

# PIANO HEROES

*MISSION: START*

***TEACHER'S GUIDE***



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# *Hello, Piano Teacher!*

*How was your lesson today? Was your five-year-old bouncing around the class, interested in everything except piano? Was your six-year-old complaining about how boring the piano is? I know, believe me, I feel for you. I am a piano teacher and, just like you, I really like teaching the piano. I put my heart and soul into each and every lesson. I plan, I prepare. And I also know your misery; when a student is distracted, bored, and in no way enjoying the beautiful process of learning an instrument. Instead of witnessing the fascinating process of students learning piano, all we feel is desolation when a student cannot stay focused. Did you notice that too? Undoubtedly, it's not your fault. It's nobody's fault that the children are changing, but the method books aren't.*

*Kids lose focus and interest so quickly these days, it's frustrating! Frankly, I was desperate and had to adjust too. I have tried so many different methods and approaches with my students and I have learned a lot from my own experience. The changes my teaching practice underwent were drastic, and not a single goal was easy to accomplish. In spite of it all, something new was created. Something so different from the other methods that I could not keep this gift to myself. Other teachers just like me were struggling with the same challenge, and from our struggle, the Piano Heroes were born. An approach that is engaging and interactive, starts small and gradually builds the foundation of a successful piano player one exercise at a time, the piano method that simply works for the modern kids.*

*Piano Heroes: Mission Start is the first book of the series; where the super animals introduce themselves and start happily interacting with the young learner from the colorful pages. Each one has a unique name that matches the music alphabet. And with the help of a short poem or song the boisterous kid learns the basics of the piano in a fun and captivating way. The names of the music notes suddenly become meaningful to the young learner, as they are no longer letters and words, but creatures. Animals that have faces and emotions, and communicate with them by more than just words, but songs and poetry. The Piano Heroes were designed in a way to construct those associations and strengthen them. Suddenly learning piano starts making sense, even for a four-year-old!*

*Intrigued yet? I know it may look like I have created the Piano Heroes for myself. I must confess, this piano method is what I was missing and looking forward to in my own piano teaching, but nobody created it for me. Eventually, I decided to do that for my students, for myself, and for you, my dear piano teacher. And today I share this contemporary approach to teaching the piano with you! And in the years to come, I'd love to hear about your experience applying the Piano Heroes method in your own piano teaching.*

*Yours truly in piano teaching,  
Valentyna Komisarenko*

# Curriculum

<b>Scope and Format</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Short exercises</li> <li>+ Interactive games</li> <li>+ Off-staff notation</li> <li>+ Friendly heroes</li> <li>+ Matching names</li> <li>+ Color differentiation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Learn new concepts in a fun and engaging way</li> <li>+ Progress from basic to the more complex concepts</li> <li>+ Memorize through sticking associations</li> <li>+ Gain confidence from playing rote pieces</li> <li>+ Differentiate by color</li> <li>+ Motivate using gamification and achievement cards</li> </ul>
<b>Keyboard Exploration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Keyboard geography</li> <li>+ Groups of black keys</li> <li>+ White keys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Learn about the whole keyboard from the beginning</li> <li>+ Explore and recognize the groups of black keys</li> <li>+ Learn to play the white keys early on</li> </ul>
<b>Reading Approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Note names</li> <li>+ Note patterns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Learn the names of the notes</li> <li>+ Locate the notes on the keyboard</li> </ul>
<b>Rhythm</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Short sounds</li> <li>+ Long sounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Learn to count the objects and notes</li> <li>+ Differentiate the short sounds from the long sounds</li> </ul>
<b>Technique</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Right hand (RH)</li> <li>+ Left hand (LH)</li> <li>+ Finger number two</li> <li>+ Finger number three</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Play with the right (RH) and left (LH) hands</li> <li>+ Play with finger number two and number three</li> <li>+ Form a proper hand position and finger independence</li> <li>+ Practice the detached playing</li> <li>+ The whole arm is playing with a relaxed wrist</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Counting</li> <li>+ Clapping patterns</li> <li>+ Repeat after teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Build the symbol-to-sound recognition</li> <li>+ Improve the musical ear and eye-hand coordination</li> <li>+ Observe and recognize what the teacher is playing</li> </ul>
<b>Musical Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Keyboard maps</li> <li>+ Key patterns</li> <li>+ Rote pieces</li> <li>+ Folk songs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Use off-staff notation to represent the music</li> <li>+ Learn from the patterns and rote-pieces</li> <li>+ Play originally composed pieces</li> <li>+ Play arranged folk songs</li> </ul>
<b>Aural Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ High &amp; Low sounds</li> <li>+ Short &amp; Long sounds</li> <li>+ Music direction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Recognize high from low sounds</li> <li>+ Recognize short from long sounds</li> <li>+ Recognize the sound moving up, down, the same</li> </ul>
<b>Creativity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Pattern play</li> <li>+ Pre-composition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Use the existing knowledge to create new patterns</li> <li>+ Create and play simple patterns</li> </ul>
<b>Supplementary Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Assignment sheets</li> <li>+ Lesson Scheduler</li> <li>+ Piece trading cards</li> <li>+ Flashcards</li> <li>+ Piano games</li> <li>+ Activity worksheets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Bring fun and interactivity to the lesson</li> <li>+ Visualize the roadmap of the lesson</li> <li>+ Utilize tools to refresh the already learned concepts</li> <li>+ Keep children engaged and focused on learning</li> <li>+ Help teacher to plan for the lesson more efficiently</li> <li>+ Let piano teacher adjust the workload</li> </ul>

