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**Reed My Lips: Answers to Improving
Your Beginning Clarinetists**

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“REED MY LIPS!”:

Answers to Improving Your Beginning Clarinetists

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PREFERRED EQUIPMENT

Buffet E11 Clarinet
AW: Vandoren M15 Series 13 or CP: Vandoren 5RV Lyre Mouthpiece
Vandoren 2.5 Reeds
Rovner or Inverted Bonade Ligature
Mouthpiece cap
Silk swab
CP: mouthpiece cushion, reed guard

We place a high priority on students having the preferred equipment. Check students' equipment thoroughly when first starting out and contact the music store or give parents instructions for contacting the music store if something isn't correct or if previously-owned equipment isn't up to standard. Sometimes students will still end up on different equipment after all of these efforts. In this case, we at least try to get students on a preferred mouthpiece and reeds. Should students end up on a different mouthpiece than the recommended one, it is important that the reed strength fits the mouthpiece: the more “open” the facing of the mouthpiece, the softer the reed needs to be, and vice versa.

CARE & MAINTENANCE OF THE CLARINET

- 1) **Learn the names of the clarinet parts and accessories.** Use the proper terminology from the beginning. Hold up each part and identify. Have the students respond with correct names as you hold up each part. **PRO-TIP:** Since the lower and upper joint look similar, have the class identify specifics to tell them apart (CP: “The upper joint has two cork tendons; the lower joint has only one” CP: “The upper joint has a register key; the lower joint has a thumb rest.” AW: “The bottom joint is bigger.”)
- 2) **Have students sit on the floor with cases in front of them.** Show, describe, and stress the importance of carrying/setting down the cased instrument properly (CP: “Protect your precious baby!” AW: “I am so protective of my case that I have a case for my case!”) Demonstrate incorrect ways and have the students identify why these are bad decisions (Ex: Teacher: “Why should we not open our case on our lap?” Students: “Because the case could fall over and spill out all the parts.” Teacher: “Why should we not swing our case?” Student: “It could bang against something.”)
- 3) **Open the case. WARNING!** This is where bad things can happen. Demonstrate FIRST. Caution them about the following: “Is the correct side of the case facing up?” “How fast should we open the case lid?” “Should we start taking things out and exploring?” **“EDU”TAIN MOMENT:** Hype it up! Build some suspense! When demonstrating, unlatch and open slowly. Show your excitement! Once open, sing the “Pure Imagination” song “There is no/place I know/ to compare to my beginner band class!” or bow down and chant “We are not worthy! We are not worthy!” Have them model for fun :).
- 4) **Examine and check their equipment.** Label cases with the students' names. Have students hold up instrument parts. Check for preferred equipment and accessories (take detailed notes of anything that is incorrect). Get rid of unneeded packaging (instrument parts may be wrapped in plastic as well). Label metronomes and reed guards. Place mouthpiece cushions on mouthpieces. Be sure you have trash cans! **PRO-TIP:** This can take a lot of class time and be a little chaotic! Consider having the instruments and accessories ordered and delivered to the school ahead of time. Get some 7th or 8th grade clarinet players to “prep” the cases before the first class. A nice touch is to have the older band kids leave a welcoming note inside the case (it's a fun surprise!).
- 5) **Discuss instrument care and maintenance.** Explain how expensive and fragile the instrument is. Breaking it or not taking appropriate care of it can lead to frustration down the road. Discuss appropriate places to store their instrument (“In a hot car?”, “In the freezer?”) Guide them through how to handle friends and family who would like to “try” their instrument. Demonstrate FIRST how to use cork grease. **WARNING!** Cork grease is just like toothpaste: once it's out the tube, it's hard to get it back in :) A dab will do. Students or teachers can work the cork grease into the corks with their fingers. Brand new cork on tendons tend to be too thick, making it hard for young kids to put together their instruments. Make note

and consider “prepping” with sandpaper ahead of time. Swabbing should be demonstrated and practiced once the instrument is fully assembled. Always start from the bottom through the top. **PRO-TIP:** Silk swabs ONLY!

