

The Roads Less Traveled: Discovering Alternatives to the Suzuki Method for Young Beginner Violinists

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Objectives: Literacy – Variety – Individuality

Methods Reviewed:

1) **Colourstrings:** European color-coding method with Kodaly philosophy (Geza Szilvay); Moveable-Do based

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds the staff one line and string at a time Opens up music-reading to pre-readers Can start with familiar tunes Can adapt to existing method books Gives “I can do it” accomplishment to kids: 5-year-olds can read music! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available in a North American edition; Euro-centric folk tunes Imported item – very expensive, lengthy lead time Requires teacher effort to adapt or create materials Short-term solution only – must bridge to standard methods

Recommendation from Jane Melin: A great method for teaching music-reading to the youngest beginners, ages 4-7. Contact me for more information on my own adaptation, G'DAE Music (www.gdaemusic.com).

2) **Fiddle Time:** Kathy & David Blackwell, UK. 3-book series with Christmas, Scales and Starter additions.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Starts with open-string tunes that can be played along with CD immediately Introduces notes finger-wise, not string-wise Follows typical finger-position progression (L2, H3, L1); covers 2nd and 3rd positions Playalong CD to reinforce in-tune practicing and learning; variety of backup instruments Variety of musical styles (classical, blues, fiddle, calypso, rock) Christmas book (Level 2-3), Scales books, Starters book; Viola & Cello too; piano accompaniments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a method book – no instructional materials (except in Starters). Use as a repertoire supplement Aside from new-note introduction, the teaching progression is hidden – teacher must note where new concepts are introduced and point them out (rhythms, slurs, dynamics, accents, tremolo, fermatas etc.) “British English” makes scales book a little too foreign Usually mail-order only (printed in U.K.)

Recommendation from Jane Melin: This series supplements almost every method I use with beginners under age 12 because they love the listen-and-play music and the fun colorful books. Great for recital pieces. Well worth encouraging your local music store to keep in stock.

3) **Adventures in Violinland:** 24 books (4 years) developed from a child’s point of view. Moveable-Do based.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students love the pictures and words that accompany each piece. Music is large and easy to read. Very thorough introduction of reading, singing, and playing all intervals from Do to Do’. It feels easy because each learning area is practiced separately. Tear-out page format allows teacher flexibility and fosters mystery and excitement in the student. Student uses a practice binder which simplifies practice and allows the teacher flexibility. Easy to teach without extra training. There are notes to the teacher where needed, right in the books. Adaptable to group instruction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exhaustively thorough. For a student who already knows how to play the piano or other instrument, plan to move quickly through the first two years of books. Written for 4-7 year-old beginners, it can be used for a wider range of ages. However, for students who are 8 and older, consider supplementing with a standard method which teaches note names and standard counting of rhythms. Also, plan to move quickly through the material. No sound recordings. Pieces are quite short for recital use. Difficulty adapting to the student who wishes to join an orchestra. For example, student does not learn low 2nd finger until year 3 books. In this case, use Violinland pieces to supplement a standard method.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent duets and piano accompaniments. • A great introduction to a variety of solo, ensemble, and orchestral literature from baroque to the 20th century. • Many books are adaptable to other standard violin methods, such as the string crossing game (book 1F), Vibrato (2C), Acceleration game (2E), and third position introduction (3D). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late introduction of note names (book 3F from year 3) and key signatures (year 4). I have been introducing note names from the start in my studio, to develop familiarity. • Cost. Each book is \$14.95 at sharmusic.com. Younger students may expect to purchase 3 books a year, older students may buy 6 or more. • Note: I have found that the cost is offset by the level of student motivation, focus on technical development, and diminished time spent in preparation for young students.
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Recommendation from Melanie Kurtzbein: If you teach a lot of young students, it is worth purchasing the set to familiarize yourself with the contents. Then, you can choose what each student needs and purchase only those books. Despite a few limitations, I still find it my go-to for a thorough, fun and inspirational experience with my young students.

4) Mark O'Connor Method

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces American music idioms from the start; musical and cultural histories included • Prepares for improvisation/jazz • Alternative techniques from Book 1 (double stops, slides, syncopation, swing eighths) • Playalong/Demo CD with piano tracks • Engaging music; especially for boys :) • Duets • Piano parts available; chords included for guitar accompaniment • Can receive teacher training and college credit • String Orchestra, viola & cello editions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended for Suzuki-style by-ear teaching. Does not teach music-reading. • Like Suzuki: not a method book, but does contain some piece-specific exercises. Teacher training needed to identify some teaching points. • Only 3 books so far; end of Book 3 similar to end of Suzuki 4 in difficulty • Demo & accompaniment tracks very swift; need slow-downer software to play/practice along. Teacher must decide realistic tempo goals. • Books are pricey due to color graphics and CDs • Complex rhythm patterns more easily introduced to younger students by-ear vs. written music

Recommendation from Jane Melin: A great choice for kids who don't gravitate towards classical music and/or want to learn fiddle/jazz/improv methods. A breath of fresh air for recital selections. Still requires supplementation for theory and written note acquisition.

Leveling Resources:

ASTACAP 11-level syllabus of scales, etudes and repertoire. Foundation Level = Twinkle; Level 10 = first tier of collegiate concertos (Bruch, Mendelssohn). Levels are more fine-grained than the 6-level ASTA repertoire catalogue. Can use their recommended testing program within your studio to track and measure progress and set learning goals.

Mimi Zweig/Dorothy Delay's Violin Repertoire Progression: includes etude books & matches Suzuki books to levels. Online at Wisconsin String Academy.

Find links to all presentation resources at www.jmviolinstudio.com/presentations.htm