

Universally Designed Pickleball

Instructor: Jake Bersin

Content Area: Physical Education

Estimated Time: 1 class period (forty minutes).

Essential Question: What skills are most important for effective pickleball play?

National P.E. Indicators

- Demonstrates striking an object with a short-handled implement in a variety of practice tasks. (Standard 1, Indicator 1.5.16)
- Selects and applies the appropriate shot and technique in net and wall games (Standard 2, Indicator 2.8.4)
- Solves problems amongst teammates and opponents (Standard 3, Indicator 3.8.8)

Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, students will know and be able to:

- Demonstrate a proper volley serve and drop serve using correct form cues.
- Identify and apply forehand and backhand striking techniques during gameplay.
- Demonstrate respectful communication and safe participation during partner activities.

“I can...” statements

- I can serve underhand into the correct court.
- I can use forehand and backhand strokes.
- I can explain one pickleball rule.
- I can demonstrate safe and respectful behavior.

Language Objective

Students will be able to verbally explain and demonstrate the proper technique for striking an object with a short-handled implement, using target vocabulary (e.g., *grip, swing, follow-through*) during practice tasks.

Equipment

Projector, Cones/ Agility ladder, Task cards, whistle, Paddles, balls, hoops

Lesson Overview

<p>Introduction/ warmup</p>	<p>Choice Warm-Up</p> <p>Each class, I like to check in with students before we jump into the content.</p> <p>Next, students choose a jump rope and complete warm-up challenges using task cards.</p> <p>Options/Accessibility Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students choose a challenge level. Music/timer adds motivation.• Visual task cards with pictures (gifs from cbhpe.org)• Teacher models examples.• Students may: jump rope, step over rope, perform seated arm rotations• Students also have the option to complete a fitness warmup
<p>Task 1 (grip & paddle/ball skill development)</p>	<p>Skill Introduction: Grip</p> <p>Goal: Get students comfortable with the paddle/implement.</p> <p>Demonstrate: Handshake grip, Forehand grip, Backhand grip</p> <p>Practice Task: Students strike or balance a ball on a paddle.</p> <p>Options/Accessibility Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher demonstration, Visual grip posters, Peer modeling• Students may use: larger/lighter balls, shorter paddles, seated participation option• Scaffolded Choices: balance only or bounce and catch• Continuous taps, alternate forehand/backhand <p>Skill Introduction: Serving</p> <p>Demonstrate: Drop serve, Volley serve</p> <p>Practice Task: Students may: serve to the wall, serve to partner, self-feed, serve from modified distance</p> <p>Options/Accessibility Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visual serve sequence chart, Slow-motion modeling, Verbal and visual cues• Challenge: Students aim for specific targets/zones

<p>Task 2 (Serving Practice)</p>	<p>Practice Task: Serving Practice</p> <p>Courts are divided into zones. Students serve toward hoops/spots.</p> <p>Goal: Improve serve accuracy and placement.</p> <p>Options/Accessibility Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may: serve to the wall, serve to a partner, self-feed, serve from a modified distance, and seated serve option • Students choose the target difficulty and whether to keep score • Different size/color targets
<p>Task 3 (Toss & hit drill)</p>	<p>Practice Task: Partner/group Toss & Hit Drill</p> <p>Goal: Improve striking hand/eye coordination.</p> <p>Options/Accessibility Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students choose three pickleball skills they want to focus on, such as serving, dinking, volleying, and court positioning. • Peer encouragement roles (leader, score keeper & helping hand) • Demonstration of movement, spot markers for positioning • Adaptations: slower tosses, trap/catch before hit, use a foam ball • Challenge: students track personal bests, and Challenge Ladder Progression
<p>Task 4 (Game situation)</p>	<p>Game Situation*</p> <p>*Differentiate instruction for students who may not be ready for game play</p> <p>Goal: Apply serving and rally skills in gameplay.</p> <p>Options/Accessibility Supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization: Smaller courts, 1v1 or 2v2, Modified boundaries as needed • Choice of partner/team • Visual rule posters, boundary markers, and color-coded zones • Students may serve closer, simplify kitchen rules, and count rallies instead of points. • Students pick their difficulty level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Level 1: Cooperative volley— complete 10 consecutive hits with a partner. ○ Level 2: Competitive volley — keep score of all shots ○ Level 3: Kitchen Chaos — add more people to the group.
<p>Intentional Close</p>	<p>Students will reflect on their skill development in serving, forehand, and backhand strokes.</p> <p>Options/Accessibility Supports</p>

- Students can complete a [mastery check](#), point to visuals/icons, and/or [use thumbs-up/down](#)

Design Process

The following highlights the proactive design process using the [UDL Lesson Planning Protocol](#).

Step 1: Clarify Purpose

Learning Goals

- Demonstrate a proper volley serve and drop serve using correct form cues.
- Identify and apply forehand and backhand striking techniques during gameplay.
- Demonstrate respectful communication and safe participation during partner activities.

