Teaching Voice to Beginners

Suggestions from Jamie Howe, senior, Northwestern University

In general

*Admit your own vocal issues/problems…it will make them feel better!
*Every student is different.
*Start them on good habits (drinking lots of water, washing hands, etc.)
*Give lots of praise…take tiny steps forward!
*Before you touch them: Tell them how you are going to touch them, why, and ask permission.
*Only teach a few things a week.
*Have their parents check off their practice schedule. (Give stickers to the young ones!)
*Ask them what they've had in school/before.
*Have them sing a song they like and than work on it.

Important beginner concepts

*Posture
*Breathing
*Anatomy
*High vs. low
*Head voice vs. chest voice
*How singing is different than singing

Lesson format

*Chat with them about how their week/school was
*Make sure you physically and vocally warmed up
*Make sure you have time to review at the end and specifically discuss what needs to be practiced.

Repertoire

*Folk/Americana
*Rounds (sing with them!)
*Simple art songs
*Christmas/seasonal
*Stuff they want to sing (could even be radio or Disney)

Reading music—Big focus!!!

*First rhythm, then the staff
*Break it down into *tiny* chunks
*Flash cards
*Rhythm—1&2, ta-ta, etc.
*Notes—solfege (start with sol & mi) and letters
*They should be able to write notes/staff/symbols too

Musical elements

*Rhythm
*Melody
*Harmony
*Dynamics
*Tone
*Timbre
*Tempo
*Interpretation
*Meter
*Form
*Texture

Trouble matching pitch?

*Very few people are actually tone-deaf
*Have them sing a note (any note) and then you find it and sing a scale down
*It's easier to match to a voice than to a piano
*Process: Think, silent sing, hum, sing

During the lesson

*Listening
*Self-assessment
*Kinetic
*Diction—tongue twisters!
*Imitation is powerful (explain how your voice is older—have them listen and say which is which)
*Right away—how to perform (have them "perform for you")

Resources

Great pictures and explanations of vocal anatomy:
http://www.sandiegovoice.org/anatomy.html
http://www.voice.northwestern.edu/howworks.html

Pictures and explanations of the breathing mechanism:
http://www.sk.lung.ca/content.cfm/diaphragm
http://www.umm.edu/careguides/asthma/asthma_respsyst.html