



RAINBOW GUITAR

Teacher Notes

General notes

The colours

In this first “Rainbow Guitar” book the pupil learns to play on 3 strings only: 4th, 3rd and 2nd. Each of these strings is given a colour, and the notes on the stave are coloured accordingly.

The coloured notes make the stave a friendlier place and help the beginner pupil to make the link between what things look like on the stave and what they feel like on the guitar.

In the very earliest open string pieces, the colours give the pupil all the information needed to find the right notes. As the fretted notes are added, the colours immediately help the pupil to the correct string, and he/she then has to use the stave lines to make a simple 2-way decision: “open string or fretted note?”

In this way the key concepts of “on the line” vs “in the space” can be learned and absorbed and the pupil is immediately reading from the stave, but without the overload of information that so often leads to frustration, a search for alternative notations or even giving up altogether.

The eventual transition to reading “black notes” will need some skilful help from the teacher, but pupils generally find it straightforward once they have acquired basic confidence in their reading skills and have already learned some of the typical finger patterns on the instrument.

Mixed-ability accompaniment parts

The book is designed for group teaching as well as 1-1. Within any group there will be stronger and weaker pupils and the accompaniment parts reflect this. Some are at the same difficulty level as the main tune. Some (marked EZ) are distinctly easier than the main tune. Others (marked ADV) may contain notes which are covered only later in the book and will be suitable for quicker learners.

The accompaniments are printed in black in order to encourage pupils to start reading and playing “without the colours”.

Of course, there is a lot of scope for adding further accompaniments including chord parts. Chord symbols as such are deliberately not included in this book - because many beginner pupils then start to confuse chord names with note names. However, all the pieces can be harmonised with very simple chords.

Some of the accompaniment parts use only G and D strings. For a fuller group sound in a concert, you could tune down one of the pupils' lowest strings (string 5 to G, string 6 to D) which would give him/her an easy way to double the accompaniment part an octave lower.

Posture and hand shapes

Generally the illustrations are based on classical guitar positions. For reasons of space and simplicity the alternative ways of holding the guitar are not illustrated, but obviously you could discuss and cover these with the pupil according to your own teaching style.

Right hand technique

In this book, the thumb stroke is learned first, and the pupil is able to stick to this one simple plucking technique while he/she masters the basics of the fingerboard and stave. All the music in the book is chosen and designed to be suitable for this approach. The first string is avoided altogether for now, as the fingertips need to rest here to begin with.

However, the music can also be played with any number of right hand techniques, and abler and more adventurous pupils can be encouraged to explore these.

- Much of the music can be comfortably played with alternating index and middle fingers (im).
- Some pieces (especially the song accompaniments e.g. on p 15) – could be plucked with thumb and index finger (pi) (free stroke).
- All the music is suitable for plectrum playing. There are illustrations of plectrum hold on p 28. As far as pick direction is concerned, you could show pupils either of two simple approaches: EITHER “downstrokes throughout” OR “downstrokes for crotchets and minims, down-up for pairs of quavers”.

Page by page notes

Open strings

From p 6 to p 10 pupils should focus on:

- making a clean sound by striking the string lightly and without “hooking” the thumb underneath it
- keeping a steady pulse with two note values
- being able to pluck and change strings while keeping eyes on the page

P6

A short reading task is followed by the first invitation to the pupil(s) to compose. There are short composition tasks throughout the book. Most pupils respond well to these, as long as there is plenty of input and modelling from the teacher – always be prepared to “go first” and show the pupils the sort of thing which they could do.

This task could also take the form of an aural game - as structured or unstructured as you please. In a 1-1 situation, you could get the pupil to imitate your rhythms on a different string. With a group, you could have 1 pupil on each string - they take turns to originate and imitate rhythms.

If pupils are really having problems getting creative, try eliciting the names of their favourite foods and finding rhythms from these. This has never been known to fail!

P7-8

Though the notes now appear on the stave, the pupil does not have to consciously learn the stave position of each note for the time being – the colours do all the work.

Notes are named for the first time - though you could continue referring to colours rather than note names at this stage.

