

FIRST LESSONS



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Starting String Beginners in a Musical Way

Establishing proper setup, also known as “healthy foundations,” is the main objective of beginning string classes. Another important goal for beginning string classes is to provide students with opportunities for development of basic music competencies such as singing in tune and with the sense of steady beat.

What follows is the summary of what string teachers need to teach in first lessons along with suggested pedagogy. Songs and chants that make learning more interesting and musical are included.

What to teach?

- Instrument and bow awareness
 - The names of the parts of the instruments and bow
 - Steps for tightening the bow hair
 - Steps for applying the rosin
 - Taking care of the instrument and bow
- Body awareness
 - Distinguishing the “Instrument Hand” and “Bow Hand”
 - Identifying “Instrument Shoulder”
 - Names and functions of left- and right-hand fingers
 - Exercises for strengthening left-hand fingers
- “Healthy foundations” awareness
 - Steps for establishing proper posture/stance (terminology applicable for upper string instruments) and body frame (terminology applicable for lower string instruments)
 - Steps for taking a professional bow
 - Steps for going from rest position to playing position
 - Steps for establishing proper instrument hold
 - Exercises for instrument hold
 - Steps for establishing proper left-hand setup

- Basic exercises for development of proper left-hand shape
- Steps for establishing proper bow hold
 - Basic bow exercises

PART 1

Instrument and Bow Awareness

Teaching the names of the parts of the instrument and bow

What to teach?

- How to safely take the instrument and the bow out of the case
- The names of all part of the instrument and the bow

Pedagogy: Demonstrate steps for taking the instrument and the bow out of the case and have students repeat the steps several times.

Pedagogy: Sing the parts of the instrument and bow on the tune of C major scale.

- (a) Students echo the teacher while pointing at appropriate parts of the instrument and bow:

This is my violin/cello/bass

This is called the scroll

These are called pegs

Etc.

This is my bow

This is called stick

This is called frog

Etc.

- (b) Students answer the questions asked by teacher while pointing at appropriate parts of the instrument and bow:

What is this? *This is my violin/cello/bass.*

What are these? *These are the pegs. Etc..*

Teaching how to tighten the bow hair

What to teach?

- Before we play, we need to tighten the bow hair by moving adjusting screw like we are closing the lid on the bottle of water.
- When tightened well, there should be the space between the bow hair and the stick, but bow stick shall never become straight do to tightening the bow hair.
- After we play, we need to loosen bow hair by moving adjusting screw like we are opening the lid on the bottle of water.

Pedagogy: Say the following chant in the “rap” like manner while tightening and loosening the bow hair.

Tighten Your Bow Chant

(Left hand holds the bow stick in the middle part and three fingers of the right hand are on the adjusting screw.)

*Tighten your bow when you play,
Loosen it up when you put it away!*

(to make it more interesting add ostinato and percussions)

Teaching how to apply the rosin

What to teach?

- Rosin cake or rosin block is a soap for cleaning bow hair. When bow hair is “clean” our strings “speak” better.
- We need to apply rosin almost every day, either before or after we play.
- The way to apply rosin is to rub it into the hair.
- It is important to clean off excessive powder from rosin from our instrument and our bow stick on a regular basis.

Pedagogy: Hold the rosin in the left palm. Hold the bow like a “cave man” in the right hand. Place the bow hair on top of the rosin and rub the bow hair into the rosin. Start with the bow hair around the frog and make your way to the tip of the bow and back. Finish by moving the bow hair on the top of the rosin from the frog to the tip so to ensure that every inch of the bow hair was touched by rosin. Take out the excessive powder by “swishing” the bow stick through the air.

Teaching how to take care of the instrument and the bow

What to teach?

- Steps for taking care of the instrument and bow

Pedagogy: Students repeat and memorize rules for taking care of the instrument and the bow.