- 6) **Discuss reed care and maintenance.** #1 Rule: Never touch the tip! Stress the importance of the sacred reed and how it must be protected. (AW: “*The tip is as fragile as a potato chip.*”) Moisten both sides of the reed with the flat side on the tongue. Leave in mouth while assembling the instrument. When done playing, explain the importance of taking off the reed and “wiping” away moisture from the back before carefully putting it back in the reed guard (CP: “*We don’t want fungus in our lungus!*”). Explain the need to “rotate” reeds every day to break them in. Have them label the bottom of the back of the reed with numbers to identify (some like to give them fun names).

ASSEMBLY OF MOUTHPIECE/BARREL (MP/B) LIGATURE AND REED

- 1) **Mouthpiece/Barrel.** Putting together the rest of the instrument will happen later. Demonstrate FIRST. Be sure the kids are close enough to see. When putting together the MP/B, leave the ligature off so it does not bend or scratch the facing. Teach the kids that the mouthpiece is very fragile and that if dropped, it will likely break. Tell them the cost of the mouthpiece (\$100), and tell them that if it breaks, it cannot be fixed. Showing them a broken one will also leave an impression.
- 2) **Ligature.** Demonstrate FIRST. Place the ligature over the mouthpiece correctly and show the kids. Point out how the screw(s) go to the right of the mouthpiece as you look at the facing. Depending on the ligature, point out if the screw(s) are behind or in front of the mouthpiece. (**NOTE:** The Rovner ligature can be deceiving due to no identifying marks. Beginners can incorrectly place it upside down and still look “correct” to them. To counter, considering adding an “up arrow” mark with a silver Sharpie. Explain how the screw(s) work (“right tightly, lefty loosey”). Students should loosen the ligature screw(s) 3-4 turns before putting ligature on the mouthpiece. This gives the reed room to be inserted. (**WARNING:** Explain the dangers of unscrewing too much!) Show and practice lifting the ligature up and down with your left thumb and index finger while still holding with your left hand (To a beginner, this takes some time to coordinate). The right hand should be free to add and adjust the reed.
- 3) **Reed placement.** Demonstrate FIRST. Be sure the kids are close enough to see. Lift the ligature and slide the reed between the ligature and mouthpiece (“**NEVER TOUCH THE TIP!**”). The reed must be perfectly aligned with the top of the mouthpiece (a hair’s width of the mouthpiece can be seen above the reed). Hold the reed and pull down the ligature until it aligns with the grooved line on the mouthpiece. Tighten the ligature screw 2-3 times. (**WIGGLE TEST:** slightly rub the reed side to side with your thumb. If it moves, realign and tighten more). After demonstrating, give every kid an opportunity to see the correct reed alignment. Now, let the kids try. Express to them that this will take many tries to get correct but is vital to sounding correct (**INSPECTION GAME:** When a student believes they have it correct, have them come up and stand in line for inspection. If correct, praise them, give them a point and adjust the reed and ligature wildy. Have them go back to their seat and try again for another point. If not correct, let them examine your setup next to theirs and have them explain what the difference is. Don’t forget the wiggle test. Once they understand what changes to make, have them go back to their seat and try to adjust. Students who need assistance should raise their hand and wait for you to respond. *“Remember kids, I’m like an ATM: Only one person at a time.”*)

BREATHING

- 1) **Correct Posture.** This is a prerequisite to breathing correctly. Demonstrate proper seated posture. Have students model you. Explore and explain the following:
 - a) “Why should we sit on the front of our chair and not the back?”
 - b) “Why should we keep our feet in front of us and not under our legs or chair?” (Demonstrate the wrong way and expose balance issues).
 - c) “Should our upper body feel like it’s floating or sinking?” (explore sternum placement)
 - d) “Should our muscles and shoulders feel tense or relaxed?” (demonstrate shoulders to ears)