You could try asking a pupil or class why the green notes are higher up on the stave, or blue notes lower down - this could lead to a discussion of pitch and perhaps a game where you play one of the open strings and they name it with eyes closed.

P9/10 Song accompaniments

Song accompaniments are a recurring feature in the book. The first ones use open strings only.

Notice the melody is in grey because there is no need for the pupil to read it at this stage.

Pupils may enjoy singing the songs as well – or you could sing them. Or they can just as well be done as instrumentals. As long as the pupils are practicing the key accompaniment skills – counting and keeping a steady pulse – it really does not matter.

The word “pulse” is not used as such in the book but this would be an obvious time to talk about “rhythm vs. pulse” with pupils.

There may be other instrumentalists available – e.g. siblings or classmates who play recorder or violin – who could play the melody with guitar accompanying. If you are playing the melody parts on guitar, they could well be played an octave higher than written.

Fretting with 2nd finger

From p 11 to p 15 pupils should focus on

- building a good left hand shape and the ability to fret a note cleanly
- learning note names on red string
- looking harder at the stave to distinguish “on the line” from “in the space”

P11

You can return to this simple page at any time for a warm-up once learned. Each time a new fretted note is learned, there is a similar page and these pages can be used in any combination (see blue box at bottom).

P12

The best time to learn the position for the left thumb is while learning the “A” note on string 3, as the thumb is directly opposite the fretting finger.

Pupils always need lots of reminding to keep their thumb in this place and keep it still – at first it does not feel like a natural thing to do at all! But it is so important. Some teachers even like to put a patch of Velcro on the back of the neck to remind pupils of the thumb position. Certainly it is useful for pupils to imagine such a patch, even if you do not use a real one.

To get pupils to use the tip of the finger and keep the finger fully curved, they can practice tapping with the fingertip “like a woodpecker” first on somewhere on the wood of the guitar and then on the string – essentially practicing hammer-ons. It is good for beginners to focus on the left hand without plucking at the same time with the right - and they enjoy this exercise. They will only manage to produce a clear tapping sound if they curve the finger and tap with the very tip.

P13 and 14

Hopefully self-explanatory. The open-string parts should give welcome relief to pupils who are struggling to fret cleanly. “Big Ben” can be made very easy in a group setting by giving each pupil one bar to play from memory and having them play in turn.

For a change of style and emphasis, pupils might also enjoy “Three Note Ballad” (music and backing track can be downloaded for free from www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php).

P15

These song accompaniments use two note patterns on red and blue strings: G-D and A-D.

If you have not already covered this, you could point out to pupils here that if they have to play an A followed by an open D, followed by another A, they do not need to lift the A finger – in fact they should not do so, because we want all the notes to ring on and overlap each other.

More able pupils could be encouraged to try a new plucking style: index finger plucks red string while thumb plucks blue. However, many pupils will not be ready for this yet, so introduce with caution.

D and E

From p 16 to p 18 pupils should focus on

- fretting cleanly on string 4 (blue)
- learning the positions on the stave for D and E
- moving between strings 3 and 4 with 2nd finger
- string damping

“Finger hopscotch” is an excellent exercise to introduce here. The pupil has to “hop” with the 2nd finger between 3rd and 4th strings. Encourage the pupil to do this without any plucking so that he/she focuses entirely on the left hand. The exercise can be done eyes open or eyes shut.

P16

See comments above for p.11

P17

You could help to bring out the simple rock character of “12 bar blues” by accompanying with E5, A5 and B5 chords on your bass strings.

This also seems like a natural and fun place to learn the art of string damping with the right thumb (see variation). However, only introduce this when the first version is thoroughly mastered.

Thought it is not mentioned in the book, you could also talk here about the idea of making a tune from a riff and creative pupils would enjoy composing their own similar riffs. This ties in with the ostinato work on the next page.

Pupils at this stage in the book might also enjoy “Rainbow Blues” (music and backing track can be downloaded for free from www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php) - there is a written tune for them to play and also some simple suggestions for improvisation.

P18

Short ostinatos are an excellent way to practise and consolidate known notes and finger movements. They are more fun than scales, and more suitable for the particular range of notes being learned at this stage in the book. Also, being short enough to memorise, they give an opportunity to make music away from the music stand and the stave.