Why This Matters

Racket and paddle sports (like pickleball) are some of the best lifelong fitness activities you can learn. It develops reaction time/coordination and keeps you agile and healthy. To truly enjoy these games and play with competence, we need a solid foundation built on different skills, knowledge, and etiquette.

Success Criteria

Students will be able to:

- Successfully serve underhand so the ball lands in the correct service court.
- Demonstrate both forehand and backhand strokes during gameplay or practice.
- Accurately explain at least one rule of pickleball.
- Show safe, respectful behavior while participating.

Score Key:	✓ = Demonstrates Skill 0 = Developing X = Not Yet			
Student Name	Serve	Forehand	Backhand	Respect & Safety

Step 2: Anticipate Variability

Potential Barriers	Proactive Scaffolds Supports
Lack of confidence	Scaffolded tasks, peer support, success-based progression
Limited striking experience	Multiple equipment options and slower-paced practice
Attention/focus needs	Visual schedules, concise directions, and demonstrations
Mobility or coordination differences	Seated options, larger targets, reduced distances
Language/vocabulary needs	Picture vocabulary cards and teacher modeling
Sensory needs	Choice of space/equipment, predictable routines

Step 3: Build a Welcoming Start

At the beginning of each class, check in with students to see how they are doing before transitioning to a [choice-based warm-up](#) routine that creates an engaging start and supports different interests, readiness levels, and movement needs.

Step 4: Embed Flexible Assessments

Ongoing Assessment

Observe students during drills/games and [track target skills](#) and formatively assess understanding of pickleball rules.

Pickleball Gameplay Skills Rubric

Criteria	4 - Advanced	3 - Meeting	2 - Approaching	1 - Beginning
Serving	Consistently performs accurate underhand serves into the correct court with control.	Usually performs accurate underhand serves into the correct court.	Sometimes serves correctly but lacks consistency or control.	Rarely serves correctly or needs significant support.

Forehand & Backhand Skills	Effectively uses both forehand and backhand strokes with control during gameplay.	Uses forehand and backhand strokes appropriately during gameplay.	Attempts both strokes but with inconsistent control or technique.	Rarely attempts or demonstrates proper forehand/backhand strokes.
Gameplay	Demonstrates strong movement, positioning, and understanding of gameplay strategies.	Demonstrates appropriate positioning and basic gameplay understanding.	Shows limited positioning awareness or inconsistent gameplay decisions.	Demonstrates minimal understanding of positioning or gameplay.
Rules	Consistently follows rules and can clearly explain rules during gameplay.	Follows rules appropriately during gameplay.	Needs occasional reminders about rules or procedures.	Frequently forgets or does not follow rules.
Sportspersonship & Safety	Always demonstrates respectful, safe, and positive behavior toward others.	Usually demonstrates respectful and safe behavior.	Sometimes demonstrates respectful and safe behavior with reminders.	Rarely demonstrates respectful or safe behavior.

Summative Assessment (at the end of the unit)

Students will complete a combination performance and reflection assessment that includes multiple ways to demonstrate learning while maintaining the same learning goal and success criteria for all students. Students will demonstrate skills during gameplay and complete a short reflection explaining one rule and one strategy, describing how they demonstrated sportsmanship, and identifying a skill they improved.

Step 5: Design Flexible Learning Experiences

Students have opportunities to make meaningful choices throughout the lesson, including selecting warm-up activities, challenge levels, serving options, target difficulty, gameplay formats, and partner arrangements. Multiple representations are embedded through teacher modeling, visual task cards, posters, demonstrations, cues, and peer supports. The lesson also includes flexible methods and materials through adapted equipment, modified distances, seated participation options, alternative movement choices, and scaffolded levels of challenge. Supports and extensions are embedded so students can build confidence while maintaining engagement and working toward the same learning goals.

Step 6: Create Space for Student Ownership

Students have input by selecting roles that align with their strengths and interests, choosing warm-up, practice, and playing options that feel appropriately challenging, and selecting equipment that best supports their success. Student voice is also embedded into goal-setting [routines](#), self-assessment, and reflection.

Step 7: Plan an Intentional Close

After completing the day's tasks, students will reflect on their skill development through a [mastery check](#), point to visuals/icons, and/or [use thumbs-up/down](#) as they consider their progress in serving, forehand, and backhand strokes.

Next Steps: Differentiated Instruction

Learner Readiness	Potential Next Steps
Students who have fully mastered the content or skill	Design extension tasks that focus on advanced gameplay strategies. Students can analyze concepts, such as shifting court positioning in doubles play or exploiting an opponent's weakness. Additionally, empower students to take on roles such as peer coaching classmates on skill cues.
Students who have a basic understanding of the content and/or skill	Provide opportunities to build teamwork during the lesson. Challenge students to focus on court positioning and communication during rallies. Introduce basic refereeing tasks, such as tracking the score and making accurate line calls, to reinforce their understanding of the rules.
Students who do not yet have an understanding of the content and/or skill	Provide targeted small-group instruction focusing on fundamental pickleball skills and rules. Use explicit demonstrations and practice to teach proper paddle grip, the drop serve, and safe movement. Ensure students demonstrate basic control and spatial awareness before moving on to game play.