Once you build correct posture, reinforce by having them practice going to “SET” on command. Explain that “SET” also means to “turn your brain on” and focus with your eyes and ears. PRAISE THEM FOR DOING IT CORRECTLY! (AW: *when practicing “SET,” I always trick them and say something like, “salami,” or “Saturday.”*)

- 2) **Inhaling and exhaling.** The goal is to get students to understand how it feels to breathe “below the ribcage” and exhale with “constant, steady, and smooth air” while maintaining good natural posture. Here are a few tips and tricks to explore proper breathing:
 - a) Explain the difference between “breathing to live” and “breathing to play”.
 - b) Explore breathing in different positions (standing, laying flat on the ground, leaning over in chair).

- c) Ask students to place a hand on their belly and/or sternum to better understand what their body is doing.
 - d) Place tip of middle finger on the nose to feel the air
 - e) Inhaling (Goals: no noise, still sternum/shoulders, getting wider below the ribcage)
 - i) "Minty breath" - cold air to the back of the throat after "eating a mint"
 - ii) "Breathe air in through the back of your ears"
 - iii) "POE breathe" - say the word "POE", then say it but inhale the word
 - iv) "Go to Sleep" - lay on your back, relax and yawn (watch your belly rise)
 - f) Exhaling (Goals: constant/steady/smooth air, upper body stays stationary)
 - i) "Coffee straw air"
 - ii) "Blowing up a hot dog balloon"
 - iii) "Send a toy sailboat smoothly across the pond with your wind."
 - g) Once both the inhale and exhale motions are acceptable, have them practice moving air in and out without stopping or holding ("ebb and flow like waves of the ocean")
- 3) **Releasing.** When releasing air, explain the importance of keeping the face and posture still and intact well after the sound stops (*"hold still through the silence"*, *"The only change on releases is the air ceases"*, *"The air turns off like a light switch, not a dimmer switch."*)
- 4) **Metered breathing.** Once they are aware of how the metronome and pulse works, give them count structures to practice (ex: *"Breathe in 4 counts, breathe out 4 counts, repeat"* or *"Breathe in 2 counts, breathe out 8 counts, release"*)
- 5) **"Magic Muscle."** Clarinet air generally needs to be faster, colder and skinnier than for other instruments. To produce this airstream, we activate the "magic muscle". When explaining the "magic muscle", you must tell the kids to be mature about the topic. Then, explain the muscle we use to "get rid of our food after digestion." Demonstrate how you move the air from slow to fast by activating the push-down feeling of the "magic muscle" ("Don't push too hard!" *giggle*). After the kids model you, have them describe how the airstreams are different. This slow-to-fast exercise can also be used later with mouthpiece/barrel work. Ultimately, students will always use the "Magic Muscle".