Five Rules on Taking the Care of the Instrument and Bow

1. Never lay the instrument on its top, even if it is in the case.
2. Clean the instrument with a soft cloth every time you put it away.
3. Never touch the bow hair.
4. Rosin your bow before your play.
5. Always loosen the bow hair after you play.

Body Awareness

What to teach?

- Right hand is the hand that holds the bow and it is called “bow hand.”
- Left hand is the hand that plays the pitches on the instrument and it is called “instrument hand.”

- Left shoulder is the shoulder that supports instrument and it is called “instrument shoulder.”
- Names of the left- and right-hand fingers (see below)
 - Exercises for strengthening left-hand fingers

Pedagogy for teaching “bow” and “instrument” hands: Sing the tune of *Are You Sleeping* with following text.

Where’s Your Instrument/Bow Hand?

(Both hands are behind player’s back; as song goes on hands are identified by bringing them forward)

Teacher: Where’s you bow hand, where’s your bow hand?

Students: Here I am, Here I am!

Teacher: How are you today, Sir?

Students: Where well I thank you.

Run away, run away

Where’s you instrument hand, where’s your instrument hand? etc. (use “Miss”)

Alternate the tempos and dynamics to get more creative repetitions

Pedagogy for teaching the names of the left- and right-hand fingers: In talking voice introduce the descriptive names of the fingers. Play the games to get more creative repetitions.

Left Hand Fingers, Wrist, and Elbow Names

Banana Thumb

1st finger

2nd finger

3rd finger

4th finger

Wedge between the 1st finger and thumb

Straight Wrist

Movable Elbow

Right Hand Fingers, Wrist, and Elbow Names

Bent and Clever Thumb

Soft Guiding Pointer

Hugging Brothers

Curled Pinkie

Soft Wrist

Exercises for strengthening left-hand fingers:

Fingers Dropping

(Make the “ring” or “O” shape with the thumb and each finger of the left hand while chanting and moving finger up-down in a steady beat; fingers must be in the “cupcake shape” and not in the “pancake shape”)

*Fingers dropping, never stopping
keep those fingers dropping, dropping.*

*Fiddle fingers must be soft
keep those little fingers drop.*

Shoo Fly

(Sing on the tune of the folk song “Shoo Fly” while flicking with the first knuckle of each finger.)

*Shoo fly, don't bother me;
Shoo fly, don't bother me;
I see, I see like a morning star
I see, I see like a morning star (etc.)*



PART 2

Steps for Establishing “Healthy Foundations”

Steps for establishing proper posture/stance

What to teach?

- “Rest Position”
 - Feet parallel on the floor with a slight space between feet
 - Soft knees
 - Movable hips

- Erect torso
- Open shoulders
- Straight neck
- Head on top of the neck
- Eyes open
- Relaxed & smiley lips

Pedagogy: Teacher demonstrates and explains good posture and students imitate. Invent games for creative repetition. Consider using the “feet chart” (Suzuki) in the beginning string classes.

Steps for taking a professional bow

What to teach?

- Start with erect position, “smiley face,” while skimming the audience
- Bend forward in hips to 90-degree angle
- Stay for several second in “bend forward” position
- Go back to “erect” position

Pedagogy: With no instrument in your hands, while standing in rest position say the Taking a Bow Chant; follow suggested movements. With instrument in “rest position” sing Taking a Bow Song; follow suggested movements.

Taking a Bow Chant

*One down look at your toes,
Two up look at teacher’s nose*

Taking a Bow Song

(Sing on tune of Twinkle Theme while holding instrument)

*Rest position feet in line,
That's just mighty, that's just fine
Check your bridge 'cause it should be
Peeking out at you and me,
Now we learn to take a bow:
Ichi (one), Ni (two), and Son (three) that is how.*

Steps for going from rest position to playing position

What to teach?

