assignments, notating a musical change or being able to read exactly what they are learning. An example of the difference between visual learners and read/write learners would be that a visual learner may prefer a picture in order to memorize something whereas a read/write learner may prefer the written word.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Persellin, “Responses to Rhythm Patterns,” 307.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>23</sup> Adam Tyner and Michael J. Petrilli, “The Case for Holding Students Accountable,” *Education Next* 18, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 32. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/case-holding-students-accountable/docview/2123681105/se-2>.

<sup>24</sup> Thepsatitporn and Pichitpornchai, “Validity of VARK Learning Styles,” 207.

**Kinesthetic**

A kinesthetic method of teaching may include a teacher patting a child's hand, the feeling of the touch of an instrument under finger, games and dances educating the student on a specific topic.<sup>25</sup> It can be summarized by being "actively involved by touching the stimulus or responding by moving...physical involvement...'hands on' experiences."<sup>26</sup> Based on these examples, the student who prefers this method of learning requires a lesson teacher or activities that explain and provide a way for students to have a hands on experience. The method books may not have the purpose of fulfilling all of the jobs of a private lesson teacher; however, in order to create a new resource to aid students of all learning preferences and strengths, new inventive inclusions to engage ought to be considered.

**Pedagogy**

The final category of assessment for current flute method books in order to obtain the ideal information to provide a beneficial resource for beginner flutist is not the way the information is presented, but the information itself. This portion of the analysis will focus on the order in which information is displayed, the consistency through the books through the years to determine success rate, as well as who created the book- a flutist or a non-flutist.

**Considerations, Limitations and Variables**

It is important to consider each authors' purpose for writing their method book as well as their intended audience. Not every author intended to create what this study is comparing their book to; however, there is value in making observations at their books and grasping the quality

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<sup>25</sup> Persellin, "Responses to Rhythm Patterns," 307.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

elements, comparing them to nonmusical specific teaching methods, and applying those to create new materials.

There are additional variables in concluding the success of the method book including the intentions of the student taking the private lessons- are they merely seeking to appease a parent, are they seeking a quick and easy road to success, or do they genuinely hope to become a skilled musician putting in the effort required to do so? Because of the vast number of variables with the student, the focus of this study will not be on that, but the presentation of the information in the resource.

It is important to avoid imposing preferential methods of teaching over the method that ensures the student to most effectively learn. Teachers see the core skill developing in challenging musical exercises, while the young student is motivated often by the ease and enjoyment of the activity.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, if the student is not enjoying the activity, they are less likely to engage for an extended length of time.<sup>28</sup> The solution is to fuse the wishes of the teacher with holding the students' attention. This relates to a resource by including enjoyable activities.

According to the results of a survey conducted on music teachers and elementary school students gathering preference in musical education strategies, there is a gap between teacher/student preference. The student wishes to “produce total musical performances” while the teacher tends toward “component skills and knowledge...necessary for broad musical

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<sup>27</sup> Maria Classendorff, “Understanding the Learning Style of Pre-School Children Learning the Violin,” *Music Education Research* 8, no. 1 (2006): 86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800600570769>.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Kotts Murphy and Thomas S Brown, “A Comparison of Preferences for Instructional Objectives between Teachers and Students,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 34, no. 2 (1986): 138. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3344741>.

education.”<sup>29</sup> Their suggestions include not avoiding alteration of essential skill, but “the achievement of that objective might be associated with some activity the students enjoy.”<sup>30</sup>

Flute teaching methodology ought to have evidence of understanding that elementary school students are primarily motivated by ease and enjoyment. In looking at materials currently available to purchase, the previously explained five elements of engagement will be discussed to evaluate the theoretical success of a fifth-sixth grade aged flute student. Success of the student is defined in this study as their ability to use the material with ease, greater level of enjoyment, while simultaneously learning at a teacher’s desired rate and quality.

### **Existent Flute Method Book Observations**

#### ***Learn to Play the Flute!* - Frederick Jacobs, 1969**

Jacobs begins with his mission statement and describes the purpose for writing a flute method book saying his book is, “A carefully graded method that emphasizes good tone production, builds a sound rhythmic sense and develops well-rounded musicianship.”<sup>31</sup> He then dives into teaching the elements of music followed by the parts of the flute; both pages are very visually clear, and the wording is succinct. Photos of flute position follow for the visually inclined as well as worded descriptions of the photos supporting the read/write preferential learners. The first note presented is a B natural as a whole note with a fermata denoting an undefined length to hold and develop the tone. Immediately after one line of playing repeated B’s, the same exercise with A’s and G’s follow.

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<sup>29</sup> Murphy, “A Comparison,” 138.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 139.


<sup>31</sup> Frederick Jacobs, *Learn to Play the Flute!* (Alfred Music Co, 1969), 1.

The next page contains a lesson on whole notes and whole rests including kinesthetic and auditory inclusions. Figure 1 shows the instruction of the author to count aloud (auditory) and tap foot lightly (kinesthetic). There are recommendations and additional guidance points similar in various locations throughout the pages of Jacobs' book.