# Approach

**Mission Start** is the first book in the **Piano Heroes** series of books for curious kids. The method is using the aural/exploratory approach to teaching the piano. Therefore before teaching to read the musical notation the book is focusing on the learning of the musical concepts through the pictures of the physical world objects, their names, colors, and the common real-world phenomena which are easy to comprehend for the kids of this age. Just like keeping the structural integrity of the foundation is vital to the long-lasting life of the house, this book is teaching the foundational concepts and skills to succeed on the long and challenging journey of learning the piano superpower.

# Equipment

Many activities in the book integrate well with simple equipment. And preparing the following equipment ahead of time will make it easier to run your lessons smoothly. Though we do not have any specific recommendations on the vendor and/or the product names here, you should be able to find some examples of the partner products on [PianoHeroes.co/start](http://PianoHeroes.co/start) page to get an idea of what kind of products worked well for us when we tested the Piano Heroes method in our piano studio.

1. Piano or keyboard
2. Small stool or box to put under student's feet
3. Mascots toys
4. Stickers
5. Colorful counters, tokens, and buttons for patterning counting and marking the keys
6. Rhythm instruments
7. Dice
8. Plastic cups
9. Pencil crayons
10. Blank paper for drawing

# Lesson

Dwight D. Eisenhower an American army general once said “Plans are nothing, planning is everything” and we truly believe in this philosophy. As long as you plan your chances for success will increase ten-fold. Planning of the piano lesson starts with its duration. The recommended duration of the piano lesson for the kids of this age is **30 min**. You will notice that, in general, the number and the granularity of the activities in the Piano Heroes method are well balanced with the kids’ age.

## Activities

The typical Piano Heroes lesson can be seen as a mix of short activities from the three major categories such as **Routine**, **Playing Piano** and **Off-the-Bench**. The magic of the method is in the right mix of those three in each and every piano lesson and you will see how the mix is changing as you progress through the book to the ultimate goal of achieving the **Keyboard Superpower**. The table below represents all three categories and their main attributes for your reference.

#	Category	Start Time	Duration	Description
1	Routine	Fixed	1-2 min	The main role of the <b>Routine</b> is to help in building rapport with the student, plan, warm-up, mentally prepare for the lesson at the beginning and wrap the lesson up at the end. <b>Routine</b> activities are like the light switches they start and end at the same time and trigger the learning process. They include <b>Welcome, Lesson Scheduler, Finger Gym, Homework Assignment, and Parent Talk</b> .
2	Playing Piano	Variable	3 min	We cannot teach to play the piano without actually playing the piano hence this is the most important category of all. It is time when a student can play, experiment and learn from her own mistakes. We have activities like <b>Playing, Patterning and Rote Pieces</b> .
3	Off-the-Bench	Variable	2-5 min	The activities from the <b>Off-the-Bench category</b> help kids in overcoming the lack of interest and short attention span. They go hand in hand with the <b>Playing Piano</b> activities and serve as a glue in memorizing the concepts faster. We are talking about the <b>Listening, Rhythm Exercises, Lost and Found, Math, Game Time</b> , and anything else you can come up with as long as it is interesting and fits well into the format and the timeline of your lesson.

