Mini-Games for Better Communication between Players

When to Use
1. At the first lesson.
2. Whenever the teacher desires to gain the concentrated attention of each student's eye.

Inner Game
The teacher knows this is how the student learned to walk, run, and skip. No one taught him verbally how and when to flex his knees! She recognizes that, the sooner her students develop the habit of mimicking motions and take pride in responding quickly, the faster progress will be made. One mental picture of a motion or a posture can be worth an hour’s lecture.

This mini-game can serve as an invaluable teaching tool and is especially applicable to class teaching.

Team Tactics
Monkey See, Monkey Do can be played by the entire string class.

Freeze!
Mini-Game 2

Outer Game
When the teacher exclaims "Freeze!" the students know that they are expected to instantly stop moving or playing and to remain perfectly still in their positions. This is a shorter version of “Freeze in your tracks,” a phrase familiar to all youngsters.

The teacher explains that this is a helpful teaching device which will be used occasionally throughout the period of study.

When to Use
Anytime the teacher wishes to call attention to a posture—either correct or incorrect.

Inner Game
The teacher is aware that often a beginning student has the impression she must think of a hundred
concomitant things while playing her cello. This mini-game helps by isolating one detail. If the frozen posture is correct, the teacher will cite it as a good example for the student to remember. If it needs improvement, the teacher will guide the student in making the necessary changes.

This sudden cessation of motion is especially useful in teaching a class of beginners. However, care must be taken that it is not used so often that it becomes disruptive to music making.

**Team Tactics**

Freeze! can also be played by violinists, violists, and bassists.

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**The Magic Dotted Line**

**Mini-Game 3**

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**Outer Game**

With the tip of his index finger skipping over the student’s arm, or whatever part of the body is being emphasized, the teacher says: “Let’s check the magic line—dot, dot, dot.”

**When to Use**

When the teacher wishes to stress particular alignment of the hand or arm.

**Inner Game**

The teacher knows that the image of an invisible dotted line is not only appealing to a youngster but is also helpful in calling attention to a specific form. If the student’s position does not match the magic dotted line, she usually makes an adjustment almost immediately.

This mini-game is most often employed to call attention to the flow of conscious live energy from the body’s trunk to the hands making contact with the fingerboard or bow.

**Team Tactics**

Imaginary dotted lines are helpful in teaching students of any stringed instrument.

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**Take a Photo, Click!**

**Mini-Game 4**

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**Outer Game**

Continually watching for a good exemplary position, at the appropriate moment the teacher exclaims “Freeze!”

“Quick, take a photo. Click! Remember this position—it is excellent! Note how your looks and feels. Hang on to this photo for your film library.”

**When to Use**

Whenever the teacher spots an excellent position that is obviously working well.

**Inner Game**

The teacher realizes that the eye is a most remarkable camera and that the brain is a phenomenal film library. By encouraging the student to take mental photos of selected positions, she is helping him build a superb reference library which is readily available for his home study.

The mental film library will consist of three types of photos: (1) still shots taken after the teacher has posed the student or herself; (2) still shots taken when the subject is in motion, similar to the method used by photographers of fashion models, or a single frame clipped from a motion picture film; and (3) motion pictures of exemplary actions. The subjects may be the student himself, other students, or the teacher.

This mini-game is especially useful in class teaching because it encourages the students to learn from each other. Caution should be taken not to overuse the taking of still photos during the performance of a musical phrase. Also, in the case of certain students, it is advisable to give advance notice that photos will be taken.

**Team Tactics**

Violin, viola, and string bass students can also improve through mental photography.

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**Be a Parakeet**

**Mini-Game 5**

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**Outer Game**

Teacher: “Today I want you to be parakeets! When I play a note or a group of notes, listen carefully and try to mimic the sound much like your parakeet learned to talk.”

After the students imitate the sounds and are complimented on being remarkable parakeets, the teacher explains:

“Now I’m going to let you in on a secret: all fine musicians have developed the technique for mimicking sounds on their instruments. It can be great fun, and it’s challenging.

“We will use this device in most of our lessons to help you learn to play the cello. But you will know that the words ‘Be a parakeet’ are your cue to listen extra carefully and to be unusually good parakeets.”

**When to Use**

1. In one of the first lessons.
2. Anytime the teacher believes that his own playing or singing will serve as a good model for the student.

**Inner Game**

The teacher knows that the imitation of sounds is one of the key pedagogical techniques in the early training of music students and that it is the method nature has provided for teaching a child how
to talk. The reference to parakeets is only one of many ways he will encourage the student to imitate sounds.

