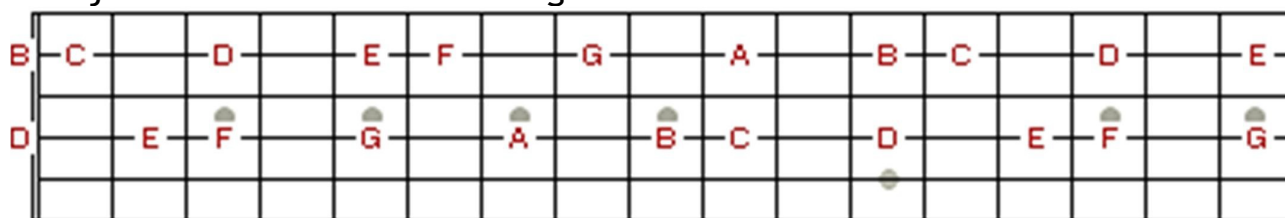




Using the Memphis Scale

The 'Memphis Scale' isn't actually a scale but a way of playing. It has been given that nickname due to the country style licks and sounds you can create. The idea is to play notes on two strings (usually a string apart) and play around with positions that form sixths.

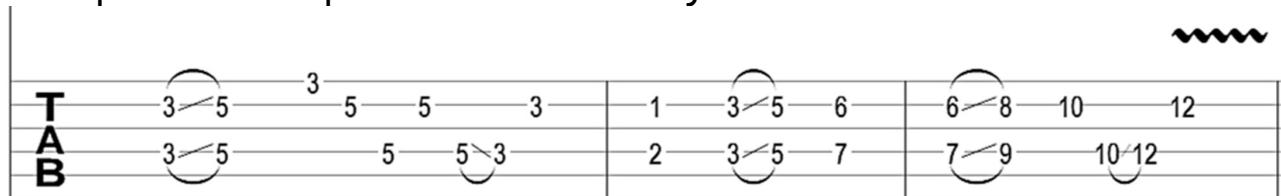
C Major Scale on the B & D strings



Positions in the Key of C

T	0	1	3	5	6	8	10	12	13	15	17	18
A												
B	0	2	3	5	7	9	10	12	14	15	17	19

Example: Mark Knopfler in 'In the Gallery'



MGL Tutor Guide Section

Material can last between 20-30 minutes depending on the skill level of the student.

Pre-lesson explanation (~ 1 minute)

Points to discuss with student before walking through content with 'My Guitar Lessons'.

- ⌚ Before looking at this style of playing, the student should be familiar with basic improvisation. Introduction to the Pentatonic Scale is an easy way to introduce improvisation to your student.
- ⌚ The 'Memphis Scale' isn't actually a scale. This is more like a nickname that people use to describe the style. As explained later, this style of playing can be used with any scale so to avoid confusion be sure to explain that it's only a nickname when people refer to it as the 'Memphis Scale'.

'The Memphis Scale' Explanation (~4 minutes)

- ⌚ The name 'Memphis Scale' is actually just a nickname - it isn't a scale at all. When people talk about the Memphis Scale, what they are referring to is the style of playing when the notes on two strings are used with intervals of sixths.
- ⌚ So the 'Memphis Scale' can actually be used with any scale. On the material sheet you can see that the C Major Scale has been used but any other scale can be used. The notes on the second and fourth strings are being used but the student can also use notes on the first and third strings. The basic idea is to use two strings like this because it makes it easier to form shapes that make an interval of a sixth.
- ⌚ The 'Positions in the Key of C' demonstrate how the student should think about improvising. All that has been done is the notes from the fretboard diagram have been arranged to form shapes that fit either a minor or major sixth interval.
- ⌚ Point out to the student that there are only two basic shapes to learn.
- ⌚ When using the Memphis Scale to improvise, it can create a very country sound or a more subtle sound depending on how the student uses the notes. Van Morrison uses this idea in the song 'Brown Eyed Girl'.
- ⌚ This style of improvising was very popular in the 60s and fits the southern country and rock styles very well.