## Lesson Plan Sample

A good idea might be to plan the next lesson immediately after or later in the day when the last lesson is still fresh in your mind. Always know the activities for the upcoming lesson.


**Table 1**

#	Activity	Start Time	Duration	End Time
1	Welcome	4:00 pm	1 min	4:01 pm
2	Lesson Roadmap	4:01 pm	1 min	4:02 pm
3	Finger Gym	4:02 pm	2 min	4:04 pm
4	Playing Piano	4:04 pm	3 min	4:07 pm
5	Off-the-Bench	4:07 pm		
6	Break		2 min	
7	Playing Piano		3 min	
8	Off-the-Bench			
9	Playing Piano			
10	Off-the-Bench			4:27 pm
11	Homework Assignment	4:27 pm	1 min	4:28 pm
12	Parent Talk	4:28 pm	2 min	4:30 pm

# Playing Piano

**Playing Piano** category includes three different types of activities **Playing**, **Patterning** and **Rote Pieces**. Note that each of them has a different icon in the book for you to help in your planning and running the lesson. All three are reinforcing the rhythm development, establishing the hand position and literally playing the piano!

## Playing

Icon	Description
	<p>A variety of exercises to play on the piano.</p> <p>Playing activities help to reinforce the rhythm, differentiate the short sounds from the long ones, and learn to recognize and locate the key on the keyboard. The off-staff notation is implemented in the form of piano keymaps. Student is <i>reciting</i> simple poems and then playing them on the keyboard syllable by syllable using the second or the third fingers of both left hand and the right hand.</p>

## Shoot for the Key (P.9)

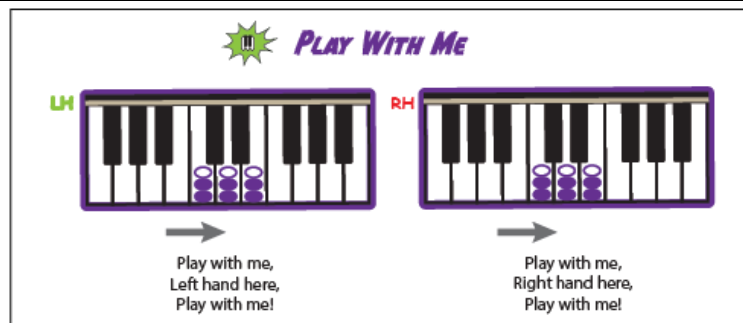
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Recognize low and high sounds, the music moving up and down the keyboard
<b>Activities</b>	Listen to the sounds, recognize the movement direction and mark the corresponding box with the Panda going up the stairs for high sounds, and panda going down for low sounds
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Pencil crayon Going up, going down cards (find in group files)
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Find a white key, down to the left of 2 black key group</li> <li>2. Practice “bouncing” from one to another key</li> <li>3. Lift your hand high and drop with a relaxed wrist down</li> </ol>





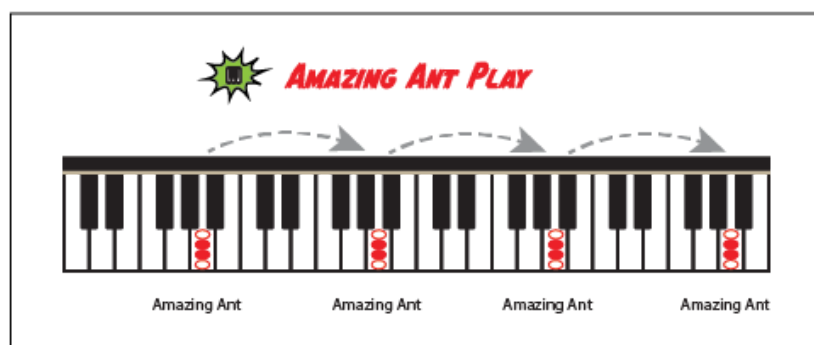
Play with Me (P.16)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Short and long sounds, playing patterns with short and long sounds and transposing.
<b>Activities</b>	Playing the patterns on the piano
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Piano
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask the student to observe the pattern</li> <li>2. Read the poem and match the syllables to the short (colored ovals) and long (clear ovals) sounds on the diagram</li> <li>3. Ask the student to play the pattern on the white keys</li> <li>4. Ask the student to find any group of three black keys and play the exact same pattern on the black keys</li> </ol>