Though it is fortunate for the student when her teacher is a fine cellist, the piano, the voice, or another stringed instrument can be used effectively. Of course, the teacher never loses sight of his end goal: as she progresses, the student will learn to express herself and her playing will assume more individual characteristics.

Team Tactics
An emphasis on listening, and developing the ability to mimic, aids every music student.

A Secret Signal
Mini-Game 6

Outer Game
The teacher explains that she expects the students to be very alert and to concentrate during the class period but that there will be moments of relaxation triggered by the words "At ease!"

"We need to work out a secret signal which means 'Attention!' Do you have any suggestions?"

When to Use
In the first or second meeting of any instrumental music class which the teacher has not previously taught.

Inner Game
The teacher's goal is to maintain order and discipline in the classroom. She knows that the students will take pride in remembering and responding to the secret signal and that the chances for its effectiveness will be greater if it is thought up by the class itself.

Team Tactics
Signals are important to every member of the instrumental class.

Skull Practice
Mini-Game 7

Outer Game
Teacher: "A fine cellist is like a good champion athlete. She practices and keeps her body in good working order so her muscles are perfectly coordinated as she runs, jumps, and hits targets. Like all good sports participants, she knows the value of skull practice.

"You do this by thinking through an action before you actually perform it. As you hold your body still, you can almost see and feel it move in your imagination. At the same time you can hear the music in your mind's ear! Let's do some skull practice together now so you will know how to use it when I show you a new technique. It will also help you in your home practice."

When to Use
Anytime, but especially when the teacher believes that the student's improvement in performance skills is not commensurate with the amount of time he practices.

Inner Game
The teacher knows that the sooner the student develops the ability to practice mentally the richer the rewards will be. Not only is this a tremendous timesaver, but the student's accuracy will be greatly improved.

Team Tactics
Skull Practice is a must for every instrumentalist."
Mini-Games for Posture and Instrument Hold

The form of the string player in action, as in any sport or other physical activity requiring coordinated skill and strength, is vital and can either help or hinder his advancement. Yet how can one explain the disparity of positions of the instruments exhibited by professionals? Even the concert-going layperson can discern obvious differences among the cellists within one symphony orchestra.

By stressing the dominant underlying principles which characterize the approach of most fine cellists, even though it often appears that they have little in common, the following mini-games are designed to help the teacher and the student discover the best position for the individual player. Many of the ideas are transferable to the violin, viola, and string bass, as explained under the heading “Team Tactics.” A list of checkpoints for home practice is given at the end of the chapter.

INDIVIDUAL MINI-GAMES

The Elegant Horseback Rider
Mini-Game 8

Outer Game
The teacher gains the concentrated attention of the students by announcing “Monkey see, monkey do” and proceeds to lead them to a good sitting posture for cello playing. As he sits on the front half of his chair, his body will be leaned slightly forward and his feet will be placed apart. He repeats the process with his chair turned sideways to the class so that the students can see the profile of his body.

“Notice, we look like elegant horseback riders on a fox hunt! Our backs are straight, our heads are erect, and our weight is distributed on three points: the balls of our feet and our seat. Take a look. Click!”

When to Use
1. At the first lesson, followed immediately by Mini-Game 9, Jack-in-the-Box, and Mini-Game 10, Fitting the Cello.
2. Anytime the teacher thinks a review is needed.

Inner Game
The teacher knows that it is desirable for a cellist’s body weight to be both balanced and leaned slightly forward. In addition, he recognizes that a person is less likely to develop lower backaches after long sessions with the cello if the body weight is distributed on three supports. Furthermore, he knows that riding a horse is an appealing image to a youngster.

Team Tactics
Good posture is important for all members of the string class. The string bass students, however, must often lean over their instruments in order to reach notes in the higher registers. Though The Elegant Horseback Rider is essentially a cello mini-game, the emphasis on the body weight being balanced on three points also applies to violinists and violists when seated. Besides, how could anyone slump in the presence of such an example?

Jack-in-the-Box
Mini-Game 9

Outer Game
Teacher: “Sit in your chair in such a manner that it will be easy for you to stand up quickly at any moment. Now you will act like a jack-in-the-box. Stand! . . . Sit! . . . Stand! . . . Sit!”

The student will automatically find a good sitting position for playing the cello. Her body will be tilted slightly forward, with its weight balanced on the balls of the feet and the seat. The feet will soon shift to a position so she can rise quickly without moving them.

When to Use
1. At the first lesson, followed immediately by Mini-Game 10, Fitting the Cello.
2. Whenever the teacher notices that the student’s body appears to be off-balance, slumped or leaned backward, or in a sprawled position.

