to my mother, for everything

Coach Andy's Chess Corner

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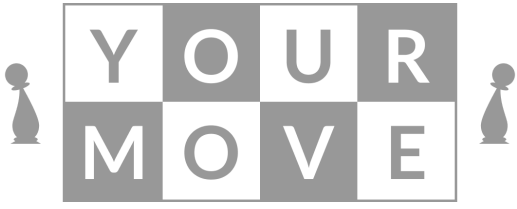

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Contents

Introduction

My dad taught me chess when I was six years old. I don't remember much, except that it felt boring and complicated.

My dad wasn't very fun to play with. He would take my pieces and I felt I was always making a mistake. After momentary interest engaging in the new activity, I quickly became irritable and frustrated, wanting to do other things. Video games were much more fun for me.

Learning chess at a young age did not enhance my intelligence or benefit me in any way, except one: I was able to play the game with friends during indoor recess in middle school.

As peers, we discovered the joys of tactical combinations. We furiously tried to attack and checkmate each other in the first few moves. We paired up to learn the fast-paced team variant, bughouse. None of us knew

what we were doing, but suddenly, the game became fun.

Once I was engaged in playing, and wanted to come up with new strategies to beat my friends, I was ready and excited to join the chess team in high school. I went from novice to expert, reading dozens of chess books and playing in rated tournaments.

And so, like the great World Champions and their professional grandmaster peers, I became a chess player. Not because of my early years but rather in spite of them.

Kids all over the world associate chess with the first experience, the dull pain, rather than the second, the playful learning. It's so easy to get frustrated or bored at the start, when someone is telling you a bunch of arbitrary piece movements.

Folks understandably stop short, thinking that improving at chess is laborious and unrewarding. As adults, they continue feeling disinterested and vaguely incompetent.

This book tackles the problem by providing a framework for learning chess that's engaging and empowering from the start. We completely bypass the boring frustration by equipping you with intuitive learning tools.

The key idea is to play simplified chess minigames. After five minutes with chapter 1, you can jump right in to fun, highly instructive interactions with your kids!

This method doesn't sacrifice rigor; we will remain laser focused on teaching the core themes and basic skills which make chess a universal metaphor for strategic thinking.

I developed the chapters to come through much trial and error teaching hundreds of students across the country, from pre-K infants to reluctant retirees. In addition to teaching directly, I've also helped parents and other chess instructors effectively employ these ideas with their kids.

It turns out that making an engaging curriculum is only half the battle. So each

minigame chapter is followed by a teaching method and a parenting principle. These are essential tips and tricks, sometimes only indirectly related to chess, that will greatly help your child feel motivated to progress in their learning.

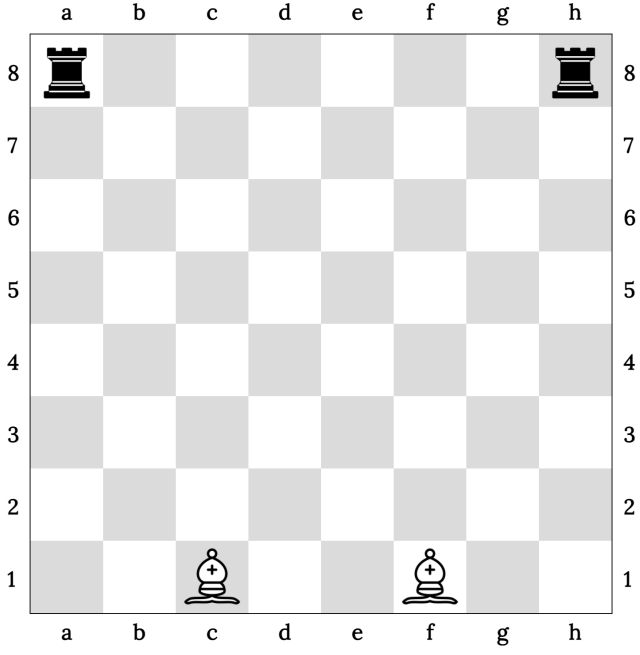
A couple notes on chapter structure before we dive in. First, each chapter is self-contained, so jump around as you like. Second, the book focuses on the overall teaching framework, not the rules of chess.