- Resetting the feet from “rest position” into “playing position”
- Placement & distribution of the weight of the body
- Stability vs. mobility
- Mailability of the knees
 - Standing and sitting positions

Pedagogy:

- Suzuki: “Rest Position” → “Butterfly” → Small step backward with the right foot → Weight is placed on the left foot
 - In sitting position, student sits in the right corner of the chair; the right leg is on the side of the chair with the ball of the right foot on the floor and the heel off the floor
- Rolland: “Rest Position” → “V Position” → Small step forward with the left foot → Weight is distributed between two feet → “Marshmallow Knees” (check by moving up and down → “The Balance” (check by moving back and forth)
 - In sitting position, student sits in the front part of the chair; both feet are on the floor and left foot is slightly forward
- Havas: “Rest Position” → “V Position” → Step sideways with the left foot → Tilt hips inward slightly → Weight is placed on the imaginary “Third Leg” that is located between two legs and it connects the end of the spine to the ground
 - In sitting position, student sits in the front part of the chair; both feet are on the floor and hips are tilted inward

Steps for establishing proper instrument hold

What to teach?

- Placement of the instrument (where?)
- Direction of the instrument (left/right/center?)
- Level of the instrument (parallel to the floor/slighting downwards or upwards?)
- Inclination of the instrument (towards the lowest string/highest string/in center?)

Pedagogy: Say the chant while performing suggested movements.

Hey Diddle, Diddle Chant

Hey Diddle, Diddle the cat has a fiddle

(bring instrument above the head)

It sits on my shoulder to play

My chin goes wiz, lean into my neck, and my head goes plop,

Now I play my fiddle whole day,

HOORAY!

(Cross hands on your belly and hold violin for 10 counts with no hands support.)

Sing following song while supporting instrument with the chin and shoulder.

Now I Hold my Violin Song

(Sing on tune of Twinkle song while holding violin)

Now I hold my violin with my shoulder and my chin.

Nose and scroll are in the line, that's just mighty, that's just fine

Now I hold my violin, with my shoulder and my chin!

Cello Hold Steps Chant
*Cello feet, edge of my seat,
tall as a tree, and looking up at me.*

Instrument hold exercises:

- “Left Arm Around”
- “Down and Up”
- “Flaying Birds”
 - *Case Walk* (Rolland)

Steps for establishing proper left-hand setup

What to teach?

- Placement of the left hand on the instrument’s neck in 1st position (consider using stickers)
- Placement and shape of the left thumb in the relationship to other left-hand fingers (slightly different on each of the four string instruments)
- “No squeezing” and the mailability of the left thumb
- “Double contact” to be maintained between the instrument’s neck and left hand. That is, between the base of index finger and middle point of the upper digit of the left thumb. “Double contact” principle is applicable from 1st to 4th position on upper string instruments. “Single contact” is applicable for lower strings. That is, between the right thumb and the instrument’s neck.
- Open space between the left thumb and the 1st finger (“V” shape)
- “Left-Hand Frame”: Octave space between the 1st and 4th fingers
- Alignment between left-hand knuckles, back of the left hand, wrist, and left elbow (“Bird Wings” for cello and double bass)
- Movable left elbow

- *Basic Vitamins for Establishing Left-Hand Shape* (Rolland sequence)

Pedagogy: Sing the song while performing suggested movements.

Stop Sign Song

(left-hand in “stop-sign” position (1st position) with palm facing student’s face;
sing the song on the tune of
the *Song of the Wind* while performing suggested movements)

*Make a stop sign just like this
Move your elbow with the twist
Hover fingers nice and round
Open fingers without sound.*



Don't Squeeze

(hand in 1st position; say the chant while moving the left-hand thumb alongside the instrument’s neck; also “tap” with the right-thumb; do the same to prevent squeezing from the base of 1st finger)

*Don't squeeze bees please!
Don't squeeze bees please!*

To ensure further development of proper left-hand shape in beginning students practice *Basic Vitamins for Establishing Left-Hand Shape* (Rolland sequence).