Inner Game
The teacher knows that this mini-game forces the student to assume the correct balanced position for playing the cello. In fact, it is impossible to stand up quickly if the
body is slumped or leaned backward or if the legs and feet are sprawled out.

**Team Tactics**

*Jack-in-the-Box* is for every member of the string class seated in a chair.

**Fitting the Cello**

Mini-Game 10

**Outer Game**

Teacher: "Continue sitting like you did in *Jack-in-the-Box* while I fit the cello to you. Don't move." The teacher then proceeds to place the instrument in the proper position, adjusting the end pin as necessary for each student.

**When to Use**

1. At the first lesson, immediately after Mini-Game 8, *The Elegant Horseback Rider*, and Mini-Game 9, *Jack-in-the-Box*.
2. Anytime the teacher thinks a review would be beneficial.

**Inner Game**

The teacher remembers that the axiom "Fit the instrument to the player—not the player to the instrument" can prevent many problems. Although the teacher's mental image of a professional cellist will serve as her chief guide while fitting the cello to the student, the following seven checkpoints are helpful:

1. Is the C string peg somewhat near the left ear? (See Mini-Game 14, *Tickle the Ear*.)
2. Is there some space between the neck of the cello and the student's left shoulder? (See Mini-Game 13, *The Chipmunk*.)
3. Does the fingerboard look like |, not like /, when the teacher faces the student directly? Can the student's left hand reach both ends of the fingerboard with grace and ease? (See Mini-Game 23, *The Skier*.)
4. Does the student appear to be cradling the cello, rather than clamping it with his knees? (See Mini-Game 11, *Cradling the Cello*.)
5. Is the cello turned slightly to the right so that the front on the A string side is exposed to the player?
6. Is the route clear so that the student will be able to bow on the A and C strings? (See Mini-Game 17, *Clearing the Air Corridors*.)
7. Will the student be able to bow without straightening his arm?

Aware that she cannot bombard the student with all the above details at the first lesson, the teacher primarily wants the student to take home a clear mental picture of himself with the cello, a start on a good position, and a feeling of success.

The teacher should not be surprised if the student veers his neck and head to the right while the cello is being fitted to him. This feeling of the need to dodge is commonplace. When this occurs, the teacher simply removes the cello and begins again, making certain that the end pin is to the left of the centerline of the player's body.

If this mini-game gives difficulty, it is possible that the student's cello is not of the appropriate size, and it should be changed if at all possible.

The teacher may wish to introduce Mini-Game 128, *Handle with Care*, at this time.

**Team Tactics**

Though this is definitely a cello mini-game, the axiom cited in its inner game applies to all stringed instruments.

**Cradling the Cello**

Mini-Game 11

**Outer Game**

Teacher: "When you play your cello, it helps to think of it as being cradled gently with your legs. This will keep it stable, yet you will be able to turn it when necessary."

**When to Use**

1. At the first lesson to help establish a good position and approach.
2. Whenever the student appears to be clamping his cello with his knees, or if it looks unstable.

**Inner Game**

The teacher recognizes that clamping a cello is an unnecessary waste of energy and that the locking of the knees can restrict the freedom of elbow movement. In addition, many cellists believe that it prevents the cello wood from vibrating as freely as possible.

On the other hand, if a cello feels unstable, the player will tend to grab it with her left hand, a habit detrimental to building a facile and expressive technique. Also, it must be recognized that a
moving target is more difficult to hit!

The word “cradle” seems to have a magical effect on most students and helps them achieve the desired stance. This approach also aids the player in turning the cello slightly when playing a lengthy passage on one of the outer strings.

**Team Tactics**

Time out for all players except cellists.

**Hm-m-m**

Mini-Game 12

**Outer Game**

The teacher overlaps his arms on his chest and breathes out a deep sigh—a symbol of great comfort and relaxation. The student imitates him by hugging her cello and sighing audibly. Music making is resumed immediately unless, of course, it is the first lesson.

**When to Use**

1. In a beginning lesson to help establish a good position.
2. Anytime the teacher perceives one of the following: the student’s body appears to be off-balance; there is a lack of unity between the player and her instrument; the body is twisted. With one shoulder farther forward than the other; one or both shoulders are elevated; or there is a hint of tension in the student’s body.

**Inner Game**

The teacher knows that this is a relaxed and balanced position. It automatically eliminates any twist in the body, lowers the shoulders to a natural position, and throws the body weight slightly forward, which will help in tone building and preventing tension in the hands and arms.

Also, this gesture gives the student a feeling that her body and her cello are one unit and that the instrument is in no way a foreign object.

**Team Tactics**

Hm-m-m is for cello and string bass students only.

