

How Piano Lessons Benefit Young Children

By Cynthia VanLandingham

Piano lessons provide a wide range of benefits to young children. Here are my "Top Five."

1. Piano lessons help preserve and develop children's natural creative abilities. The best analogy of how children learn through music that I've found is from Donald Kroodsma's book "The Singing Life of Birds." Every songbird can be identified by the unique song it sings, but a baby bird has to be taught by its parents to sing the family song. Baby birds, like humans, just 'babble' at first. Mother birds sing the family song over and over to the baby birds as they try to repeat it back. At first, the baby birds are only able to sing back one or two notes, but they gradually learn to sing the whole song. And birds with two voice boxes even learn to sing their own harmony parts! Once baby birds learn the family song, they can start developing their very own songs. Similarly, I encourage students to compose their own music after developing needed skills. In my experience, young children in piano are a lot like baby songbirds!

2. Piano lessons help children perfect their natural learning processes. Music is a language, and children are programmed to absorb languages. Studies have shown that kids can most easily learn new languages when they start at a young age. Piano lessons help children develop the very same skills needed to accomplish language arts, like reading. In piano, students learn how to follow directions, scan written materials, think critically, create solutions and translate writing into action. For example, students must look at each note, measure and phrase and decide how to play each note to make the music come to life. Many children (including my own sons) have become much better readers after starting piano lessons. Further, piano lessons involves an interplay of both right and left brain activity that stimulates neural development.

3. Piano lessons help children learn how to stay focused and achieve goals. Piano lessons help children set specific goals and then work towards reaching these goals. Each new piece of music a student learns requires a specific set of skills and playing habits. To achieve these goals students must learn to stay focused and study each note, measure and phrase to understand how to play the song. In doing this students learn to think critically and creatively as they decide how to make the music come to life. Staying focused over time develops good study habits that become natural. This is important because learning to practice good habits that match their goals shows children how to make their dreams come to life!

4. Piano lessons help children develop courage. It takes courage to face challenges without letting our anxiety and worries get the best of us. Piano lessons help students learn to accept challenges such as learning a difficult song, as well as to perform pieces in front of teachers, friends, and families at recitals. Lessons also help kids learn the importance of keeping a positive perspective despite difficulties. Learning to handle uncertainty and stress in a way that minimizes anxiety and maximizes creativity is a valuable life tool. We all need practice at this!

5. Piano lessons teach children to persevere. A key part of accomplishing anything difficult is not to give up easily. As children grow, piano lessons teach kids to try and then try again if they don't initially succeed. However, as Yoda explained to Luke Skywalker, the objective isn't just trying itself, but accomplishing the desired goal -- "Do or do not, there is no try!" Piano lessons teach students how to adjust their expectations if they can't initially master a tough song or skills, and to tackle these big goals by taking small incremental steps. In the end, just like the baby songbirds that eventually learn to sing, students learn that they can accomplish great things and reach their dreams through careful and consistent effort.

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