If you aren't familiar with or have forgotten the names of the chess pieces and how they move, you may want to glance at the rules in the appendix and then jump to the teaching method on basic piece mechanics before returning to the first chapter. This alternative sequencing will be useful for readers who need more context to grasp the Bishops and Rooks minigame.

I'm so excited for the kids who have the privilege of learning with you. Thanks for developing your chess teaching, and enjoy!

Minigame 1
Bishops and Rooks

White moves a bishop first, then black moves a rook, then white moves a bishop, and so on. The winner is whoever captures one of the opponent's pieces first.



Initial setup. Notice a1 square is black.

If nobody has captured a piece after 50 moves each, the game ends in a draw. For many children, getting that far often takes weeks. No need to keep count for the first few games.

Even if a child has played chess before, this minigame can be used as a diagnostic tool. Players who consistently miss opportunities or lose are encouraged to continue playing before moving on to the next minigame. Quick learners (especially adults) may find the game too obviously easy and boring, ready to move on after one or two rounds. That's OK too.

As you play, remember that the minigame is the teacher! Get your child in the habit of making a move *of her own volition and committing to it*. No eye contact approval, no "uh ah" warnings, no head shaking, no judgment. It's healthy for chess learners to make their own mistakes and learn from them. Switch colors and try again! Be patient, just play.

Eventually, you may set up certain instructive positions (double attack opportunity) and ask the student to point out the best next move. This is especially good after the first week of teaching second graders, for example, once they're engaged in the play and want to improve.

As an optional rule, you may enforce touch move: if you touch a piece you have to move it. When you release the piece your turn ends. The only exception is to say "I adjust" prior to touching and fixing a piece.

Starting with Bishops and Rooks is the fastest and most concrete way to teach the most basic skill in chess: "think before you move."

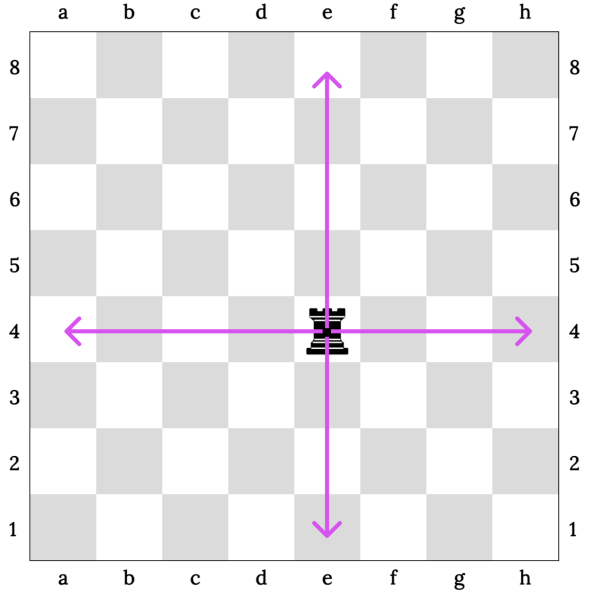
In the next chapter, we will explore how to teach the movement of the pieces. Feel free to skip if you and your child are fully familiar with the various piece movements.

Teaching Method 1

Basic Mechanics

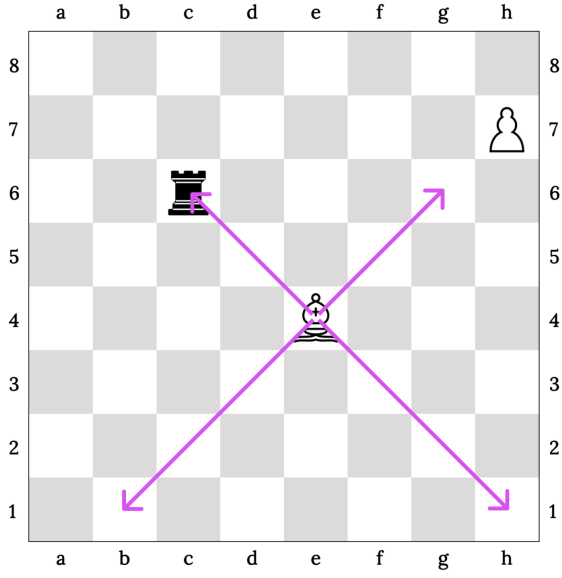
How do the pieces move? Rather than demonstrating each piece (see appendix), here we focus on how to teach a beginner.