**The Chipmunk**

Mini-Game 13

**Outer Game**

Teacher: “Is there room for a little chipmunk to walk between your shoulder and the neck of your cello?”

Without moving his trunk, the student waves his right hand between the cello neck and his left shoulder to show that there is clearly enough room for the chipmunk.

**When to Use**

1. In beginning lessons to help establish a good position and to serve as a checkpoint for the student in his home practice.
2. Whenever the teacher notices that the cello neck is too close to the student’s left shoulder; the left elbow is folded at an acute angle; or the left shoulder and upper arm are pulled back.

**Inner Game**

The teacher recognizes the importance of having some space between the cello neck and the student’s body. If the instrument is held too near the player’s shoulder, his left elbow will be forced to fold up at such an acute angle that it will feel tight and uncomfortable. Consider, for example, this posture without an instrument. No one would choose to place her left hand on her own left shoulder, or even an inch or two from it, for more than a few seconds!

Since it is the nature of human beings, especially children, to seek comfort, the student will unconsciously swing her left shoulder back in order to widen the angle of her elbow. Although this incorrect position provides instant relief and may not hamper the performance of a simple first position piece without vibrato, the player is twisted and off-balance. Thus, many technical problems will manifest themselves later, particularly those related to shifting and intonation.

When using this faulty posture the player will produce a sound which falls into one of two categories:

1. A weak tone, which results from a restriction in the flow of energy from the body’s trunk. (See Mini-Game 6a, **Pulling through a Milkshake**.)
2. A harsh tone, which results because the player, in an effort to achieve more volume, will exert the wrong kind of pressure on the
bow stick. A more beautiful tone is created by allowing the energy to flow through the hand from the ultimate source, the trunk.

Unfortunately the very person who conceives of a big tone and is dissatisfied with a weak sound will be the one most likely to be trapped in the second category. Though the teacher knows that pressure on the bow stick is a necessary ingredient of a big beautiful tone, he recognizes that its source not only affects the tone quality but is invisible to the student. However, the twisted shoulders are highly visible and are much easier to prevent or to correct at an early stage, before the habit has become ingrained.

Also, the teacher is aware that the young student's arm will grow; thus the bend at her elbow will become tighter. If the teacher has not provided enough room for the arm to grow, the student will surely seek relief by pulling back her left shoulder and upper arm.

**Team Tactics**
This mini-game is for cello students only.

**Tickle the Ear**
Mini-Game 14

**Outer Game**
Teacher: “Check to see if the C string peg of your cello is within a few inches of your earlobe. In fact, it might be so close that it tickles.”

**When to Use**
1. In a beginning lesson to help establish a good position and to serve as a checkpoint in home practice.
2. Anytime the teacher observes that the cello is placed either too high or too low in relation to the student’s body.

**Inner Game**
The teacher recognizes that the student needs some tangible checkpoints to use in his home practice. Since the position will vary slightly from individual to individual, the teacher may choose to change the title of this mini-game.

In any event she will take care that the cello is not held too high, thereby forcing the player to raise his hand and arm unduly in order to play in first position. The teacher is aware of the need for the live weight to flow through the arm and hand so that the fingers seem to sink into the fingerboard. This sensation is more difficult to acquire in the initial stages if the student approaches the fingerboard from below. Instead, if he raises his hand and forearm higher than the fingerboard, then lowers them into the correct position, he can easily acquire the feeling of sinking. Conversely, if the cello is held too low the player’s left elbow will feel cramped.

The teacher is particularly aware that a little girl who is bombarded with the remark, “Your instrument is bigger than you are!” even by total strangers on the street is often prone to hold her cello too high because of the appeal of this attention-getting image. Since it is commonplace to interchange the C and G string pegs, note should be made that this mini-game is intended to refer to the lower of the two pegs on the side of the scroll closest to the player.

**Team Tactics**
*Tickle the Ear* is for cello students only.

**Look, No Hands!**
Mini-Game 15

**Outer Game**
The teacher stretches his arms straight out at both sides, level with his shoulders, and exclaims: “Look, no hands!” While sitting with her cello, the student silently mimics the teacher, thereby proving to herself and to him that she does not need her hands to hold the instrument.

**When to Use**
1. In the first lesson to help establish a good position.
2. Anytime the teacher notes that the student's left hand is supporting the cello; the body is twisted, with the left shoulder pulled back; or the body appears off-balance.

**Inner Game**
This gesture demonstrates to both the teacher and the student that the instrument is securely supported by the end pin and the student's legs cradling the cello. One needs only to recall some of the acrobatic passages from the major concerti the student will perform in the future to recognize this important concept of a free left hand.