**WHOLE NOTES AND WHOLE RESTS**

In  $\frac{4}{4}$  time, there are four beats (or counts) in each measure. A whole note (♯) receives all four beats.  $\frac{4}{4}$  may also be written as C. This stand for *common time*.

In No. 1, start by counting aloud, "1-2-3-4." Count *steadily*. Now tap your foot *very* lightly and *think* the count. If you can tap, think and play the notes, you are well on your way towards becoming a good reader.

Whole note ♯ = 4 counts (or beats)      Whole rest  = 4 counts (or beats) of silence.




Figure 1. Lesson with auditory and kinesthetic inclusions.<sup>32</sup>

In comparing these observations to the observations drawn by researchers on the various learning styles, there are strengths in the visual aspects of the book as well as levels of auditory and kinesthetic inclusions. The information pedagogically speaking is ordered well, while the pacing may be above the rate in which a student could feasibly progress without losing interest. There are enhancements that may enrich the resource. The pages do not feature various colors or visual stimuli such as pictures or patterns to keep the young musician engaged. The photo inclusions also date the book and may not appeal to the average 11–12-year-old. Moreover, supplementary kinesthetic related instruction may be beneficial. The opportunity for the student to personalize, or instruction to write is non-existent, and excludes the read/write preferential learners.

<sup>32</sup> Frederick Jacobs, *Learn to Play the Flute!* (Alfred Music Co, 1969), 6.

***Breeze-Easy Method 1 - Valentine Anzalone, 1983***

Anzalone write that his method book “offers to the young student a systematic approach to correct concepts in music reading and flute playing.”<sup>33</sup> Seeking to help the student form a solid foundation and quickly guide them to an intermediate level, Anzalone states his purpose for writing this method book. The following page shows proper flute position in images with no accompanying text explaining. The method of teaching this concept is beneficial for the visual learners, but students with other learning preferences may appreciate additional explanation. The next page shows how to read a flute fingering chart with both pictures, words, and symbols, while the consequent page showing the parts of reading music. An informational blurb clarifies that an external teacher will give the instruction on producing tones correctly.

The following pages are each entitled “Lesson 1.”, “Lesson 2.”, etc. The new material is neatly presented at the top of each page in a box. Similar to the previous book, the author instructs the student to count the first measure “slowly and evenly.”<sup>34</sup> The first page teaches the student to play B, A and G, and the very next page is C and F. There are ten exercises per page including a blank at the bottom of each page that allow the student to write the date they completed the lesson, and the teacher to determine the quality of the lesson with three boxes- excellent, good, and fair as seen in figure 2.

THIS LESSON HAS BEEN COMPLETED.    DATE \_\_\_\_\_ EXCELLENT     GOOD     FAIR   
21468-29

*Figure 2. Personalization opportunity.*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Anzalone, *Breeze-Easy Method*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

While this book is clear and systematic, it would likely not engage the young flutist. There is no color or variation in presentation of material. The photos are from a previous generation and the modern beginner flutist could find difficulty relating. There are not auditory inclusions beyond counting aloud, nor kinesthetic beyond tapping the foot. Young students prefer learning through activities they enjoy, so improvements toward that can be made.

**Rubank Elementary Method- A.C Peterson, 1990**

“A fundamental course for individual or like-instrument class instruction.”<sup>36</sup> *Rubank Elementary Method* is slightly different than the others as it considers group instruction. There are editions of this book for each band instrument, so it is generalized and less specifically designed for flutists. In the front cover, there is a fingering chart complete with every note the flute can play in a numbered system. Figure 3 shows this chart. Because of the densely focused text and nontypical formatting, this chart is not ideal for young beginners.

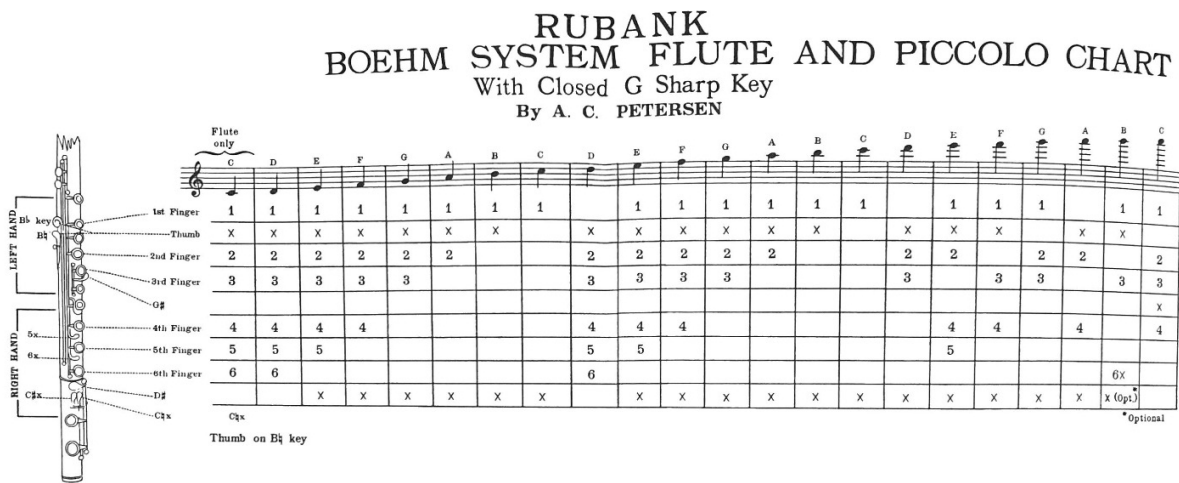


Figure 3. Rubank fingering chart.