First, we want to expose the learner to the piece. Place it on an empty board and demonstrate: “This is the rook, it looks like a castle. It moves vertically and horizontally.”



Next, invite the student to move the piece around. This is an opportunity to familiarize them with coordinates. “Is it legal for a rook to move from b1 to c8? Would you please move the rook from f7 to c3 in two moves?”

Now that the student has tried movement, we need to explain capturing. “Pieces that move in straight lines cannot jump over their teammates—they have to stop short. To take an opponent’s piece, move into the square occupied and remove the other piece from the board.”



Set up a few obstacle courses and have the student practice legal moves. For example, place the bishop on e4 and opponent pieces on c6, a2, h3. Place a friendly knight on d5. Moving only the bishop, how many moves does it take to capture all the enemy pieces? Have your child just try it!

Teaching piece movement can take as long as you like. I recommend keeping the training session short. Kids usually prefer "let's play a game" to "solve this arbitrary puzzle." The minigames will naturally teach and reinforce piece movement rules.

Kids appreciate fun, inventive language. For example, you could introduce bishops as "X-men" or explain how Catholic leaders wear pointy hats with diagonal cuts. I worked with an instructor in St. Louis, Queen Thomas, who sang a memorable jingle as she demonstrated rooks: "up, down, side-to-side, up-down-side-to-side."

Especially with young children, every second is a valuable opportunity to captivate.

Parenting Principle 1
Enrollment

There are many tactics we can employ to momentarily attract kids' interest, but long-term, we need their goodwill and buy-in. How can we get on the same team?

I wasn't on team chess when my dad taught me the pieces movements by rote. I was much more invested, years later, when chess became a fun competition among friends.

The most powerful and natural motivator is to play for the sake of play. Because you can. Because it's interesting and enjoyable.

Kids don't practice piano to win trophies at recitals, they don't do ballet or hockey to eventually earn millions as lucky pros, and they don't study chess to put line items on their resume or to get into a famous college.

They might, eventually, after hearing it ten thousand times from someone else. And they

might want to win your short-term approval or avoid punishment. But these are hollow drives which utterly fail when battling against playful discovery that's interesting, challenging, and incrementally rewarding.

This is especially true with chess. It's a hard game to learn and an easy one to feel bored or insecure playing. Anything other than an encouraging smile, a gentle guiding hand, and a playful attitude might breed resentment. It's bound to be a disaster if we start with the full, complex, confusing game.

Throughout any learning journey, we want to inspire. We want the student to become engaged, to ask questions, to take initiative.

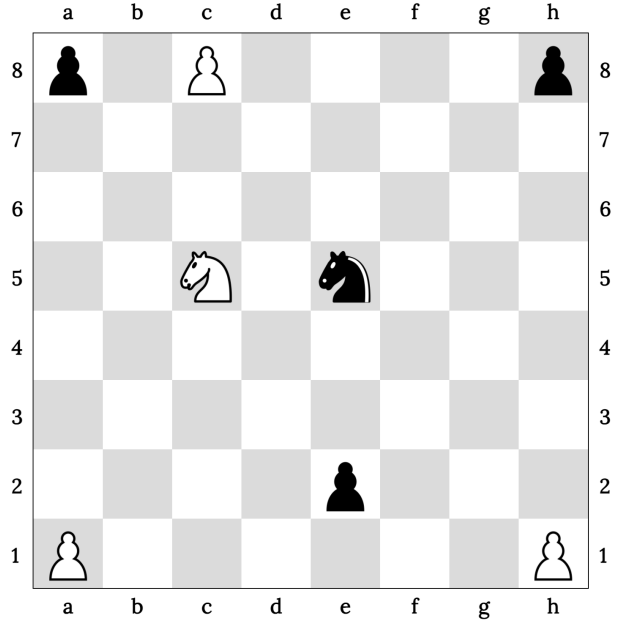
Being on the same team means that when someone really doesn't want to play, we don't force it. Give them other options and a hug. Let them know to come back when ready.

