

A Piano Lesson Book for Average-age Beginner Bilingual Korean-English Immigrant

Students

by

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## ABSTRACT

This project presents the development of a bilingual Korean English piano method book designed for elementary-level Korean immigrant students and Korean American children from immigrant households in the United States. Many widely used American piano method books are written primarily for native English speaking students and assume familiarity with Western pedagogical approaches. As a result, young Korean immigrant students often encounter additional challenges when beginning piano study, including language barriers, differences in music reading systems and mismatches between Korean and American teaching traditions. These challenges may slow learning progress and limit the ability of parents to support their children's musical development at home.

The purpose of this project is to create a piano method book that addresses these challenges by providing bilingual explanations, culturally familiar repertoire and a pedagogical structure that bridges Korean and American educational practices. The method book is intended for beginning students between the ages of four and six and focuses primarily on primer-level piano fundamentals. Musical concepts are introduced sequentially so that students can gradually develop foundational skills in technique, music reading and rhythm.

The method book is organized into chapters that combine several instructional components. Each chapter includes technical goals that focus on proper posture, hand position and independent finger use. Theory sections introduce basic music literacy concepts such as note recognition on the staff, simple rhythmic patterns and dynamics.

Repertoire pieces reinforce these concepts through off-staff pieces, C five-finger patterns and familiar children's songs from both Western and Korean traditions. In addition, creative activities such as rhythm tapping, short composition exercises and coloring tasks are included to encourage engagement and reinforce learning.

By providing parallel Korean and English explanations, the method book allows both students and parents to better understand instructional material and participate more actively in the learning process. The project also integrates aspects of both Korean and American pedagogical approaches, combining technical discipline with creative exploration. Ultimately, this bilingual method book aims to support early piano learning for Korean immigrant children while contributing to broader efforts toward culturally responsive and linguistically accessible music education.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

According to the 2023 U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 1.5 million Korean Americans live in the United States, about 71% of whom are immigrants. Many of them grow up bilingual, speaking Korean at home while using English at school and in social interactions. Among these families, extracurricular activities play a crucial role in both skill development and cultural adaptation. In particular, piano lessons hold a significant place in children's education. In Korean culture, taking piano lessons is seen as a symbol of refinement, discipline and educational enrichment. It is common for children in Korea to begin piano lessons in kindergarten, often attending private institutes daily for practice and short 10- to 20-minute lessons. When Korean families immigrate to the United States, this cultural emphasis on piano study often continues. Piano lessons are viewed as a safe and productive after-school activity, a way to maintain continuity with the educational practices of their home country and a means to integrate into American society. Yet despite the shared value placed on piano education by both Koreans and Americans cultures, Korean immigrant children face unique barriers when entering the American music education system. The most significant challenges arise from linguistic differences, cultural disparities in teaching styles and a lack of resources specifically designed for bilingual learners.

Many widely used American piano method books, such as Faber Piano Adventures and Alfred's Basic Piano Library, are created with implicit assumptions about the student's fluency in English and familiarity with Western pedagogical traditions.

These books often include written instructions, games and exercises that rely heavily on English-language comprehension. For international students with limited English proficiency who have recently moved to the United States, such materials can be very confusing. While musical notation is universally understood, Western countries typically use the English alphabet to read music notes, whereas many Asian and European countries use solfège. The explanatory text, practice tips and theory exercises may not be accessible simply because of the language barrier. This limitation can lead to slower learning, frustration and disengagement. Therefore, as a bilingual teacher, I often have to spend time during lessons translating the materials.

The problem becomes more complicated when considering the role of parents. In many Korean households, parents are heavily involved in their children's music practice and overall education. Many act as at-home coaches, ensuring the child follows the teacher's instructions and maintains consistent practice habits. However, when parents' English proficiency is limited, their ability to assist is greatly reduced. Misunderstandings about practice instructions or the sequence of concepts can lead to ineffective practice and delayed progress. For example, students may not receive adequate help because their parents cannot clearly understand the method book due to the language barrier and because they themselves were taught differently back in Korea. Parents often express frustration when they cannot provide the same level of support they could have in Korea, where the method books and teaching styles were familiar.

Pedagogical differences between the Korean and American approaches further complicate the learning process. In addition to the language barrier, one of the biggest

challenges students often face is the difference in how music is read. In Korea, music instruction typically uses a fixed-do system, where the note “C” is always “do,” regardless of the key of the music. While Korean students also learn Korean syllables that correspond to the letter names A through G used in the United States, their primary reading method remains the fixed “do” system. In contrast, music reading in the United States generally relies on the letter names A through G and often incorporates a movable-do system, where the tonic, or “do,” changes depending on the key. Because of these differences, many Korean students experience confusion when transitioning from fixed “do” to reading with the English alphabet, which can slow down their overall music reading progress. This becomes even more problematic, when a student is not familiar with the English alphabet. In addition to differences in note names, teaching methods for reading the notes are different. Although each method book in the western countries use different ways to introduce note readings, the most common one is starting on the middle C for both treble clef and bass clefs. This method is even problematic to native English-speaking students, having to go backwards with the alphabets. For younger students in particular, who are still developing their understanding of alphabetical sequence and directional thinking, this can create confusion and slow down the learning process.