Shuttles

Starting in first position with “cupcake fingers” placed in between two strings move fingers, hand, and arm up and down the fingerboard eight times.

Make sure that thumb is moving along with fingers.

Strumming

With the 4th finger (left-hand pinkie) strum strings from G to E string eight times. Be gentle and don’t pull strings too hard. Make sure that left elbow is moving.

Tapping

Left hand and thumb are in “saddle position.” Left-hand fingers hover over the fingerboard. The tips of left-hand fingers are touching the upper left bout of the instrument. Initiate movement from the left wrist and tap various rhythms on the upper left bout of the instrument. This exercise is considered to be the first pre-exercise for vibrato.

Two Plucking Songs

Each and Every Ant

(Pluck each string with the 4th finger (left-hand pinkie) three times → move elbow to the next string before plucking)

Each, each, each and every (only violins)
Ant, ant, ant, digging in the (violas and cellos join)
Dirt, Dirt all the way to
Georgia, Georgia, Georgia all the way to
China, China, China (only violas and cellos)

Hot Cross Buns Bass Line

(Pluck each string with the 4th finger (left-hand pinkie) → move elbow to the next string before plucking)

C-G-C Stomp (violas and cellos)
C-G-C Stomp
C-C-G-G
C-G-C Stomp

G-D-G Stomp (violins, violas, and cellos)
etc.
D-A-D Stomp
etc.
A-E-A Stomp (violins)
etc.

Steps for establishing proper bow hold

What to teach?

- The correct placement of the right-hand thumb on the “frog’s nose” and correct shape (“Bent Thumb” vs. “Clever Thumb”)
- The correct placement of each right-hand finger
- The shape of right-hand fingers
- The space between right-hand fingers
- The function of each finger in the bow hold
- Basic bow exercise

Pedagogy

With erasable marker or pen draw a “middle line” on two middle fingers (in the middle of the middle joint of middle and ring fingers). Add the “corner dot” to the right thumb. That is, to the “corner” of the thumb that is close to index finger.

“Nine Steps for Bow Hold” by Applebaum

1. Hold the bow in the left hand with the bow hair facing you. Arm is straight and parallel to the floor.
2. Wiggle with the right thumb away from the bow.
3. Bring “bent thumb” to the “frog’s nose.” Point of touch is in the “corner dot.”
4. Place “middle line” of the middle finger right across the bent thumb.
5. Place ring finger next to middle finger and “hug” the bow.
6. Next, for upper strings, place “curved” pinkie on the inner side of the bow octagon. For lower strings wrap index finger around the bow stick (for French bow hold on double basses).
7. For upper strings, wrap index finger around the bow stick. For lower strings, wrap pinkie around the stick and do couple of “tall and low” movements.
8. Insert right hand fingers in between fingers to ensure appropriate space between right-hand fingers.
9. “Fly”: Extend right arm in front of the body and while maintaining proper bow hold count until 10. Repeated steps 1-9 several times.

Basic bow exercises

Feet are in “Playing Position.” Bow is in the “Fly Position” and placed in the open palm of the left-hand. This is called “Station Position” or “Safety Position.”

Up Like a Rocket

Up like a rocket, down like a rain.
(straight arm goes up and down)

Back and forth like a choo, choo train
(straight arm goes left and right)

Round and round like a great, big sun
(straight arm makes big circles)

Up to my head, just for fun
(arm/hand/bow go to top of the head)

Down to the station just to check my pinkie TAP, TAP, TAP
and Mr. Bent Thumb BOP, BOP, BOP.
(bow back in “Station Position”; on TAP, tap with “Curved Pinkie”; on BOP, touch the “bent” on thumb.)

The Wheels on the Bus

The wheels on the bus go round and round..

The people on the bus go up and down...

The doors on the bus open like this..