Having a choice is a prerequisite to enrollment. And enrollment is a prerequisite to learning *and retaining* anything at all.

Minigame 2

Knight Battleship

Starting with an empty chess board, each player holds a knight and three pawns of their color. Players take turns placing their knights then pawns on the board, one at a time. Since white moves first, black gets first placement. The knights may not attack each other initially. Here's an example setup:



After placement is complete, take turns moving the knights only. Whoever first captures all the opponent's pawns, or takes the unsuspecting enemy knight, wins.

Knights are the trickiest piece. The geometry of their L-shaped hop doesn't come naturally. Instructions like "two squares in one direction, then one square in another" can be confusing. "One square like a rook then one like a bishop" may work but then we have to explain "horses are special and can jump over other pieces."

The best way to introduce knight movement is per teaching method 1: make a short explanation, demonstrate the movement, then have students try it out quickly so they can get a feel for it themselves. This last part is the key, so don't worry as much about finding the perfect explanation. The sole purpose of this minigame is to become familiar with the knight's geometry.

Unlike the first minigame, which only required one-move tactical awareness,

Knight Battleship teaches calculation of longer sequences. Players naturally start to look ahead while hopping around and optimizing initial placement. See if you can evaluate various starting positions as winning for one player or the other! The example above is nontrivial.

After some time counting squares or shuffling the knight on the path to its destination, you may gently guide your child to leave the piece on its initial square and get closer to the touch move rule. “Only touch the knight when you know where you’re going to put it, and bring it there in a single hop.”

An intermediate step is using a finger to find the end square. You can later remove the finger and have them work in their head.

Note the pawns act as flags and don’t move. For this game, it doesn’t matter if they are on the edges of the board or “attacking” and “defending” each other.

Teaching Method 2
Open Questions

The best teaching presents a touch of challenge while engaging the student to concentrate, learn, and grow. Even more, the best teaching will deepen the student's motivation to learn—her enrollment.

Most teaching questions we ask are closed. They demand some finite thing or objective list, an accurate answer. "How can the knight reach this square? Any hanging pieces?" Every move on the chessboard answers a closed question: "what's your next move?"

It's rough on children to learn any skill which requires lots of closed questions. The right answers are expected, and the inevitable wrong answers are demotivating because they implicitly tell the child that she is incompetent and useless.

It's essential to introduce open questions as a countermeasure. Here are some examples:

- What's something you noticed while playing this minigame?
- How did you feel playing chess today? What was the high / low?
- What's your favorite thing you learned in the last hour?
- Is there anything you want to improve next time you play?
- What patterns did you observe, how do you think about this?
- What are you proud of doing today?

These questions have no proper, pre-defined answer. Any meaningful effort at all may be greeted with "that's a wonderful response, thank you for sharing your thoughts."

Open questions provide structure for introspection. Then our validation of their original responses encourages further reflection and articulation. This facilitates learning, engagement, and personal growth.

When the child says something not entirely clear, we can give them the opportunity to help us understand what they mean by using

open follow-up questions. But we want to carefully avoid making any judgments.

In teaching children that they are right in the expression of their thoughts and feelings, we give them emotional breathing room to develop themselves and their relationship to the activity at hand.

When asking such questions regularly during the course of teaching chess, the child is more likely to pick up this framework of reflection and apply it themselves later in life to any activity or challenge they may choose. It's transferable, and a much more important skill than chess itself!

Follow-up actions are usually not necessary. The mere act of sharing, demonstrating curiosity and listening, this creates a positive environment where mistakes are no longer the primary emotional trigger but seen as smaller incidents contained within the larger, joyful learning journey. Open questions teach your child to love the game and love themselves.

Parenting Principle 2
Patient Expectations

To beat my friends in chess as a teenager, I wanted my little sister to practice with me. I impatiently trained her, constantly pointing out mistakes. Just like my dad did to me.

Of course, it didn't work. Since learning and playing with me was frustrating, she never became a strong player. She didn't want to; she wasn't enrolled in that journey.

I see a lot of parents making the same mistake with their kids, week after week in my beginner classes. "No, honey, that's totally wrong! I just told you the knight moves like this...like this, remember!?" Or, "you don't want to move *there*, otherwise I'll take your piece like *this*!"