The sequence of introducing musical concepts also varies. For example, Korean methods may prioritize reading skills and technical exercises before creative activities, while American methods often integrate improvisation and ear training from the beginning. While neither approach is inherently superior, the mismatch can be disorienting for students and parents transitioning between the two systems.

The purpose of this project is to address these challenges by developing a bilingual Korean-English piano method book specifically designed for elementary-level Korean immigrant students and Korean American children from immigrant households. This method book will incorporate both Korean and American pedagogical traditions, provide bilingual explanations for all concepts and instructions and include culturally familiar repertoire from both Korean and Western literature. By offering parallel Korean and English text, this book will not only help students understand new concepts more easily without a language barrier, but will also allow parents to actively support their children's learning process. This method is designed for students aged four to six years old.

Ultimately, this project aims to serve as a bridge between two educational cultures. The bilingual method book seeks to promote greater engagement, faster progress and higher retention rates in early piano study among bilingual and immigrant communities. In doing so, it also contributes to the broader conversation about culturally responsive pedagogy in music education, providing a model that could be adapted for other non-native English speaking populations.

## CHAPTER 2

### ORGANIZATION OF THE METHOD BOOK

The method book is organized into chapters that progressively introduce fundamental, primer-level musical and pianistic concepts. The sequential structure allows beginning students to develop foundational skills in a clear and manageable way. By the end of the book, students are expected to perform simple repertoire using both clefs, reading notes from Middle C through G in the treble clef and from Bass C through G in the bass clef.

The level of musical content in the book is designed for beginning students approximately four to six years of age. Although the book includes visual storytelling and playful activity pages to maintain engagement, the musical tasks require skills that typically develop during the early elementary years. Students are introduced to symbolic music reading through the musical alphabet, note placement on the staff and the distinction between line and space notes. They also learn basic rhythmic values such as quarter notes, half notes and whole notes and practice counting through tapping exercises. In addition, the repertoire requires the use of independence of fingers and simple coordination between the right and left hands. These skills move beyond imitation-based playing often used with younger preschool students and support the development of early music literacy.

Each chapter incorporates several components designed to support the development of basic piano technique and music literacy. First, each chapter is designed to support technical development, focusing on establishing a proper physical approach to

the instrument. These include correct sitting posture, appropriate hand position and the development of independent finger use across all ten fingers. While these foundational concepts are introduced explicitly at the beginning of the book rather than restated as separate goals in every chapter, they are intentionally embedded throughout the repertoire and activities, requiring ongoing application. This approach encourages teachers to consistently reinforce these technical elements in each lesson, using the musical material as a means to revisit and strengthen proper technique over time.

Second, a theoretical component reinforces fundamental elements of music reading. These sections introduce note recognition on the staff, basic rhythmic patterns and simple dynamic markings. The material is presented gradually so that students can develop reading skills alongside their technical development.

Third, each chapter contains repertoire pieces that reinforce the concepts introduced in both the technical and theoretical sections. The repertoire includes off-staff notation, pieces based on limited hand positions that incorporate stepwise and skipwise motion, as well as children's songs that are familiar in both Western and Korean cultures.

Finally, each chapter includes creative activities that encourage active musical engagement. These activities may involve composing short melodies, clapping rhythmic patterns or completing coloring exercises related to musical notation. Such activities reinforce musical concepts while maintaining student interest and participation.

The method book is carefully designed to support beginning students in a clear and step-by-step way. By combining technical, theoretical, and creative elements in each

chapter, students can build both musical understanding and physical skills at the same time. This balanced approach helps young learners stay engaged while developing strong foundational skills that will support their future piano study.

## CHAPTER 3

### PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE

This section explains the pedagogical rationale and scope of the method book, with a focus on how musical concepts are selected and sequenced. The book is designed to introduce beginning students to basic piano skills and music reading in a gradual and developmentally appropriate way. Although the use of visual storytelling, simple language and activity-based learning may initially suggest that the book is intended for younger preschool students, these elements function as instructional supports rather than indicators of a lower level of musical content.