Apart from working through the examples on p 18, pupils should be encouraged to make up their own ostinatos, then teach them to each other etc. As the teacher, you can help turn the ostinatos into more complete-sounding pieces of music by improvising melodies over them (they all suggest either G major pentatonic or E minor pentatonic).

The ostinatos could incorporate string damping.

Also notice there is another kind of composition task at the bottom of the page – putting notes to a set rhythm. Get pupils to say or clap the rhythm first, then play on a single note, then try the task. As usual be prepared to give lots of examples yourself.

Fretting with the 1st finger

From p19 to p23 pupils should focus on

- fretting cleanly with the first finger
- reading new notes B and C on the stave
- gradually learning to play tunes which use both 1st and 2nd fingers on the fingerboard

Finger hopscotch

Pupils will need a lot of reminding to stick strictly to the correct fingering, to keep the left thumb still while switching between fingers and not to look at their left hand while playing! Various kinds of “finger hopscotch” games can be used to reinforce this – done without plucking, so the pupil can focus entirely on the left hand. Eyes open or shut.

P19

Remember this can eventually be used in conjunction with p11 and p16. You can return to these pages frequently for quick warm ups. In a group setting, it is quickest to have more than one book open and get pupils to change pages (and strings) in quick succession.

P20 and 21

These pieces are all very effective duets and would make good material for “that first assembly performance”.

Pupils at this stage in the book might also enjoy “ABC Jazz” (music and backing track can be downloaded for free from www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php). There is a written tune to play with lots of switching between 1st and 2nd fingers – also some simple suggestions for improvisation.

P22

Another classic format for a simple composition task – inventing “answers” to set “question” phrases. As usual be prepared to go first: get pupils to play the question phrases repeatedly while you make up a variety of answers.

P22 and 23

Song accompaniments (please note these were adapted and simplified in the 2nd edition).

Notice that the instruction is to make the notes ring on “as much as possible”. Pupils will vary enormously in their ability to keep notes ringing on, and the approach needs to be flexible. These accompaniments are designed to be playable and satisfying without needing to hold down more than one finger at the same time – but for more able pupils, they also make a useful technique builder for this all-important skill.

Fretting with the 3rd finger

From p. 24 – 27 pupils should focus on

- fretting with the third finger (D on string 2 - green)
- reading the new note on the stave - gradually integrating the third finger with the first two fingers
- learning to “leave the previous finger down” when passing to a higher note on same string (e.g. from C to D on string 2)

Again, there are many “finger hopscotch” and tapping exercises that can be used to focus on the left hand without distraction from the right. A good left-hand finger warm up is to alternate between the notes CDCD while holding down first finger the whole time.

In the right-hand department, this might be the right time to introduce your more able pupils to “walking fingers” - striking the strings with alternating index and middle fingers (imim). But it is still fine to play “thumb only”.

P24

Notice that on this page, there are no C notes so that the left hand is not overloaded.

P25

The C note is re-introduced.

P26 - 7

Encourage pupils to learn the rounds by heart.

The final tunes in the book (La Volta and Shepherd's Hey) are quite challenging and would make excellent school concert pieces either played as solos or by a small group - both have mixed-ability parts.

Pupils at or near the end of the book might also enjoy "Two Carols", "The Last Post", "Kerry Polka", and "Fruit Salad" (music can be downloaded for free from www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php). All are arranged with EZ accompaniment parts too.

That's it!

There will be a Book 2 of Rainbow Guitar in due course so if you have any ideas or feedback please let me know!

Meanwhile, pupils should by now be thoroughly prepared to move on to any other guitar tutor book series and progress quickly through it.

Thanks, Hugh Boyde (March 2013)

Extra resources

There are lots of extra pieces available as free downloads from the website: (www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php). Some have accompaniment parts, some have backing tracks available as mp3 downloads, and in some cases there are extra teacher notes showing how to exploit each resource to the full.

The idea is to give pupils

- A larger repertoire using the Rainbow Guitar note range
- Some useful occasional pieces e.g. carols
- An opportunity to explore musical styles in which the pupil can practice embellishing the tune and improvising.