You can see it in the child's eyes when they're tip-toeing on eggshells, watching their parent's face with each move to see if they're making a mistake.

This is a very bad state of affairs. Each negative correction erodes your child's energy and trust, in addition to making them ever more sensitive to future corrections. They won't say anything, but their fun chess journey will quickly evolve into a losing struggle for parental approval and love.

We need to remember that, especially in the beginning, our children aren't playing chess to become the world champion. They don't care to add a title to their resume or achieve computer-like perfection. They're playing because it's fun, because they like to play.

My sister would have become a much better player if I had trusted her to improve in her own time. If I had encouraged her more and expected to witness the same mistake five times in a row, without comment.

Now I know that it's best to ignore most mistakes in the beginning, to just let kids get comfortable moving the pieces around. Over time, we can start to consistently punish mistakes by capturing pieces, for example.

They will learn from the experience, through dozens of repetitions playing a game they want to get better at, much better than from us telling them how wrong they are.

Let the child ask to take the move back, instead of preemptively telling them to.

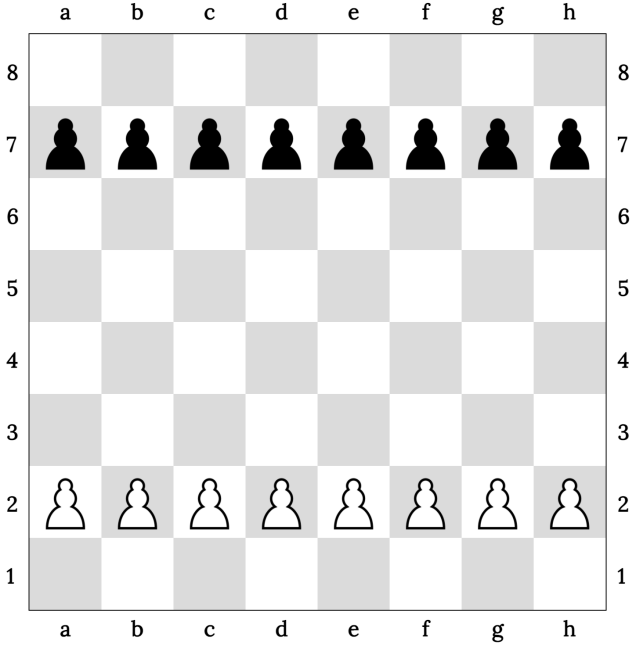
If direct teaching is truly necessary, construct a puzzle or diagram related to the mistake. Ask the child to look at this interesting position and talk through their observations. There is magic in taking a few extra minutes to hold back any direct scrutiny and instead conduct a calm, non-threatening, non-judgmental conversation. Explore this hard game with joy and curiosity, on the same team!

The silent chess teacher is best. She is the wise master who presents mysterious, fun challenges and builds enrollment through open questions. She will have much more success than the loud critical teacher who, knowingly or not, constantly tells his students that they are fools.

Minigame 3

Pawn Wars

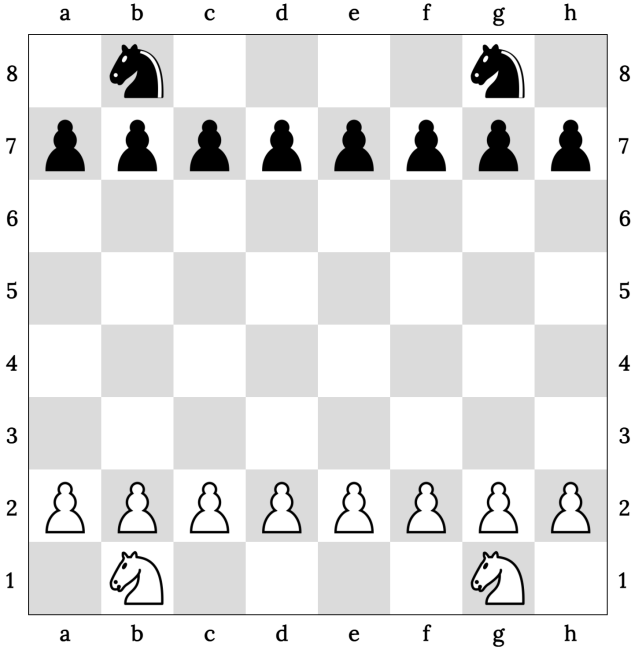
Whoever gets a pawn to the other side first wins!