The content centers on foundational skills appropriate for students in the early elementary stage, including keyboard orientation, recognition of high and low sounds, finger numbers, basic rhythm and note reading within a limited range. Students are introduced to symbolic music reading through the musical alphabet, staff notation and the distinction between line and space notes. They also begin reading in both treble and bass clefs from C to G. Engaging with these concepts requires students to connect written symbols with physical movement at the keyboard and to understand sequential patterns, moving beyond imitation-based learning typically associated with younger beginners.

Rhythm is introduced through quarter, half and whole notes, with emphasis on counting and maintaining a steady beat. The repertoire further supports this development by requiring the use of multiple fingers and simple coordination between the hands. These combined demands reflect cognitive and motor skills that are consistent with students in the four-to-six age range. At the same time, the content is intentionally

limited. Introducing too many concepts at once can divide attention and hinder early progress, particularly for young beginners. For this reason, the book prioritizes clarity and reinforcement of essential skills such as steady beat, controlled finger use and note recognition within a restricted range. A simple counting system using numbers (1-2-3-4) is used to help students understand the beat and note length in a clear consistent way. This method is chosen instead of more complex systems because young students are already familiar with basic counting, so it helps them keep a steady beat without making the learning process too difficult.

This pedagogical focus is directly reflected in the overall design of the book, which functions as a lesson-based resource rather than a comprehensive all-in-one method. Technical, theoretical and musical concepts are introduced briefly and then applied immediately through short pieces and guided activities. For example, posture and hand position are presented at the beginning without being extended into systematic technical drills and concepts such as rhythm, dynamics, and note reading are reinforced through tapping, coloring and simple repertoire instead of separate written theory sections.

The sequencing of the material further supports a repertoire centered approach. Concepts such as black key groupings, finger numbers and limited pitch sets are first introduced through visual and physical exploration and then directly applied in short pieces that emphasize movement and pattern recognition. In this way, repertoire serves as the primary medium for learning, rather than as a supplement to a broader technical or theoretical system.

As a result, the book does not aim to provide a complete all-in-one curriculum. Instead, it is designed to function as a lesson book, where the teacher can expand on technique, theory and musical understanding as needed. This structure allows flexibility in pacing and depth while maintaining a clear instructional focus.

In summary, the method book reflects a deliberate balance between accessibility and musical development. While certain visual and structural elements may resemble materials for younger learners, the musical tasks require early engagement with reading, rhythm and coordination appropriate for students ages four to six. The decision to limit and carefully sequence concepts is intended to support clarity, confidence and meaningful skill development. By functioning as a focused lesson resource, the book can be effectively integrated into a broader pedagogical framework while maintaining a clear and intentional design.

## CHAPTER 4

### REPERTOIRE SELECTION

Each piece included in this method book is designed with specific pedagogical objectives. The melodies are intentionally kept simple in order to allow beginning students to focus on the development of fundamental piano skills without becoming overwhelmed by musical complexity. Through the study of accessible and manageable repertoire, students are able to build confidence while gradually strengthening their technical and reading abilities.

Several of the pieces are children's songs that are commonly recognized in both Western and Korean musical traditions. Although these songs may use different titles or lyrics in each culture, they share the same melodic structure. Incorporating these familiar melodies allows students to connect more easily with the repertoire while also experiencing music that may already hold cultural familiarity or personal meaning.

The following repertoire selections illustrate the pedagogical goals embedded within the method book.

*Fly High and Down into the Ocean:* Students identify groups of two black keys across the keyboard and play them using finger numbers two and three.

*Puddle Jump:* Students play steady quarter note beats and recognize groups of black keys. Students are able to play using finger numbers two, three and four.

*Climbing Fun, Ball Pit Dive and The Silly Hat:* Students identify groups of three black keys across the keyboard and play them using finger numbers two, three and four.

*Mary Had a Little Lamb*: Students identify groups of three black keys and play each hand separately using finger numbers two, three and four.

*Bubbles in My Pocket* and *A Sunny Day*: Students play C, D and E while maintaining a steady quarter-note rhythm.

*Flipping Pancakes* and *Popping Popcorn*: Students play F, G, A and B while maintaining a steady quarter-note rhythm.

*The Marshmallow Moon Walk* and *Train Ride*: Students play melodies that incorporate the notes C through B while practicing both quarter-note and half-note rhythmic values.

*Itsy Bitsy Spider*: Students are able to use all five fingers of the right hand to play the melody with both quarter-note and half-note rhythmic values.

*The Rainbow*: Students read Middle C through F and bass C through G. The piece includes repeated notes and stepwise motion.

*The Wiggly Worm*, *Sweet Mini Cupcakes*, *Jellyfish Dance* and *Tippy Toe March*: Students play right hand Middle C through G and left hand bass C through G. The piece includes both steps and skips.

*Magic Carpet Ride* and *Lightly Row*: Students reinforce playing steps and skips from Middle C through G in the treble clef and Bass C through G in the bass clef, while adding repeated notes.