<sup>36</sup> Peterson, A. C. *Rubank Elementary Method- Flute or Piccolo*. (Chicago: Rubank Publications, 1990), 1.

Similar to the previous book, each page of flute music contains the headings “Lesson one”, “Lesson two”, etc. showing a consistency leading to infer its effectiveness. Contrasting from the previous books, this method does not include any information on forming an embouchure, photographs, nor any in depth information on how to read music. Peterson jumps into learning the notes G, A, B, and C in the first five exercises in whole notes with whole rests in between. Each page following introduces new rhythms such as half notes, the tie, and dotted notes in rapid succession. By page six, the student is learning a C Major scale. A strength of this book includes cleanliness visually, while a weakness includes pacing of presentation of material. There are not personalization opportunities nor auditory related inclusions.

***Beginner’s Book - Trevor Wye, 2002***

Flutist, Trevor Wye, emphasizes enjoyability, familiarity with more musical keys than the previously discussed books, low register formation, and ensemble playing in his volume 1 method book.<sup>37</sup> This is in line with the research done concluding that young students respond well to enjoyability. A clear image of a flute, part names, key specifics and proper positioning follows. He supplements the photos with text describing tone production and his recommendation on producing a student’s first sound. However, he says to “bring lips together and blow across the hole” when referring to creating the first sound, which leaves gray area for the student to exactly reproduce proper technique.

This method book includes seven pages covering do’s and don’t’s of positioning, breathing, practicing, and musical literacy. This more in-depth approach presents a more complete instructional foundation which logically leads to better understanding and less

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<sup>37</sup>Trevor Wye, *Beginner’s Book for the Flute- Part One*, Novello, 2003.



confusion. Later in the method book, Wye includes a page with a sketch of a historical flute and teaches about the first flutes, which is a strength of the book in its attempt at helping produce knowledgeable well-rounded musicians. More emphasis on listening to oneself, other flute music, and incorporating kinesthetic modes of learning would improve this resource. Colors and images may also hold the attention of the young students.

***Play Flute Today!* - Hal Leonard, 2003**

The selling point of this method book is the accompanying audio tracks that “will make your learning even more enjoyable,” which is a strength as the majority of young musicians appreciate fun elements in order to become fully engaged in the task at hand.<sup>38</sup> This element is especially beneficial for the auditory learners who make input information more quickly, correctly, and pleurably. The auditory emphasis is an excellent example of playing to the strengths of auditory learners. The downfall of this inclusion is that the modern family may no longer have ease of access to a CD player. An improvement could be to have the videos and auditory inclusions as YouTube videos or links to online viewing platforms.

There is extensive information provided first on the parts of the flute, posture, breathing, producing a tone, then reading music. The wording is concise and are co-presented with photos and symbols for the varying styles. Additionally, there is a symbol next to various exercises throughout the book that means there is a video explanation of that topic. Figure 4 shows this icon. The way to get to this track is on a CD. In the current generation, CD's are no longer the norm, so a solution would be to consider a QR code or a YouTube channel that has the corresponding tracks and video instructions.

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<sup>38</sup>*Play Flute Today!* (Hal Leonard, 2003), 2.

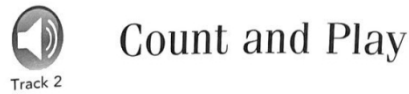


Figure 4. Audio Icon found throughout method book.<sup>39</sup>

The first note the student is instructed to learn is an F at the top of the staff. This requires six fingers to be in place to produce the tone. The number of fingers required suggests a greater difficulty in creating this as the initial note. This could be beneficial so as to challenge the student and the lesser involved notes may come easier, or it could frustrate and deter the student from continuing. The younger students' frustration may prevent them from the enjoyability and lead to discontinuation of flute study. Further research is suggested.

Visually, the layout, order, and font are readable and not too densely populated across the pages positively affecting the student's perception of the information. Kinesthetic inclusion is introduced in an instruction to tap one's foot to understand keeping time.

***Flute 101: Mastering the Basics - Phyllis Louke and Patricia George, 2010***

These two accomplished flutists introduce their method book by suggesting a competent teacher to guide the students through the book.<sup>40</sup> The introductory pages include the parts of the flute, questions a student should ask the teacher, how to practice, and their biographies. They reference the end of the method book where they instruct and advise the teachers on how to teach various beginning lessons such as embouchure, producing first sounds, learning rhythms and other musical literacy elements.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>*Play Flute Today!*, 9.