You may start with pawns moving one square at a time. After movement and capture are digested through a few rounds

of play, we can add the initial double-step and *en passant* capture rules.

Another option is Knight Wars, where we also add the knights on their normal starting squares. Whoever gets any piece to the other side first wins. This version is a bit more fast, fun, furious!



Teaching Method 3
Incentives

The common modes of chess instruction are:

1. Lecturing with a demo board.
2. Giving worksheet assignments.
3. Tournament, partner, or free play.

Maybe there's a bit of instructive value in good lectures, but we can mostly expect students to zone out. Worksheets are often viewed as a chore, although they can occasionally engage the student when done well. Kids typically enjoy free play the most, but they rarely learn much from it.

When I was teaching in St. Louis, I found these techniques insufficient. Each had benefits and drawbacks, but none would produce high engagement or further the students' chess abilities in the ways I wanted.

When I started utilizing minigames, I took a big step in the right direction, but still students wouldn't take them very seriously.

If I played one-on-one with a child, they might engage. But with their peers during free play, they frequently just goofed off.

I decided to introduce some prizes designed to maximize engagement and learning. There were three pieces of candy available each class: one for the highest number of wins, one for the most opponents played, and one for exceptional sportsmanship. (Note that candy can be inadvisable. Notebook smileys, stickers, or stamps are much more scalable.)

With paper in hand to write each opponent's name and a 1, 0, or ½ result, everyone became focused. They would concentrate on their games, immediately standing and finding new partners when finished.

At the end of class we debriefed with a couple open questions and relevant tactical problems. For example, "What's the minimum number of moves for the knight on c6 to reach the pawn on a8?" or "White moved here in Jaden and Michelle's game...did they miss anything?"

Rather than lecturing at the beginning of class, students were more attentive at the end when seeing material that was relevant to their experience playing that day. It would help them improve to win prizes next class!

One issue I ran into was the subjectivity of the sportsmanship prize. A student doing a great job shaking hands at the beginning of games might have behaved poorly when I wasn't watching. Asking for peer recommendations or taking a vote would improve the objectivity of the process.

Whatever the implementation, it's important to have clear rules and expectations set in advance. If the incentives make sense and include a fair process for dispute resolution, then we can all agree to live uncomplainingly with the outcomes.

The results may not always be perfectly fair, but at least the incentives will provide some useful structure to motivate results. Overall, students will be much better prepared, mentally and emotionally, to engage.

Parenting Principle 3
Empathetic Boundaries

There's an elementary school in St. Louis where children live on the edge of insanity. When the teacher turns to write on the blackboard, the class erupts at the opportunity to run around screaming and fighting and breaking anything that goes *crunch*. Hair is pulled, sobbed tears reflect maniacal grins. Nothing is sacred.

In this school, you'd think students would fall behind from all the time they spend physically struggling with the staff. You'd be correct, except for one classroom.

In this classroom, Ms. Firm lays down the law. Students sit at their desks, God-fearing, rapt. To these young whippersnappers, Ms. Firm's left pinkie is more intimidating than the entire administration.

Ms. Firm radiates a bubble of respectful silence as she strolls through the halls with

her tidy line of students, like a funeral procession. After she passes, kids whisper with shudders, “I really hope I get some other teacher in 4th grade. Please good Lord, I hope she never looks at me.”

Teachers and parents are also scared of Ms. Firm. They could never bring themselves to be so hard on the students. They’re just kids after all, aren’t they? They think maybe she grew up in a military family or a nunnery.

The funny thing about Ms. Firm: not only do her methods get results (and a reputation), they also engender love. Ms. Firm’s approval is the most sought-after commodity at the school, and you don’t graduate from her class without it. After six months or so, the lucky fourth graders in her room have developed an attachment so deep that they actually enjoy coming to school and learning in respectful silence with Ms. Firm.