Amazing Ant Play (P.20)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Learning the first note of the music alphabet and its location on the keyboard.
<b>Activities</b>	Tapping, playing the rhythm.
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Piano
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell the student to observe the given notes matched with syllables. The pattern is long, short, short, long, so the student would say aaaa-ma-zing aaannntt as they play the note A with their right hand. Hitting each A as they move up the keyboard.</li> <li>2. Do the same with the left hand.</li> </ol>

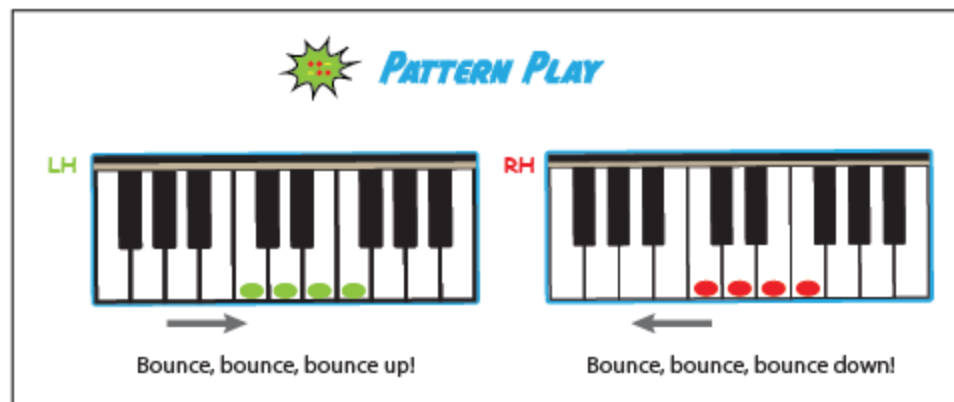


## Patterning

Icon	Description
	<p>Read, create and play simple patterns on the piano.</p> <p>Nothing in music is random and our brain is very good at recognizing the patterns hence they are essential to the piano teaching. It starts with simple patterns. While patterning we let students experiment and come up and play their own ones. Various visual cues and off-staff notation are used in the form of arrows showing the direction of the movement as well as the keymaps with the assigned keys.</p>

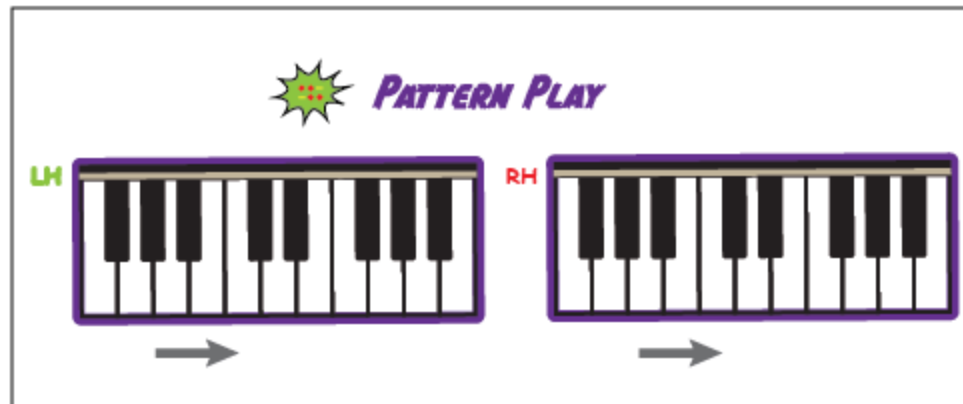
### Pattern Play (P.10)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Recognizing and playing patterns
<b>Activities</b>	Playing
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Piano
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tell the student to observe the given pattern</li> <li>2. Play the pattern on the piano, reciting the lyrics</li> <li>3. Ask them to play said pattern going up with the finger #2 left hand, and going down with the finger #2 right hand.</li> </ol>




Pattern Play (P.17)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Making piano patterns, recording piano patterns, and playing from recorded patterns.
<b>Activities</b>	Making and playing patterns.
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Pencil Crayons Piano
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ask the student to create a pattern on the black keys,</li><li>2. Draw ovals on the keyboard diagram to visualize the pattern (as shown on the neighboring page)</li><li>3. Practice playing the pattern on the piano with finger #2</li></ol>
<b>Teacher Tips</b>	+ Make sure the student recognizes the purpose of the arrows below the keyboard diagrams. This being to symbolize the direction of the movement of music: up for both right and left hands.