EMBOUCHURE

- 1) **Finger to bottom lip.** Students open their mouths slightly. They point one finger upwards, turn it sideways, then press it into their bottom lip (not at an angle). They should press in firmly, the same way that the clarinet will.
- a) Bottom teeth should be behind the fleshy part of the bottom lip. Students whose teeth are below the fleshy part of their lips should try again, opening their mouths less wide. Students whose teeth are above the fleshy part of the lip should try again, this time with their mouth open wider.
- 2) **Director places the "small" instrument** (mouthpiece, barrel, reed, and ligature).
- a) I'm able to get around 80% of the students to make the correct embouchure the first time. I quickly say:
 - i) "Open." (I then touch the reed to the students bottom lip)
 - ii) "Teeth on top." (or "Click your teeth on the top of the mouthpiece.")
 - iii) "Close your lips like a straw."
 - iv) "Breathe through the clarinet like it's a straw."
 - v) "Blow like you're blowing through a straw."
 - b) My goals at this point in the process are to:
 - i) Get the correct amount of mouthpiece in the student's mouth. Placement should be slightly behind the point at which the instrument will "squeak." Each student will be slightly different depending on their facial structure and teeth. (CP: *Have them look at the MP/B from the side and point where the reed meets the mouthpiece facing. Slightly above that point is the amount they need to take in. Use a piece of paper and slide it between the reed and mouthpiece to get a better idea.*)
 - ii) Get the correct amount of bottom lip in the mouth/in front of the teeth. The bottom lip should be in its natural position: mostly in front of and only slightly over the bottom teeth (*"I want to see more of the red part of your bottom lip. Right now you're swallowing your bottom lip"*)
 - iii) Get the students to keep their teeth down on top of the mouthpiece ("Teeth on top - teeth on top - teeth on top!" [said quickly while wiggling mouthpiece side to side])
 - iv) Get the correct amount of pressure on the reed. The tone should be approximately Concert F#. ("Bring your teeth closer together.") (CP: *Explain to them how the bottom teeth are like a "mattress" and the bottom lip is like a "sheet or comforter" on top. When you lie down you feel the "sheet" but you are supported by the "mattress."*)
 - c) Other considerations
 - i) Corners of the lip are in their natural place or slightly inward, not pulled back.

- ii) AW: I believe that when the chin looks correct, it is a result of the embouchure being correct. When the chin is not correct, I talk about how the embouchure should function like a drawstring bag, or I have the student “caterpillar” their bottom lip inward toward center. (“*Squish don’t stretch,*” “*Squish your caterpillar a little bit,*” “*Do more ooo lips.*”)
 - iii) Clarinet is a “down” instrument. Often students have the barrel pointed more horizontally than vertically. The angle between the instrument and the student should be such that, with the head balanced, the bell points between the knees.
 - (1) Students who play with too horizontal an angle will play with a flatter sound.
 - (2) As the angle of the clarinet changes, so does its balance point. The more vertical the clarinet, the more it wants to fall forward, away from the body and into the top teeth. The more horizontal the angle of the clarinet, the more the reed/mouthpiece wants to fall down into the bottom lip.
 - iv) The top lip should stay against the top teeth (most students do this naturally) (“*Activate your bunny rabbit muscle.*” *For those that don’t, consider experimenting with double lip embouchure to show students how their top lip should feel.*)
 - v) Snugging. Have the kids imagine how a doorstop works. There is an unchanging gap between the bottom of the door (top teeth) and the carpet (firm bottom lip). For the doorstop (mouthpiece) to work, we “snug” in between those two points evenly. Demonstrate how this looks with your fingers. Show a scenario where there is too much space and the doorstop is not secure (move the doorstop up and down). Demonstrate not enough space.
- 3) **Students learn to place the mouthpiece and barrel themselves.** This is only after the teacher has placed it several times (**PASS THE TORCH:** Place and hold up the MP/B for the students and have them play correctly. Tell them to take it from you while still playing and keep the same feeling. Hold the MP/B up like the Statue of Liberty Torch “Don’t let the flame (sound) go out”. This “holding up” sensation will carry over to the right hand thumb’s job of holding the instrument up later.). Students learn to troubleshoot themselves and others. They learn what it sounds like to have too much mouthpiece (squeeks). They learn what it sounds like to have too little mouthpiece (thin sound and hard to play). They learn what too little pressure on the reed sounds like (flat, not a Concert F#).
 - 4) **Students play on the whole clarinet.** Embouchures tend to change as we begin to add more of the clarinet, because the instrument gets heavier and harder to balance.
 - 5) **Tongue placement.** The back of the tongue is high against the molars, the middle dips down, and the tip is up toward the teeth (like saying the word “she”). The tongue says weee while the lips say oooo. Consider waiting to talk a great deal about tongue placement until other aspects of the embouchure are in place (lips even, teeth on top, correct amount of pressure on the reed).