<sup>40</sup>Phyllis Avidan Louke and Patricia George, *Mastering The Basics* (Theodore Presser Company, 2010), 2.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

This is the first of the method books so far to write exercises for the head joint alone. The first page contains seven exercises for the head joint alone to develop tone, attacks, rhythmic understanding, and an introduction on pitch differences. When covering the end of the head joint with the palm, a lower pitch is produced. The exercises progress in difficulty mixing quarter notes, half notes, quarter rests, half rest, high pitches, and low pitches. There is an additional line at the bottom of the page that gives the opportunity for the teacher to play along with the student's exercise creating a melodious melody. They include this as the "just for fun" portion of their method. This is especially beneficial for young students as enjoyment is a large part of remaining engaged and motivated to repeat the activity.

The first official lesson teaches the student B, A, and G with diagrams of fingering charts, introductions to treble clef, time signature, and tunes commonly known such as "Mary Had a Little Lamb", and "Hot Cross Buns." Another aspect of their methodology that differs from the previous books recommends having the student hold the barrel of the flute with their right hand while it is not in use for the first three notes. At the top of a page dedicated to duets, which further separates this method book from the previous methods, supporting auditory learners who will progress listening to the sound of their teacher's flute as well as encourage them to improve to the level of their teacher.

### ***Foundation to Flute - Ernest Wagner, 2017***

Looking to rectify the method books that "go too far beyond the capabilities of the student after the first few pages," Wagner desires to "start flutists on the proper path" and prepare them for musical success.<sup>42</sup> Wagner details meticulously the proper flute playing

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<sup>42</sup>Ernest Wagner, *Foundation to Flute Playing- An Elementary Method* (Fischer LLC, 2017), 3.

position, notating what to do such as “keep the right elbow higher than the left,” as well as what not to do, “cheeks should not be puffed out.”<sup>43</sup> Photographs with captions convey this information for the visual and read/write learners. Dense paragraphs of information covering care of flute, how to practice, what to practice, transposition, breathing, tuning, and general advice to the beginning flutist. He implores students to not rush the first lesson and states it as the most important of them all. Wagner instructs to “get one exercise perfect before the next is attempted,” and that “advancement can only be made by careful study and practice.”<sup>44</sup> Wagner encourages the student to listen to quality music ranging from flute, orchestra, to singers in order to internalize, reproduce, and advance musically.

The rudiments of music come next. He defines terms that will frequent the students’ musical career as well as lists the vast majority of musical markings on the outset. This approach seems beneficial as a reference page that contains all the essential information to read music; however, the lack of progression may overwhelm with the vast amount of information quickly displayed. While thorough, this method does not seem to inspire, encourage or engage the young student who may struggle to with the amount of information presented all at once via only the read/write learning style.

The order of information is presented with “1<sup>st</sup> lesson”, “2<sup>nd</sup> lesson”, etc. headings and vary in length. Wagner begins with teaching the note C, then B, A, G following all without the use of the right-hand pinky key. This approach could lead to repeated practice and muscle memory of an incorrect kinesthetic feeling of each note. The pages are not visually engaging or easily digestible for young students as seen in Figure 5. They do not seem enjoyable.

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<sup>43</sup> Wagner, *Foundation to Flute Playing*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



Figure 5. This “2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson” would be difficult for young flutists to study.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Best Beginning Flute – Larry Newman, 2020***

The cover of this method books depicts a face on the head joint of the flute with a pearl necklace and eyelashes creating amusement and interest to open to the following pages. Similar to the *Play Flute Today!* method, this book has play-a-long mp3s at a website listed at the top of page one. Without any other information on position, embouchure, reading music, the first exercise teaches the note, D.<sup>46</sup> The first note taught requires six fingers to work simultaneously and accurately in order to produce the desired note presenting possibility of frustration in the young students. The exercises are also all in the key of Bb, which presents a host of questions for students who lack the understanding of key signatures, accidentals, and other advanced musical notations. It is not until after the sixteenth exercise where the term “staff” is introduced to the student. The pacing and order of the musical pedagogy lacks logic. Strengths of this book include the visual clarity of font, exercise, the fun pictures appearing adjacent to the exercises.

<sup>45</sup>Ernest Wagner, *Foundation to Flute Playing- An Elementary Method* (Fischer LLC, 2017), 18.

<sup>46</sup>*Best Beginning Flute Book for Kids* (Colombia, SC: Children’s Music Workshop, 2021), 1.

***Blocki Flute Method and Flute Zoo - Blocki, Kathy, 2015 and 2021***

The most recent flute method books in observation are by Kathy Blocki. Kathy Blocki is an established and award-winning flute teacher. She has developed tools such as the Pneumo Pro Wind Director, KinderFlute™, and specializes in teaching young students. With a history of playing for various Orchestras, Philharmonics, and Wind Symphonies, she is a qualified instructor of the flute. She emphasizes kinesthetic learning via “the use of games to create an active, fun and engaging environment to best learn the flute and to build a lifetime love of music.”<sup>47</sup>

*Blocki Flue Method Book* shows images of proper flute embouchure and the words to describe how to achieve it. There is an image involving her patent pending invention the Pneumo Pro Wind Director designed to teach how to direct your air stream when creating sound in various octaves to produce the most desired tone. Following comes the basics of music. Printed in large and clear text, the elements of creating music are listed. Accompanying this is an activity that instructs the student to draw a line from the image of the music element to the name of it. There are components of visual learning with the images, read/write learning with the reading of text as well as kinesthetic for the physical action of connect the two with a line.