In addition to melodic and technical development, the pieces also introduce basic dynamic contrast. Only two dynamic markings, *p* (*piano*) and *f* (*forte*), are included so

that beginner students can clearly experience the difference between soft and loud sounds. In my teaching experience, even late-elementary students often find *mezzo piano* and *mezzo forte* too subjective and some students struggle to produce a clear distinction between them. By limiting the dynamic range at this stage, students can focus on recognizing and expressing a strong contrast in sound.

Similarly, articulation markings such as *legato* and *staccato* are intentionally not introduced at this level. While these concepts are important, they require a level of physical control and auditory sensitivity that may not yet be fully developed in beginning students.

Introducing them too early can divide the student's attention between multiple new elements, potentially hindering the development of a secure foundational technique. Instead, this method emphasizes an even tone and controlled finger movement as a basis for future articulation study.

The decision to teach within a C five-finger pattern, rather than beginning on Middle C, is based on both cognitive and physical considerations. A fixed five-finger position allows students to establish a clear spatial understanding of the keyboard and develop finger independence without the added complexity of frequent hand movement or shifting positions. In contrast, the Middle C approach often requires students to navigate both clefs simultaneously and can introduce directional confusion, particularly for younger learners. The five-finger pattern provides a stable and accessible framework through which students can more confidently connect visual notation with physical movement on the keyboard.

In addition, theoretical terms such as step, skip and interval names are not formally introduced in this stage. Although students do experience these concepts musically through adjacent and non-adjacent note movement, the terminology is intentionally delayed. For young beginners, especially those navigating two languages, an excess of abstract terminology can increase cognitive load and reduce comprehension. By allowing students to first internalize these patterns through guided musical experience, the method prepares them for a more meaningful and efficient understanding of these concepts when the terms are introduced in later levels.

Overall, the pedagogical decisions in this section are intended to reduce cognitive, linguistic and technical overload for beginning students. Introducing multiple new concepts at once, such as subjective dynamics (*mezzo forte* and *mezzo piano*), articulation, shifting hand positions and abstract terminology, can overwhelm learners and hinder the development of secure foundational skills. By intentionally limiting or delaying these elements, the method allows students to focus on essential skills such as basic note reading, steady rhythm and coordinated finger movement. This simplification is particularly important for young and bilingual learners, as it supports clearer understanding and prevents confusion. These concepts are not excluded, but rather postponed until students are developmentally ready to engage with them more meaningfully, thereby creating a stable foundation for future musical growth.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The development of this bilingual piano method book stems from a need observed while teaching elementary-level Korean immigrant students. Many existing piano method books are written only in English and are primarily designed for native English-speaking learners. As a result, Korean immigrant children who are beginning piano study often face additional challenges, as they are learning a new instrument while also trying to understand instructions in a language that may still feel unfamiliar.

This method book focuses on primer-level fundamentals, allowing students to build a strong and secure foundation before advancing to the next stage of study. The goal is to introduce basic musical concepts in a simple and accessible way while taking into account the linguistic and cultural background of Korean immigrant students in North America. By providing explanations in both Korean and English, the book supports clearer understanding for both students and parents, fostering greater confidence throughout the learning process.

Upon completion of this method book, students are expected to have developed essential skills in keyboard orientation, basic rhythm, finger coordination and early music reading. With this foundation in place, they will be well prepared to continue their studies in a standard Level 1 method book, such as Faber Piano Adventures Level 1 or an equivalent early elementary series.

Another important aspect of this project is the integration of different pedagogical approaches. Korean piano education often emphasizes discipline, repetition and careful technical development, while many American method books focus on creativity, exploration and student engagement. This book attempts to combine strengths from both traditions. Through this hybrid approach, students can develop solid technical skills while also enjoying a more imaginative and interactive learning experience.

Although this method book was created mainly for Korean immigrant students, the ideas behind it may also apply to other bilingual or immigrant communities. Providing culturally responsive and linguistically accessible materials can help make music education more inclusive for a wider range of students. Ultimately, early piano education should not follow a single standardized approach. Every student brings different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to the learning process. When educators recognize and support these differences, piano learning can become more meaningful and engaging. As this method book continues to be used and improved, I hope it will help teachers and students see language differences not as a barrier, but as a bridge that connects cultures, encourages family involvement and supports the musical journey from the very first lesson.

## REFERENCE

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APPENDIX A

THE MELODY LAND

[Consult With Attached Files]

The complete bilingual piano method book developed as part of this project has been submitted as a separate supplemental PDF file accompanying this paper. The supplemental file is available with the electronic submission through ProQuest and Arizona State University's institutional repository.

Supplemental File Title: *The Melody Land*. pdf