*The windshield whippers go like this... (on this verse bow is in the
“Station Position.”*

*The spider on the bus goes like this....(add this verse later; “spider” first
learns how to go up and down the bow stick when bow is in vertical
position then when bow is in horizontal position, which is little more
difficult)*

Circle, Circle

(sing on the tune of *Allegro* song from Suzuki Book 1)

*Circle, circle carefully we circle,
up and down and circle all around.*

(Straight arm makes big circles to the right.)

*Circle, circle carefully we circle,
up and down and circle all around.*

(Straight arm makes big circles to the left.)

Keep your thumb bent, keep your tip straight

(Straight arm is going left and right)

Keep your circle go aroooouuuuuund.

(Straight arm makes big and slow circle; slow like in fermata)

*Circle, circle carefully we circle,
up and down and circle all around.*

(Straight arm makes big circles to the right.)

Steps for establishing proper bow hold when holding the instrument

Hanging Bow

(instrument in “Playing Position”; left hand in “Middle Position” with left-hand pinkie being “free”)

Hang the bow on left-hand pinkie.

Make “Bunny Bow Hold” away from the bow.

Bring “Bunny Bow Hold” to the upper quarter of the bow stick and slide down to the frog.

*With the bow still “hanging” on the left-hand pinkie,
connect “Bent Thumb” with the frog’s nose.*

Place two middle fingers right across the thumb and hug the bow.

Place the pinkie on the top part of the stick.

*Wrap pointer around the stick.
Take bow off the left-hand pinkie.
Go to “Fly Position.”*

For cellos and double basses:

Same steps as for upper strings instruments except that students hold the bows in the middle part of the bow stick with left hand.

Steps for placing the bow onto the string

Landing Bow

(instrument in “Playing Position”; bow in “Fly Position”)

Tick-

(Bow is vertical position with bow hand being elevated to around belly position.)

Tock-

(Bow angled towards the instrument at around 45 degrees.)

Land to the highest string, in the middle part of the bow, and between the bridge and fingerboard.

(Bow silently “lands” on the string like the airplane-from above.)

*Roll to the A string (or whatever string needed)
(roll the elbow/arm/hand/bow to desired string)*

Repeat several times.

After you learn how to safely land in the middle part of the bow, practice landing in all parts of the bow.



PART 3

It is very important to provide string beginners with an extended period of time when they can engage in learning to play instruments without reading the music. This is called “learning by rote.” Using Suzuki Book 1 repertoire (up to *Perpetual Motion*; pieces need to be taught in D major) for starting string beginners by rote is engaging and transferable rote repertoire. School orchestra teachers are required and expected to teach music reading from the onset of the instruction. At first, music reading shall be taught separately from playing. Once students gain basic playing skills and they can play with controlled intonation, their music reading knowledge and skills shall be transferred onto the instruments.

First Pieces and Songs to be Played by Rote

Open and Close

(practice at first with no violin and bow; then have violin in playing position, bow in the middle and moving from middle to the tip while opening the forearm ONLY)

Open the gate in the morning, children are coming to play.

Close the gate in the morning children want to stay.

Open the gate in the evening children have to go.

Close the gate in the evening, that's how we move our bow!

Alternative first 'moving on the string' bow song:

(start in tip and move as chant suggest)

Up like a rocket

Down like the rain

Back and forth like a choo choo train

Round and round like a great big son

Up to my head just for fun

Down to the station

Just to check you Curved Pinkie and Mr. Bent Thumb

Pre-Twinkle Songs

Ta-ka Ta-ka Ti, Ti Concerto on D and A String



Stop!

(repeat this rhythmic pattern four times)

Flower Song

A	O O O O	O O	1 1 1 1	1 1	O O O O	O O	
D							O O O O O

See the little flo-wer, growing in the gar-den. See the little flo-wer, yellow, blue and pur-ple.