Her methodology has her students play with the head joint alone before putting the entire flute together for exercises. She lists six exercises of mixed half and quarter notes for the student to read through to understand the rhythms and develop a good tone. The page concludes with additional instruction to play the same exercises with the head joint closed which is a quality reinforcement tactic so as to encourage repetition of material to learn it well and with variety to

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<sup>47</sup>Kathryn Blocki, *Blocki Flute Method*, i.

encourage flexibility.<sup>48</sup> With the ability to play high and low pitches on the head joint alone using your finger to determine the pitch, her method progresses to “Mary Had a Little Lamb”, and then an opportunity for the student to compose with the skills they have learned so far. She encourages the teacher to also play their composition. This activity is especially beneficial to connect all of the learning styles through visually reading the notes, reading the instructions and writing their composition down, and kinesthetically making something, and aurally hearing their teacher play it for them. This methodology incorporates all of the learning styles via expertly crafted pedagogical tactics.

Her other method book, *Flute Zoo*, is largely replicant of her previous methodology; however, more colors, pictures, and areas to personalize their book are available.<sup>49</sup> For example, she utilizes images of Lego pieces in full size and in half to spark the understanding of rhythmic values of half notes and quarter notes.<sup>50</sup> Her design demonstrates her desire to create an enjoyable and engaging flute method book for young beginners. However, the book is geared toward the developmental stage of a first or second grader. This is seen through the photo examples being of children no older than 6. This age is understood to be too young, and students who begin in fifth or sixth grade instead often reach the same skillset of a student who starts earlier. If a middle schooler were handed this book, they would more than likely be uninterested because it may make them feel like they are being “babied”. The middle school aged child desires to be treated as if they were an adult rather than receive instruction they would view as childish.

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<sup>48</sup> Kathryn Blocki, *Blocki Flute Method*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Blocki, Kathryn. *Flute Zoo*. Pittsburgh, PA, 2021.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

### **Conclusion and Application**

In light of the observations of current method books compared to the elements of learning specific to fifth to sixth grade students, improvements could be made to create a resource for young beginner flutists. The following pages are in fulfillment of the creative portion of the thesis. They are pages and activities for a flute method book with purposeful design established from knowledge of the various learning styles to increase well-roundedness of the student and lead to an enjoyable process of learning the flute. They are geared toward fifth and sixth grade novice flutists who may not have access to a private lesson teacher. The pages include successful elements of previous method books with enhancements for the modern 11-12-year-old of any and all learning styles as defined by the VARK learning style.

The first page of the flute book is titled, “The Four P’s of Flute Playing” shown in Figure 6. The design of this page of the flute book is to provide a way for the young flute students to visually see the way their embouchure should look, hear the sound of poo, read the descriptions in clear font and concise, and then feel the way the air feels on the palm and hand on the stomach. Figure 6. is colorful, fun and easy to look at, plus the term “poo” may cause the student to laugh and psychologically lead them to remember the way the flute embouchure should be formed. Changes to improve this page would be to include photos of fifth to sixth graders; however, access to that age group was limited. I would encourage teachers to have them repeat these 4 P’s daily! The QR code leads to a YouTube video explaining this page as the auditory inclusion.



**4 P's OF FLUTE PLAYING**



**POUT**

Turn the corners over you mouth down, soften lower lip like a pillow with a firm upper lip.



**POO**

Release your airstream as if saying, "Poo." Let the air create a natural split between your lips.



**PALM**

Put the tips of your fingers straight out from your nose and aim coffee straw air at your palm. This is the direction your air should go when playing



**PRESS**

With strong stomach muscles, blow fast and precise air when you play.

Figure 6. The Four P's of Flute Playing.

The next page is seen in Figure 7. and is titled, "Check It Out."



*Figure 7.* Check It Out.

The emphasis of this design is on visual learning. The mirror seen above would not just be a picture of a mirror, but rather, it would be a removable mirror attached by Velcro or a similar mechanism. The student would then be able to hold the reflective surface in their hand and have the option to stick it back on when finished. The photo of the correct embouchure as well as the reflection of their own embouchure are mere inches apart for students to continually reference. This is a fun and engaging page that is clear and crisp to the eye. It is a way for the

student to engage kinesthetically by holding the mirror in one hand and the flute head joint in the other. Focusing on these fundamental elements of learning flute is essential because learning a foundational component of flute playing incorrectly and then having to reconstruct it is difficult and frustrating. Avoiding this should be a priority for flutists. The QR code leads to a YouTube video explaining this page pertaining to the VARK model as an auditory inclusion.

The purpose of the next page, Figure 8., is to teach the student proper breath support while playing the flute.

**HOLD IT**

Hold the tissue paper against a wall and use your strong airstream to hold it there for as long as you can!