PRO-TIP #1: Study embouchures of great players to know what a clarinet embouchure should look like. Study pictures of professionals and notice embouchures of older students that make great sounds. In order for the teacher to place the clarinet in the students mouth correctly, he/she must know precisely how it should look.

PRO-TIP #2: If you have never played clarinet before, find a band director friend or a lesson teacher who does. Have them place the MP/B for you and play so you can experience what it truly feels like to do it correctly.

ARTICULATION

- 1) **Why is articulation a challenge to teach?** We all learn in many different ways, but visual learning is the most predominant followed by aural and tactile. When teaching breathing, embouchure, and hand position/movement, you the teacher can see correct or incorrect visual cues. Students can do the same with mirrors. Evaluating aural cues can easily determine proper or improper embouchure by both teacher and student. Teachers can help by physically moving hands and fingers of the students. *What about articulation?* Neither the teacher nor the student can see inside the mouth for correct articulation. Listening cues are tough as inappropriate articulation can be deceiving. Also, most students are unaware of their tongue movements let alone the control of this massively ambiguous muscle.

PRO-TIP: Good tone and correct embouchure are prerequisites to adding articulation on mouthpiece/barrel. Good hand position and technique is a prerequisite to adding articulation to the full clarinet.

- 2) **Before mouthpiece/barrel work.** Do not be in a hurry to add articulation when playing the MP/B until they are comfortable and consistent with starting, sustaining and stopping a tone that is acceptable in color and resonance. Consider using the following exercises beforehand:
- a) **Articulation = speaking**
 - i) Practice saying the following: “EEEEEE-TEEEE”, “EEEEEE-DEEEE”, “EEEEEE-NEEEE”, “EEEEEE-LEEE”
Talk about consonant vs. vowel. Discuss how each consonant feels and where the tongue touches.
PRO-TIP: Have students scratch two taste buds on the tip of their tongues with their fingernails. This creates a sensation to help them identify the touchpoint and firmness. Another way is to have them scrape their tongue across the bottom of their top teeth until they reach the top of the tip of the tongue, and then to have them slide side to side.
 - ii) Practice saying syllables quickly. Students may naturally have some trouble doing this. Discuss being still with the jaw and touching quickly and lightly (AW: “Say it like a ventriloquist.”). **PRO-TIP:** Have them “tickle touch” the side of their cheek with their finger in the same manner. This gives them a visual of what their tongue should feel like and what it should do.
 - b) **Blowing air.** Instead of saying “EEEE-DEEE”, have them replace “EEE” with air. Explain the importance of constant, steady, smooth air at all times (“We are ‘touching’ or ‘denting’ the airstream, not stopping it.”). Have them repeat rapidly to check for quick and light movement.
FUN VISUAL #1: Take the class to a school water fountain. Press the water button and explain how the water is like our air. Then, “tickle touch” the stream of water with your finger. Explain how this relates to our articulation when speaking or blowing. (“Notice we never turn off or block the water. It is always moving.”)
FUN VISUAL #2: Have the students point their finger forward. As they inhale, draw the hand back. As they exhale, smoothly move the pointed finger forward and model the air. Now do the same thing, but add articulation. Keep the hand moving in the same motion as before. You will instantly notice that some kids will “stop and move.” Help them understand that it’s “one long piece of air.” Add a “tap” motion to your index finger to represent the articulation.
 - c) **Coffee Straw.**
 - i) Cut a coffee straw in half. Make enough for the entire class. Demonstrate by holding the coffee straw with two fingers and blowing while “tapping” the rim of the end of the straw with your finger. This creates the same sound as articulation but gives the students a visual representation they can see. Demonstrate the different ways that they could do this incorrectly (Ex: cover the entire hole at the end of straw, leave your finger on the hole, make too big a motion with your finger away from the straw). Reinforce the idea of constant, steady, smooth air. Have the kids try it.
 - ii) Once the students can model correctly, demonstrate using the tongue. Explain how articulation is exactly like the “tickle touch” motion, but on the inside of the mouth. Reinforce appropriate syllable. Due to the small surface area of the rim of the straw, students can understand the concept of touching two taste buds at one dot. **PRO-TIP:** The hardest part to recognize is what part of the tongue is touching the straw. Have students point their tongues out and place the straw where they are touching. Adjust the straw for them for better accuracy.
- 3) **Concepts of good articulation.** By doing the previous exercises, the students will already have a general idea of correct articulation concepts (i.e. DOING it before KNOWING it). Keep these concepts in mind:
- a) Always constant airstream. One long piece of air. The air should be “unaware” of what the tongue is doing.
 - b) Articulate the center, tip of the reed with the top of the tip of the tongue (Like the rim of the coffee straw).
 - c) Use an appropriate consonant/vowel syllable, one that is quick and light in nature (“DEE” and “NEE” are my favorite).
 - d) The only thing that moves is the tip of the tongue (embouchure engaged, middle of the tongue “EEE”).
- 4) **Moving to Articulation on Mouthpiece/Barrel.**
- a) **Listen to every kid, every day.** Although this is a good rule in general, this is critical to articulation. The more they do it wrong and go unnoticed, the harder it is to fix (CP: speaking from personal experience). Ask them questions and take your time.
 - b) **The first thing they need to know is where to articulate on the reed.** Draw a picture of the reed and place a dot at the top-center of the image. Reinforce that this is the same surface as the bottom rim of the coffee straw. Have students look at their reeds and imagine the dot (“Never touch the tip with your finger.”) Have them scrape their tongue across the bottom of their top teeth until they reach the top of the tip, then have them “tickle touch” the edge of their teeth. Now, have them open wide and place the MP on their top teeth. Have them lick the reed up to the imaginary dot and “tickle touch” it. Have them imagine their reed is a toothpick. (“How would that feel and how hard would you touch?”).
 - c) **Leaving the tongue on the reed too long.** This is common. Here are some visuals to help them understand:

- i) Baseball. *"When you hit a baseball, how long does the baseball touch the bat?" "Does it stick to the bat?"*
 - ii) Keyboard. *"How do you type on a keyboard or iphone?" "Do you hold down the button for each letter?"*
 - iii) Heat Check. *"How to do you check if something is hot?" "Do you leave your finger there for too long?"*
 - d) **OH SNAP!** Demonstrate FIRST. Start with "whole-note air" and articulate once when you snap your fingers, keeping the air moving afterwards. (**NOTE:** Do not start the air with articulation yet. That will happen later.) Have the class try to articulate along with your snap. Hear individuals and assess. Add more snaps on one airstream. Kids can also do this in pairs.
 - e) **Monkey Hear. Monkey Do.** When students begin to articulate consistently, do "call and response" with them. Be aware of appropriate rhythms. Have individuals respond to monitor correct articulation.
 - f) **Starting with articulation.** Once they are really comfortable articulating on the MP/B, introduce the importance of articulating when we start a note. Have them say, "TEEE-DEEE". Discuss the difference. Then practice with air, no MP/B. Before going to MP/B, show with your index fingers how your tongue starts on the reed. Then explain that tip of the tongue moves exactly when releasing the air. Demonstrate starting with and without articulation and have them guess which one they hear. Then have them try individually. This will take many, many reps. Here are some other useful analogies:
 - i) Teeball. *"Imagine putting the baseball on a tee stand. The tee is the reed and the baseball is the tongue. When we inhale/exhale, it's like swinging the bat. Get the timing right and hit a homerun!"*
 - ii) Watermelon seed. *"How do spit out a watermelon seed?"*
- 5) **Moving to Articulation with the Fully Assembled Clarinet.**
 - a) **Reminder.** Only move to these steps after students are comfortable with playing the full clarinet and moving fingers while playing.
 - b) **Start with just one note.** Second-line "G" is a good one. Practice playing rhythms or songs on a single note.
 - c) **Air and Finger.** Tell the kids to blow air and articulate with the clarinet on the knee. Tell them to move their fingers when they articulate. Check for correct concepts. Then, have them play. Remind them to focus mainly on a constant airstream and articulation.