***Monkey Song (violins & violas)**

A	
D	3333 3 3 2222 2 2 1111 1 1 0000 0 0

See the little mon-key, going down the lad-der. He is going down to... pick his pink ba nan-na

A	
D	0000 0 0 1111 1 1 2222 2 2 3333 3 3

See the little mon-key, going up the lad-der. He is going up to... eat his pink ba nan-na

Monkey Song (cellos)

A	
D	4444 4 4 3333 3 3 1111 1 1 0000 0 0

See the little mon-key, going down the lad-der. He is going down to... pick his pink ba nan-na

A	
D	0000 0 0 1111 1 1 3333 3 3 4444 4 4

See the little mon-key, going up the lad-der. He is going up to... eat his pink ba nan-na

These two songs shall be practiced in three ways:

- With slow stops (two beats of rest between finger changes)
- Fast stops (one beat of rest between finger changes)
- No stops (no rest between finger changes)

Important: Students, be aware of movements of both elbows before string crossings.

- Stop and roll both elbows to the new string and then play

Six Steps of Twinkle (violins, violas, & cellos)

1. D play- Repeat 4 times

A	
D	O O O O O O O

*Step one is the same for violins, violas, and cellos.

--Roll to A--

2. A play – Repeat 4 times

A	O O O O O O O
D	

--Roll between strings--

3. D to A play-Repeat 4 times

A		O O O O O O O	
D	O O O O O O O		O O O O O O O

4. A 1 A play-Repeat 4 times

A	O O O O O O O	1 1 1 1 1 1 1	O O O O O O O
D			

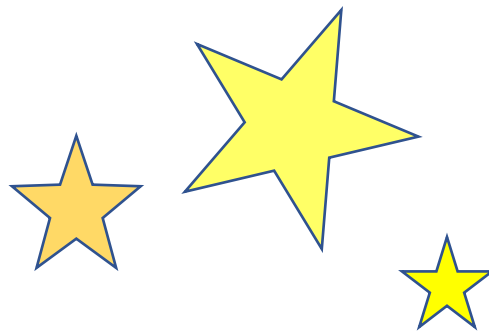
5. 3 2 1 D (cellos 4 3 1 D)- Repeat 4 times

A				
D	3333 3 3	2222 2 2	1111 1 1	0000 0 0

6. A 3 2 1 play (cellos A 4 3 1)-repeat 4 times

A	0000 0 0			
D		3333 3 3	2222 2 2	1111 1 1

Play A, plop 3 fingers on the D string simultaneously, then roll to the D string (“finger, bow, then we go”)



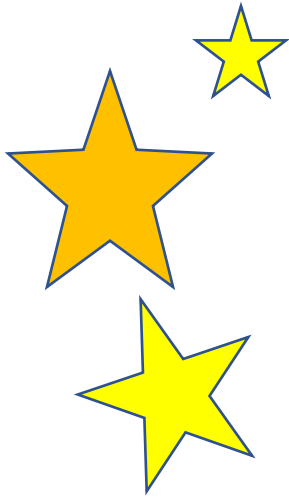
Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

Learning Points for Twinkle Variations A, B, C, D & E

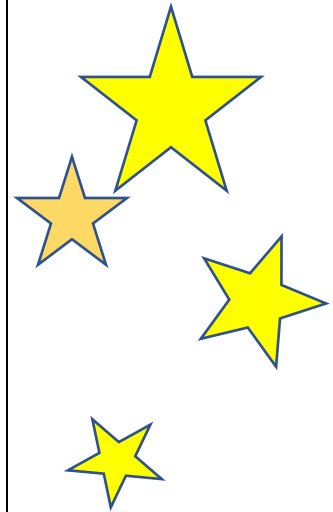
Left Hand	Right Hand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No squeezing • First finger on A string on the correct finger marker • Simultaneous placement of 3 or 4 fingers on D String on correct finger markings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of the upper middle part of the bow (or middle part) • “Hugging” the string (“Catch the String”) • Bow strokes: détaché, staccato, and martelé