## Rote Pieces

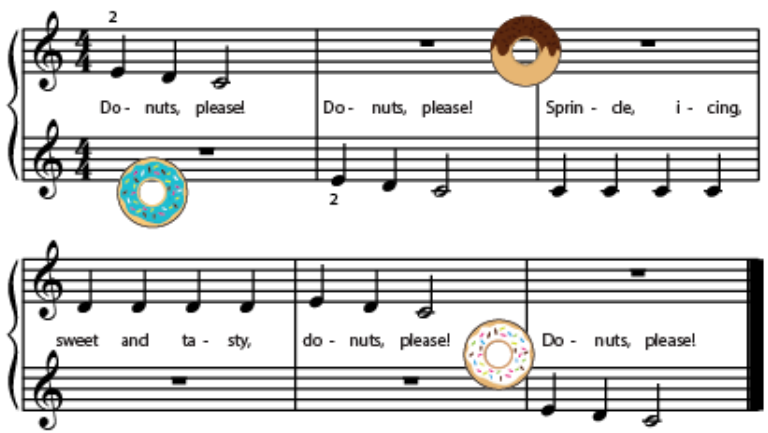
Icon	Description
	<p>With the goal to motivate and entertain. These pieces are learned by listening, observing, deconstructing patterns and imitation.</p> <p>We are very big proponents of the rote pieces at the early stages of the piano teaching. Teaching by rote enables beginning students to experience and play more complex music pieces without any knowledge of the notation and sight-reading. It is not only boosting their motivation but helps in implementing the rhythm, training the muscle memory and greatly assisting in the aural and memory development of the young learners. Last but not least it makes playing on the whole keyboard possible!</p>

### Donuts, Please! (P.15)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Learn to play short patterns of long/short notes on the white keys by rote
<b>Activities</b>	Playing the piano, memorizing
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Piano
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Play the song 'Donuts, please' for your student</li> <li>2. As you prepare to play the song for a second time. Ask your student to see if they can spot any patterns</li> <li>3. Then play one measure of the song, and ask a student to repeat</li> <li>4. Continue teaching the song measure by measure to the student, until you have learned the entire song</li> </ol>
<b>Teacher Tips</b>	+ 'Donuts, please!' is a rote piece based on the folk song: Hot Cross Buns





### DONUTS, PLEASE!



Rhythm on Blacks (P.32)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Learn to play specific rhythm on two black keys with finger #2, alternating hands and by rote.
<b>Activities</b>	Clapping the rhythm and playing the piano
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Piano, rhythm instrument (optional)
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As the teacher, clap the rhythm.</li> <li>2. Ask the student to repeat said rhythm</li> <li>3. Show the student how to play the first two measures of the song, and ask them to repeat after you.</li> <li>4. Then continue learning the song two measures at a time until you reach the end.</li> <li>5. Assign the song to the student as homework, so that they can further their freedom in their playing.</li> </ol>
<b>Teacher Tips</b>	+ If eight-measure is overwhelming for the student, you can learn four measures the first lesson and assign it fo home, then continue learning the piece during the next lesson.



**RHYTHM ON BLACKS**



## Off-the-Bench

One of the main challenges with the nowadays kids is they are losing their interest in activities of any kind extremely fast as well as have a very short attention span. These are what the **Off-the-Bench** activities help to overcome as they appear in between **Playing Piano** exercises and are our vital tools in successful piano teaching.

### Rhythm Extravaganza

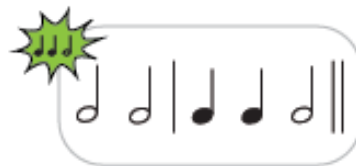
Icon	Description
	Exercises which involve clapping, tapping, stomping and dancing. Anything that inspires students to feel and make a rhythm.

## Rhythm Superpower (P.31)


<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Learn a specific rhythmic pattern through a poem and different movement, before applying what has been learned to the keyboard.
<b>Activities</b>	Rhythmic movement, playing piano.
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Piano
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offer to the student to learn the given poem according to the movement (ex. Clapping, stomping, tapping and jumping).</li> <li>2. Show and explain to the student that the first line of the poem is played on the A key, the second on the B key, so on, so forth.</li> <li>3. Help the student play the assigned note for each line with finger #2 (either hand).</li> </ol>
<b>Teacher Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ If the student catches on really fast, you can show them how to play the song with two hands. Play the proper note in an octave and recite the poem.</li> <li>+ There should be a note played for each syllable, so it follows the displayed rhythm pattern to the right of the poem.</li> </ul>

### **RHYTHM SUPERPOWER**

- A** Clap, clap, clap your hands,
- B** Stomp, stomp, stomp your feet,
- C** Tap, tap, tap your knees,
- D** Jump, jump, to the beat !