Date:	Counts:	Date:	Counts:
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Figure 8. Hold It.

This activity has the student pull the tissue paper from within the envelope and practice the proper air stream needed in order to support playing notes on the flute audibly and in tune. It can be very difficult for beginning students to have a strong and continuous airstream. To have enjoyable and kinesthetic activities for them to practice rather than the typical and repetitive options in other flute books would prove to be beneficial. The supplementary video provides the auditory inclusion element.

An introduction to the concept of lip flexibility for beginner flutists is found on the page called, “Three Fans”. Figure 9 shows the design of this page.

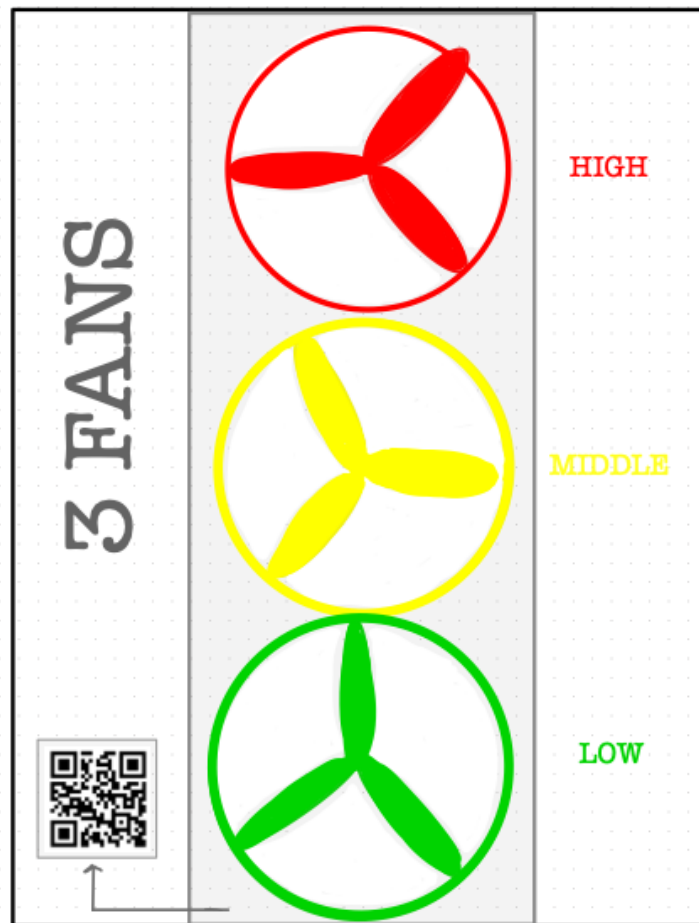


Figure 9. Three Fans page designed to develop lip flexibility.

In actuality, this page would be thicker than paper and have three plastic fans down the center. Developing lip flexibility allows students to achieve a clear tone in the extreme registers of the flute. The idea of this page is to hold it away from your face and spin each fan in isolation from the others. This will be helpful as the student begins to expand their range higher and lower. Air direction is a major aspect of controlling notes played on the flute. The student should have an awareness of where their air is going and have control over it. This page can, like the mirror page, be referred back to often. This page incorporates all the VARK elements including visual appeal, auditory with the YouTube lesson, kinesthetic with of the physical involvement, and entertaining for the younger students.

The following few pages are geared toward the student who prefers to learn by writing information down. Figure 10. showcases a page for students to complete to remember the parts of a flute. Knowing every part of the flute is important information for all flutists to memorize.

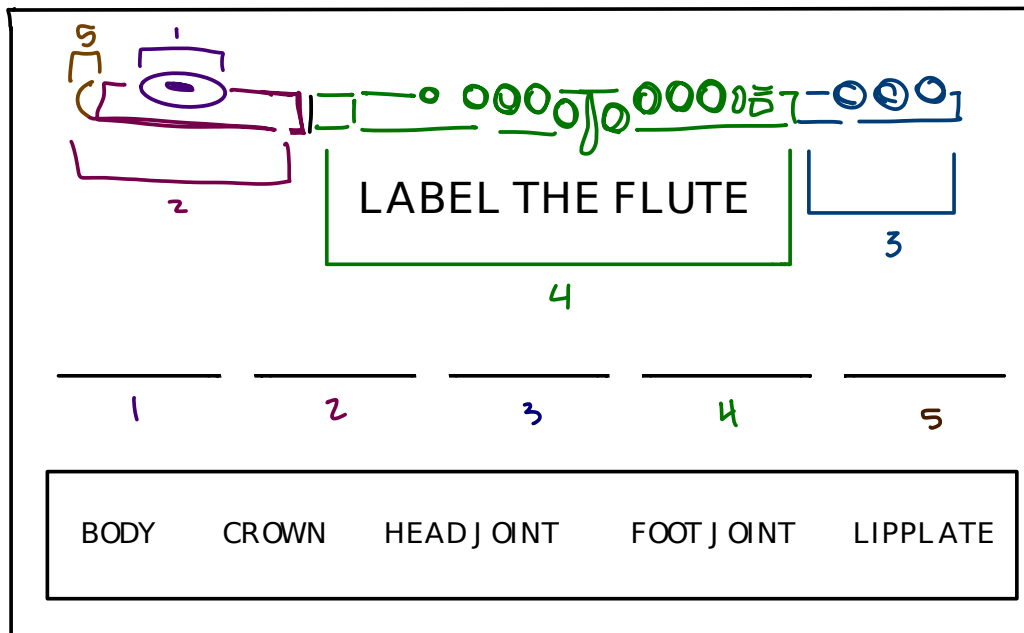



Figure 10. Label the Flute.