It’s up to you to find the balance that works between playful friend and authoritarian dictator. If it’s a prerequisite that students sit

in their seats and pay attention while you speak, then so be it. We have to work on that before we get to chess, with fun minigames and prizes. Or we will sit in silence.

Ms. Firm has mastered the art of practicing generous intent but setting clear rules. She helps her students make choices and live with consequences.

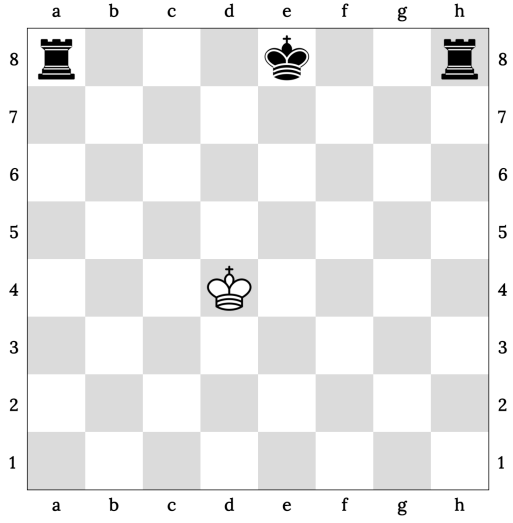
You don't have to put on your angry hat, but you shouldn't cave to a child's cute sadness or frightening scorn. It's selfish to damage your student by coddling them or arbitrarily exercising power. Be thoughtful and generous about creating a structured environment where children can grow.

By setting clear guidelines and adhering to them, you are developing your child's world. Ultimately, it will reflect in their relationship with you, with themselves, and with the game at hand. It might take months to achieve the desired result, but remember Ms. Firm and don't give up on them!

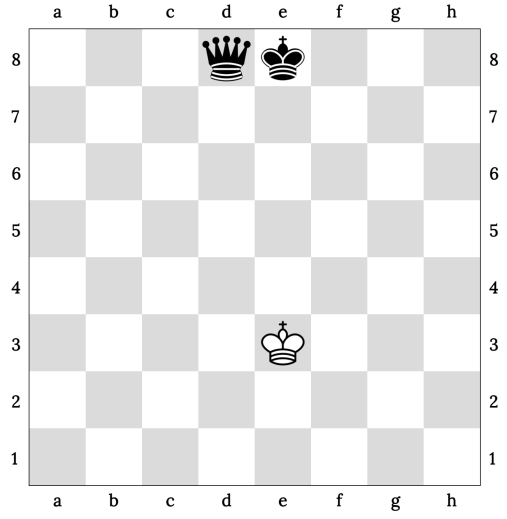
Minigame 4
Basic Checkmates

In the following situations, white is trying to stay alive, and black is trying to checkmate: attacking and trapping the opponent's king. It doesn't matter who moves first. The first two are mandatory, the third is extra credit.

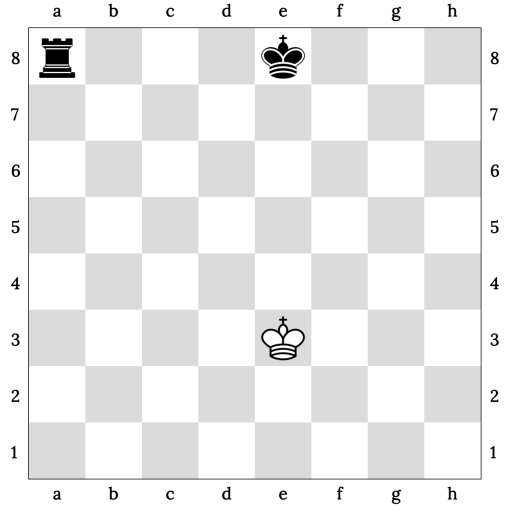
Start by asking your child to take the pieces in hand and set up a checkmate to serve as a guidepost. Then return to play the diagram.



Scenario 1: King versus King and two Rooks



Scenario 2: King versus King and Queen



Scenario 3: King versus King and Rook

Teaching Method 4
Adaptive Instruction

I once had a student who didn't like the minigame we were working on. Out of the entire class of a couple dozen kids, she was the only one who sat there grumpily, refusing to play. I spoke with her and discovered a deeper problem: "I don't like Knight Battleship. I don't like chess."