Form: A-B-A (parts taught separately, then put together and used for Mix Up Twinkle Game)

Step One: Sing the Song



*Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky
Twinkle, twinkle little star
How I wonder what you are*



Suzuki's Rhythmic Variations

A. Ta-ka Ta-ka Ti, Ti



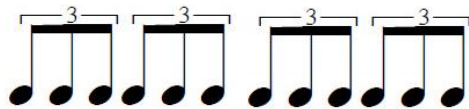
B. Ti – Ti Hmm Ti – Ti – Ti Hmm Ti – Ti – Ti



C. Ti Ta Ka, Ti Ta Ka



D. Tri-o-la, Tri-o-la



E. Ta-ka-ta-ka, Ta-ka-ta-ka



Part A

Violins & violas:

A		00000 O 0	1111 1 1	0000 O O
D	0000 O O			

A				
D	3333 3 3	2222 2 2	1111 1 1	0000 O O

Cellos:

A		00000 O	1111 1 1	0000 O O
D	0000 O O			

A				
D	4444 4 4	3333 3 3	1111 1 1	0000 O O

Part B

Violins & violas:

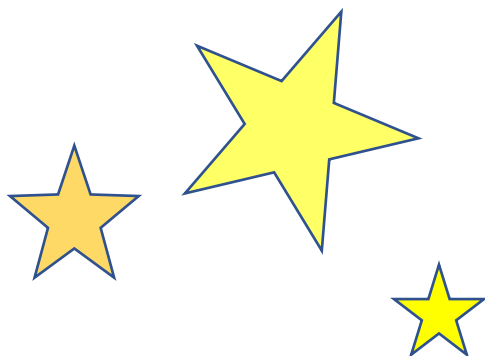
A	O O O O O O			
D		3 3 3 3 3 3	2 2 2 2 2 2	1 1 1 1 1 1

A	O O O O O O			
D		3 3 3 3 3 3	2 2 2 2 2 2	1 1 1 1 1 1

Cellos:

A	O O O O O O			
D		4 4 4 4 4 4	3 3 3 3 3 3	1 1 1 1 1 1

A	O O O O O O			
D		4 4 4 4 4 4	3 3 3 3 3 3	1 1 1 1 1 1



A B A: Whole Twinkle Song (violins & violas)

A		OOOOO O 0	1111 1 1	OOOO O O
D	OOOO O O			

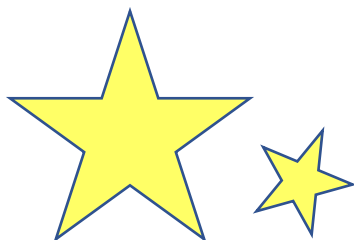
A				
D	3333 3 3	2222 2 2	1111 1 1	OOOO O O

A	OOOO O O			
D		3333 3 3	2222 2 2	1111 1 1

A	OOOO O O			
D		3333 3 3	2222 2 2	1111 1 1

A		OOOOO O 0	1111 1 1	OOOO O O
D	OOOO O O			

A				
D	3333 3 3	2222 2 2	1111 1 1	OOOO O O



Twinkle Theme

Learning Points

- Right hand: bow speed & using lower middle part of the bow (stopped bows)
- Left hand: same skills as in Variations

Formula for Learning Bowing:

- Use “caveman bow hold” in instrument hand.
- Place right-hand index finger on stick and singing the “bow tune” while moving right-hand index finger in the way that Bowing Tune suggests.
- Do the bowing on open D or A string.

Bowing Tune

Q Q Q Q Q Q S _____ Q Q Q Q Q Q S _____
 Q Q Q Q Q Q S _____
 Q Q Q Q Q Q S _____
 Q Q Q Q Q Q S _____ Q Q Q Q Q Q S _____

* Q stands for “Quick” bow movement, S stand for “Slow” bow movement