## Lost and Found

Icon	Description
	It focuses on observation, memory, and interconnection through seeking and labeling various elements.

Lost and Found (P.11)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Keyboard geography, groups of two and three black keys,
<b>Activities</b>	Drawing
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Piano Pencil Crayons
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask the student to observe and identify the group of keys that DOES NOT appear on the piano</li> <li>2. Then tell them to cross it out</li> </ol>




Lost and Found (P.25)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Reinforcing the student's knowledge of the musical alphabet.
<b>Activities</b>	Printing
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Pencil
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask your student to recite the musical alphabet.</li> <li>2. Now turn their attention to the diagram below and ask them to fill in the blanks.</li> </ol>



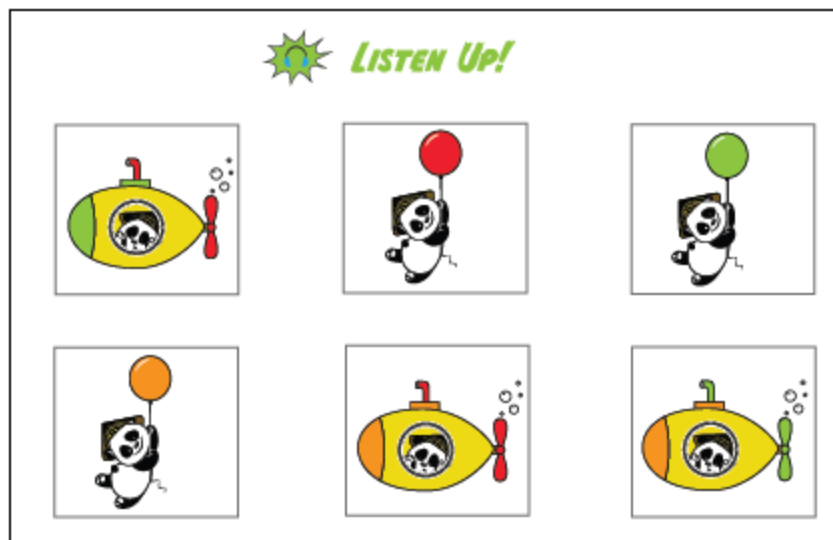


## Listen Up!


Icon	Description
	Tune in the ears to listen and understand different sounds of music.

### Listen Up! (P.7)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Listen and understand high and low sounds, sounds going up, going down
<b>Activities</b>	Listening and recognizing sounds played by the teacher.
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Going up, going down cards (link here)
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Show the student the picture and explain that the Panda in the submarine is associated with low sounds, and the Panda with a balloon - with high.</li> <li>2. Ask the student to listen to the sounds you play. Play a few keys in the high or low register. Ask the student if the sounds were high or low?</li> <li>3. If the set of sounds played was low, the student should circle the Panda in the submarine. If the set of sounds was played in the high register, the student should circle Panda with a balloon.</li> </ol>










## Simple Math

Icon	Description
	Aims to form some basic skills in mathematics as numbers and counting.


### Twos and Threes (P.13)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	One to one correspondence and recognizing groups of two and three.
<b>Activities</b>	Identify and cross out specific groups
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Pencil crayon Piano
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ask the student to find any groups of two and three basketballs.</li><li>2. Once they have told them to cross them out.</li><li>3. Turn the student's attention to the keyboard, and ask whether they can find the groups of two and three black keys on the piano</li></ol>

 **TWO'S AND THREE'S**

## Drawing Exercises

Icon	Description
	Use a pencil to draw, connect, circle or print.

### Colorful Hands (P.8)

<b>Learning Objectives</b>	Recognize left and right hand, play with finger #2
<b>Activities</b>	Color the right-hand pointer finger with a red crayon and the left-hand pointer with a green crayon. Then find and color all left hands in green and all the right hands in red
<b>Materials and Equipment</b>	Red and green pencil crayons Red and green dot stickers (optional)
<b>Instructions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ask the student to color the right-hand pointer finger with a red crayon and the left-hand pointer with a green crayon.</li><li>2. Then find and color all the left hands in green and all the right hands in red.</li></ol>

### **COLORFUL HANDS**