ASSEMBLING THE FULL CLARINET

Demonstrate FIRST! Have the students recite the steps. When finished, have a student volunteer to assemble his or her clarinet. The other students should watch and make a note of any step that is being skipped or any incorrect moves. (**TEACHING MOMENT:** This is a great way to introduce kids to giving and receiving peer critique/praise appropriately.) Then, have the kids pair up: one assembles while the other watches and comments.

- 1) Be sure all corks are greased accordingly. (Be aware of new, light colored cork. These tend to be too thick and will be tough to twist and push. Tell students it's ok to ask for help.)
- 2) Put reed in mouth.
- 3) Left hand bell. Right hand to the bottom of the bottom joint. Small twists and push. Keep the right hand "glued" to the bottom of the bottom joint (**WARNING:** By holding the bottom joint at the top, students may press the finger rings lifting the bridge. This may cause damage in the next step!).
- 4) Left hand on top joint, hold the key rings down and raise the bridge!. Line up the register key of the top joint and thumb rest of the bottom joint.. SMALL twists and push until the bridges are aligned (**WARNING:** Twisting the joints too much while assembling may create contact with the keys on both joints causing damage.).
- 5) Move the right hand up to the top of the top joint (**WARNING:** Holding with the right hand anywhere else may cause other sections of the instrument to get out of alignment.). Take the barrel with the left hand, twist and push.
- 6) Move the right hand up to the barrel (**WARNING:** See #5). Take the mouthpiece (no ligature yet) with the left hand, twist and push, aligning the mouthpiece opening with the register key. Continue with reed and ligature assembly.

HAND POSITION

- 1) Fingers move from the big knuckles.
- 2) Fingers are curved, but only slightly curved. If students' fingers are too curved, they will not cover the holes and close the rings simultaneously when they put their fingers down. Knuckles never "collapse" or bend backwards. (For right hand shape, students can lightly grasp their forearm with their right hand, or make a flattened letter 'C')

- 3) Fingers “hover” over any tone holes they are not covering (*CP: Have them imagine holding a Skittle between their finger and the tone hole to learn how high to “hover.”*).
- 4) To have the students understand how the pads of the fingers cover the holes, have them “fingerpaint” on their thigh in circular motions. Also, have them “check their Cheerios” by pressing firmly on the tone holes and rings. The impression of the keys should leave circles around the pads NOT the tips of the fingers. **NOTE:**The low G tone hole is difficult to cover completely for many students, especially at first.
- 5) The left hand points slightly downward, and the first finger is able to cover the first tone hole, touch the A key, and touch the G# key simultaneously.
 - a) Students make a sign language letter ‘A’ (or pretend they have a fly in their hand) and then open their hands slightly.
 - b) Golf Pencil. Put a golf pencil behind (not under) the G# key and have the student hold it there while all left hand fingers are down.
 - c) **SQUEAKING:** If a student is squeaking and the problem is not too much mouthpiece or that their fingers aren’t covering the tone holes completely, it could be that they are pressing the G# key inadvertently.
- 6) The left hand thumb points between one o’clock and two o’clock. It does not point toward 12 o’clock.
- 7) The left hand thumb has four positions, and it must be able to move from any one of these positions to any other. The register key is played by pointing the left hand thumb, and the left hand thumb never touches the wood of the clarinet. The four positions of the left hand thumb are:
 - a) Thumb covers the F tone hole only
 - b) Thumb covers the F tone hole and presses the register key
 - c) Thumb presses the register key but does not cover the tone hole
 - d) Thumb hovers over the register key and tone hole
- 8) The right hand points across the clarinet. It may point slightly downward, but it does not do so as much as the left hand.
- 9) The thumb rest rests between the knuckle of the thumb and the thumbnail. It may rest on the thumbnail. *AW: I place my clarinet closer to my knuckle for more strength. Also, I keep my thumb knuckle slightly pointed for added strength and encourage my students to do so as well.*
- 10) To keep their pinkies from collapsing, students can think about using the side of their fingerprint on the pinky keys.

