

# TinkerTar

**TinkerTar** is an excellent way to introduce stringed instruments and simple musical concepts to children in your classroom. With only one string, its simplicity enables a helpful approach for beginners and young children who may find a full guitar or ukulele daunting.

## Why is starting with one string beneficial?

- 1. Simplified learning:** Focusing on only one string allows beginners to concentrate on developing basic skills such as finger placement, picking technique, and coordination. By reducing the complexity of the instrument, the TinkerTar helps students build a solid foundation before moving on to more complicated instruments.
- 2. Building confidence:** Playing melodies on one string is very simple. This can help beginners experience early success, inspiring confidence and a sense of accomplishment.
- 3. Developing ear training:** With one string, beginners can develop their ear-training skills. They can learn to recognize different pitches and intervals while learning simple melodies. Furthermore, the TinkerTar is fretless (just like a violin). This will help students hone their ear-training even more as they learn to play in tune.
- 4. Understanding musical concepts:** Starting with one string allows beginners to focus on and grasp fundamental musical concepts such as rhythm, timing, and melody.
- 5. Visual and auditory feedback:** When children start with only one string, they can clearly see and hear the results of their actions. This helps them understand the relationship between finger placement and the sound produced.

## Materials Needed

- TinkerTar, the enclosed strap, and accompanying songbook
- Phillips-head screwdriver
- A tuner or reference for finding pitch

## Preparation

Before each group class, you'll want to tune your TinkerTars to the same pitch. We recommend tuning the TinkerTars so that the open string plays an E. Turning the tuner clockwise tightens the string and raises the pitch. If the tuner is not tightening the string, use a Phillips-head screwdriver to tighten the screw on the back of the tuning peg.

## Introducing the TinkerTar in a Classroom Setting

Have your students sit in a circle on the floor as you reveal the instrument to the class. Play a recognizable melody for the students (we recommend "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star") and then start a discussion. What questions do the students have? This is also a great time to discuss new vocabulary and go over the parts of the instrument (listed in the book). Play another short melody and see what the students notice.

## Sample Questions to Ask the Students

- How did sound come out of the instrument?
- How many hands are needed to play a TinkerTar? Why do you think so?
- What is the purpose of the lines and circles on the TinkerTar?

- What happens when you push the string down onto a circle and pluck it?
- What happens when you push down higher up the neck?
- Why is it important to be careful with our musical instruments?

## A Note for the Teacher about Frets

When looking at the “Getting to know your TinkerTar” diagram in the book, you’ll notice that the lines on the fingerboard are called *frets*. The Tinkertar is actually a fretless instrument (like a violin). The lines represent where the frets would have been if TinkerTars had frets. When playing a fretted instrument, you push the string down just behind the frets, which is why the color-coded finger-placement markers are located just behind each fret line.

## Getting Started

Pass a TinkerTar to each student, and allow them to explore the instrument on their own. Since you’ve already pre-tuned these TinkerTars, remind them not to turn the tuner.

### 1st Activity: Plucking

- Have your students lay the instruments flat on either the floor or in their laps. Make sure the front of the TinkerTar is facing up, toward the ceiling.
- Demonstrate plucking the string with your thumb or fingers on your dominant hand.
- Have the students pluck their TinkerTars. Make sure their other hand is not touching the string. Each pluck should produce a clean ringing sound of the open string.
- Continue to practice plucking with various rhythms, and try to get the group to pluck in unison. You may find it helpful to sing along while plucking the rhythms. Example: “Da Da DaDaDa”

### 2nd Activity: Holding The TinkerTar

- Have each student hold the TinkerTar so that the front of the instrument is facing away from them and the shoulder of their dominant arm is draped over the body of the TinkerTar. (Refer to the diagram in the TinkerTar book, if needed.)
- Repeat the steps from the previous Plucking activity, and have your students pluck the open string with their dominant hand while the instrument is in proper playing position.
- Continue to play rhythms using just the open string. Repeat this activity until it’s natural for your students to hold the TinkerTar in its proper position and pluck the string.

### 3rd Activity: Changing Pitch

- Demonstrate how the hand that is not the plucking hand is used to push the string down and change the note on your TinkerTar.
- In this exercise, we are going to call the circles on the TinkerTar “frets.” Have your students position their non-plucking hand so that their thumb is resting on the back of the neck and the fingertip of their pointer finger is resting on the string at the 4th fret. When pushing the string onto a fret, make sure their fingers are positioned directly over the circle.
- Have them push the string down onto the 4th fret and pluck. Small adjustments may be needed to get a clean sound. Another way to describe this to your students is to say, “Pinch your fingertip and thumb together,” which will help give adequate pressure to push the string down into the fret.
- Practice alternating between plucking the open string and plucking the string when pushed down at the 4th circle. Continue with this exercise until your students can get a clean sound when pushing the string down and plucking.

#### **4th Activity: Playing a Scale**

- Refer to the “How to Play Your TinkerTar” section in the TinkerTar book.
- Practice playing the short scale with your students.
- Practice the longer scale with your students.
- Because the TinkerTar is fretless, small adjustments in figure position will make changes to the pitch. Work with your students to help them play the scales in tune with proper intonation (accuracy of pitch).

#### **5th Activity: Learning a Song**

- It’s time to teach your students their first song. Have them turn to the first song in the TinkerTar book, which is a 3-note arrangement of “Mary Had a Little Lamb.”
- We recommend learning the song using just one finger (the pointer finger) to hold the string.
- Work on one line at a time with your students. When they can play the line cleanly, move to the next line. Continue until they can play the entire song together.
- We recommend singing along as they play.
- Congratulations! Your students have just played their first song!

#### **Next lessons: Learn More Songs**

- Go at your own pace, and teach your students all the songs in the book. The important thing is that they have fun while learning these melodies.
- There are thousands of songs that can be played on a TinkerTar. Are there songs that you can figure out and teach to your students?
- Lessons teaching additional songs are on the TinkerTar social media channels.

#### **Improvisation with the TinkerTar**

At the end of the music book, there are two pages dedicated to exploring improvisation with the TinkerTar. Simply follow the directions on these pages, and let the students create their own melodies!

#### **Final Note**

Overall, starting on one string provides a structured and manageable approach for children learning guitar. They can develop fundamental skills and gradually progress to more advanced techniques as they become more comfortable and proficient. Starting on one string should be seen as a stepping stone toward playing the full guitar. When your students are ready, introduce them to a ukulele or children’s guitar.