Figure 11. is an educational puzzle page. Playing games and completing activities assists students in memorizing information. In order to be well rounded as a musician, having an understanding of where your instrument came from and the significant advancements made to have the instrument in its current form leads to a greater appreciation for the opportunity to learn and participate in the historical art of playing an instrument. This page also gives more variety within the method book and breaks up the pace of information delivered.

**DISCOVER IT**



**NEANDERTHAL FLUTE**

The first flute was made out of bone and likely found all the way back during the time of Neanderthals! It is said to have been found in Slovenia in the cave of Divje thousands of years ago. Complete the puzzles to discover what it might have looked like.

*Figure 11.* Discover It.

Figure 12. shows three separate practice trackers that would be scattered throughout a complete method book. This gives the student an opportunity to personalize their book. Also, it gives great incentive to practice which is proven to be an important aspect of learning. Without incentive and an end goal, it can be difficult to remain motivated as a student. An option for this page is for a teacher to have a sticker book and place stickers as note heads to further engage their younger students. If a student has a perfect practice week, a prize system could also be incorporated. This has elements of visual, read/write, kinesthetic, and enjoyment for students of various learning preferences.

**Fill in a key each day you**

**practice.**

**Fill in a note each day you**

**practice.**

**Add a note each day you**

**practice.**

Figure 12. Practice Pages.

The following three pages, as seen in Figures 13 and 14, go together. The purpose of these pages is to encourage composition at an early age as well as ensure students' understanding of rhythm and note values. There would be more pages as new notes and rest are introduced, they would have a page to punch them out and add to the pool of notes.

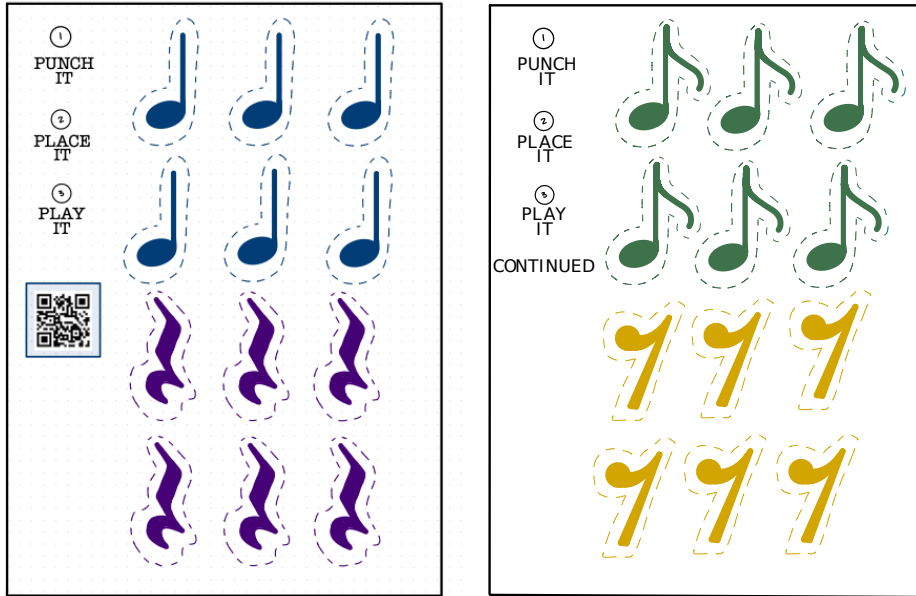


Figure 13. Punch It, Place It, Play It Notes and Rests Pages.

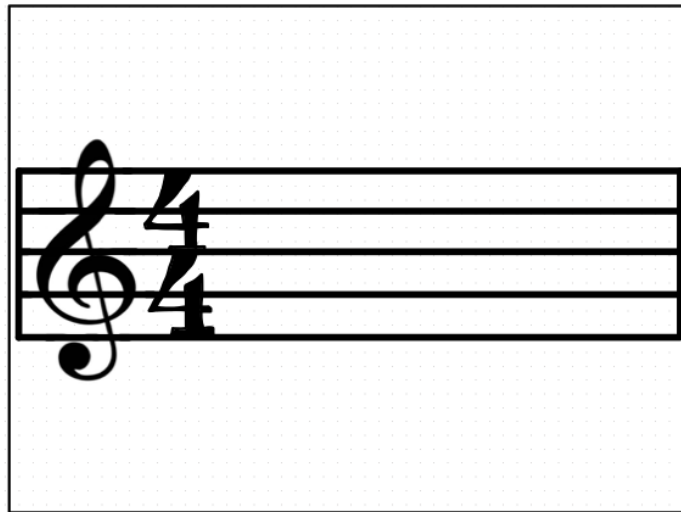


Figure 14. Blank Staff for previous page notes.