PLAYING THE ENTIRE CLARINET

- 1) **Moving without playing.** While working on embouchure and articulation with the MP/B, work on hand position and finger movement separately. Get them comfortable with how the instrument feels by placing it on the knee and doing exercises (note naming, “finger wiggles”). Then, when they are ready to add air, it will not feel as foreign to them.
- 2) **Left hand barrel, right hand down.**
 - a) Demonstrate FIRST.
 - b) Have the kids sit with correct posture. They should have a slightly curved ‘C’ shape in their lower back. They physically cannot hold the instrument up with bad posture.
 - c) With the clarinet resting upward on their right knee (“READY” position), have them finger an “open” G while the left hand holds the barrel (*CP: In the beginning for G, I teach right hand down plus Right Pinky F Key (RP2). Later I explain to them the three ways to play G [“open”, “RHD” and “cover”] and why all three are important and when it’s appropriate to use them).*
 - d) Have them look straight ahead. They’ll want to look at their instrument when they bring it up, changing their mouthpiece angle. Make them aware why this is important. (“Look at the floor. What happened to your head?” or explain to them that playing your instrument is like driving: “You should look out the window, not at the floorboard.”)
 - e) Have students bring the instrument up with the embouchure made (“PLAY” position). They should imagine that their clarinet is just a longer MP/B. Their left hand on the barrel will help them guide it to feel correct. Practice moving back and forth between “READY” and “PLAY” position looking for appropriate angles. Once they feel used to it, have them play a sustained note. Talk about appropriate sound concepts.
- 3) **Right hand only.** Do the same exercises above, but shift the “holding up” responsibilities to the right hand thumb and remove the left hand. Try without playing first, then try while playing. Check for proper right thumb position carefully (see HAND POSITION). (**WARNING:** With incorrect posture and/or right thumb/hand position, students will compensate by “pushing up” against the four side keys on the upper joint above the right hand. Over time, these keys will eventually bend underneath each other causing leakage and repair. If you don’t monitor and make them aware, this is your fault NOT the students’.)

- 4) **Add the left hand back correctly.** Do the same exercises above, but now put the left hand back with correct hand position. Don't let students look down. Instead, have them "find and touch the silver keys" with their left pinky (specifically LP4). This will instantly give them correct hand position. (**WARNING:** Watch out for the left thumb. Students will want to support the clarinet and rest it under the back tone hole.)
- 5) **Adding other notes.** From this point on, do long tones on new notes. Consider having them finger the note on their knees first, then have them bring the clarinet up to them. This way they can check hand position comfortably instead of looking down while and "hunting" for fingerings. Always monitor correct sound concepts.
- 6) **Explain how the "air is unaware" of the fingers.** When you are ready to start moving fingers while playing, it's important the kids understand the placement and direction of the air does not change with finger movement. It's all the same air. (Note: They will feel more resistance as the add more fingers down. Use that "Magic Muscle.") Here are a few ways to help them realize this concept:
 - a) Demonstrate a scale or song with no articulation and lots of finger movement, then pull the instrument out of your mouth but keep the air going. They should hear the air being constant, steady and smooth. Do the same exercise in different ranges of the clarinet so they hear how it's all the same.
 - b) Take a student's fully assembled instrument and turn the mouthpiece 180 degrees from the barrel. Have him or her play while holding the clarinet by the barrel while you move your fingers on the clarinet. Do something flashy and keep telling the student to move air the same way no matter what. The kids are always amazed at this!
 - c) With the clarinet on the knee, practice fingerings and practice while blowing air. Then try playing. Always monitor correct sound concepts.

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