In the Gallery Demonstration (~2 minutes)

- ⌚ The easiest way for the student to understand all of the above is to demonstrate how the Memphis Scale is used. Play the entire lick shown using your thumb and fingers to pluck each note.
- ⌚ Strats and Teles sound great with this style and if you don't have one of them, try to play using a single coil pickup. Explain to the student that the type of guitar and the pickup used will have a big impact on the feel of the lick. Acoustics can be used but won't have the same feel.
- ⌚ Point out that when you play the lick, instead of lightly picking each note, when you play the fourth string you pull the string straight up in the air so it snaps back down and hits the frets. This achieves a great sound that fits the style very well. A similar technique can be used with the second string notes but even if this is done just on the lower notes it creates a great feel.
- ⌚ Point out the single note on the first string and explain that while the idea behind the Memphis Scale is to play using two strings, other notes can be used and the student can move away from using just two notes if they feel like it.
- ⌚ Mention that all the shapes used in this lick can be found in the diagrams on the material sheet. This lick is in the key of C so the student will find it easy to improvise in C after practising this lick.

In the Gallery - Student Practice (~7 minutes)

- ⌚ Take the lick one position at a time and ask the student to use their thumb and first finger from their picking hand to play the notes. Hybrid picking can be used but the fingers create a more authentic feel that fits the style.
- ⌚ Ask the student to think about which fingers they should use when they move from position to position. The very first slide from the third to the fifth fret shouldn't be played using the first finger as a bar. This is because the student will have more control over the notes if they use two separate fingers.
- ⌚ Let the student focus on the positions at first then they can focus on the rhythm. By focusing on one aspect of the lick at a time they will learn it faster and it will sound better.
- ⌚ Once the student can play the lick without stopping, strum a C Major chord while the student plays the lick so they can hear how each part relates to the root.
- ⌚ Ask the student to experiment with the feel of the lick by adding in staccato wherever they feel appropriate. They can also experiment with how hard they pluck the strings.
- ⌚ Explain that changing how hard the notes are plucked is a very easy way to change the feel of a piece.

Improvisation Practice (~5 minutes)

- 🕒 Now the student understands how the Memphis Scale is used in music they can learn how to improvise.
- 🕒 Explain that the student can simply start off moving up and down the positions changing how they pluck the notes. For example: some positions they can pluck both strings together while other times they can pluck each string one after another.
- 🕒 Ask the student to start off by simply playing the positions shown up and down the neck.
- 🕒 Ask the student to do this again but instead of simply playing up and down the positions, they should try to change direction as they go and just play around with the shapes.
- 🕒 Next, the student can start sliding between the positions and introducing single notes as well as the positions shown.
- 🕒 Let the student continue to experiment with improvising using the Memphis Scale and remind them to think about the feel by adjusting how they pluck the notes and using staccato and other techniques.

Memphis Scale Overview (~2 minutes)

- 🕒 It should be pretty obvious to the student that the Memphis Scale is very easy to use to create something that sounds like music. Sometimes students get stuck when improvising using the Pentatonic Scale because they have trouble creating something that sounds musical. With the Memphis Scale, almost everything sounds very musical straight away.
- 🕒 Mention that the student can choose to improvise using the Memphis Scale whenever they feel appropriate. As long as they figure out the right notes, they can easily use this idea to create a different style of improvisation.
- 🕒 Explain that the student can blend this idea together while improvising using the Pentatonic Scale and can easily alternate between the two. They should practice using the Pentatonic Scale for eight bars then switch to the Memphis Scale and continue alternating back and forth to get used to each.

Suggested Practice Plan for student

1. First, the student should practice the In the Gallery lick shown to practice how the Memphis Scale is used by other players
2. Next, the student should practice improvising using the C Major Scale as shown
3. Finally, the student should figure out other scales and improvise in new positions

Other uses for this lesson content

- 🕒 This content works very well if the student is struggling to create musical phrases using the Pentatonic Scale