The student would use the staff page by laying the book flat and laying the notes atop to play games and create melodies. There would be a clear sheet protector in the book to keep all the loose notes and rests. The options are endless with this page. It could be used for the student to compose melodies, understand time signature and note values, as well as test their knowledge of fingerings. The QR code leads to a YouTube video explaining this page as the auditory inclusion.

The next page, Figure 15., leans toward the music theory side of learning to play the flute.

The worksheet is titled "What does it spell?" in green text. Above the title are two question marks. Below the title are three question marks. The worksheet contains five numbered musical staves (1) through (5), each with a sequence of notes and rests. To the right of each staff is a blank line for an answer. At the bottom, there is a bonus question: "Bonus) How many years is this?" with a blank line and an arrow pointing to a musical note on the fifth staff. On the right side of the worksheet, there is a vertical staff with a treble clef and a series of notes and rests, including a QR code at the bottom.

Figure 15. What Does It Spell?

The activity sheet requires the student to truly know the notes on a staff. The students will have learned these notes and now can apply their knowledge in completing this activity. This is exemplar for students with strengths in the read/write style, and it includes visually engaging elements. In a completed method book, this page could be assigned as homework for a student to bring back to their teacher, if applicable, so as to encourage practice and divide up playing activities.

The final activity, Figure 16, is designed to help students understand the relationship between flute fingering charts, the place the note is on the staff, and the name of the note. The activity is visual, kinesthetic, involves writing, and auditory inclusion with a QR code at the bottom to explain how the activity works.

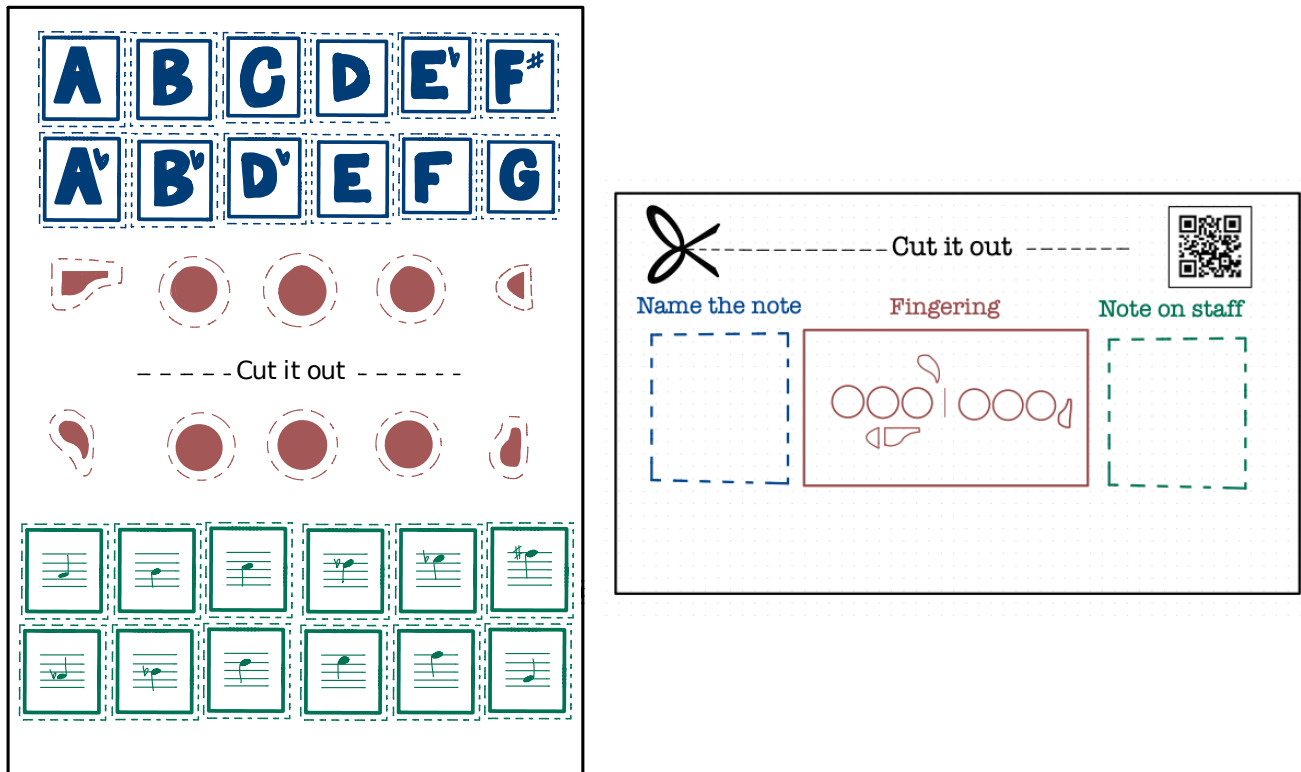


Figure 16. Cut It Out Activity Page.

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