"That's OK," I told her, "it's not required that you like chess, but for the next 45 minutes, that's what we're going to be doing in this class." I was establishing an empathetic boundary. "Here are the options: play the minigame with the other kids, go into the hall by yourself, or sit at your desk quietly until class is over."

The grumpy face remained. "Can I do something else? I don't want to play with the other kids."

We were making progress discovering the root issue and an alternative plan. “What’s your favorite activity or sport? Oh, cool, gymnastics is awesome. I love the cheese pit with all the foam blocks! Hey, in gymnastics, you know how they get to do all those awesome flips and tricks in the Olympics?”

She thought for a moment. “Lots of practice?”

“Yes that’s exactly right. And practice can be really boring and not fun sometimes, just like chess! It’s a huge chore; you have to go for hours to the gym and do pushups and hurt yourself trying new flips. Then you have to do sit ups, get blisters, and sweat a lot. Gross! But then, you start to get better and it’s more fun. I bet we can make a fun new game...would you please think of it like gymnastics practice, try it for ten minutes?”

I asked her to place her knight on the board, then I put a couple pawns in an easy sequence. “Would you please capture these for me, using legal moves?” After that was

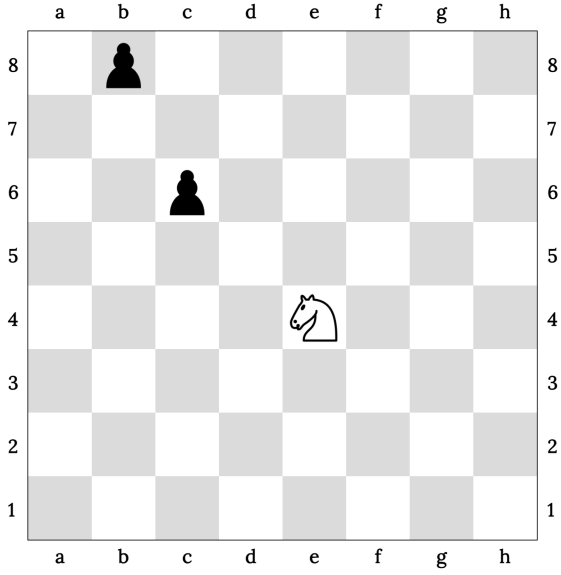
done, I asked her to place the pawns anywhere she wanted, and the knight, then go at it. We called this single-player version of Knight Battleship “Knight Gymnasium”.

I gave her a piece of paper and asked her to write how many moves it took to capture the pawns. Then I asked her to set up another random position and try to get all the pawns in fewer moves. Keep writing the numbers, and try to make them go down each time!

Some positions would require more moves. It didn’t matter. The important thing was to get this student engaged.

Because her relationship with the game stemmed from a feeling of incompetence, practicing this tractable task helped her gain confidence without fear of other students’ judgment. She would call me over and show her progress: “Look Coach Andy, I can set up the pawns like this in a line of L’s and it only takes as many moves as there are pawns!”

By the end of the week, she was the best student in the class at calculating knight jumps. She rejoined the group and trounced her peers. She set up puzzles for other kids. Like this one: how many moves are required for white to take all the pawns?



It's usually possible to get creative with students and help them engage at the appropriate level. If I can do it with 20+ kids running around in a room, you can certainly do it with your child one-on-one!

Parenting Principle 4
Good Habits

If you watch professional chess players, you'll notice they adjust their pieces before starting their games. They do this after the board is set up by a meticulous tournament organizer, with each piece already neatly placed in the center of each square. The chess pro has a habit of making triple sure things are orderly to their liking.

When I was growing up, there were two things that happened every single day. The first was at suppertime: veggies were served first, on a separate plate, and needed to be eaten completely before any other food. The second was after school: homework was finished before anything else—before snacks, before talking, before games, before chores. The only exception was going to the restroom, and even that could be a struggle. All of this was due to my parents' firm empathetic boundaries.

Habits, and strict rules in general, often don't seem efficient or optimal in the moment. It's not necessary to the chess game for every piece to be so accurately centered (the squares are bigger than the base of the pieces). I could have eaten some chicken or a bite of rice before the broccoli, and it wouldn't have harmed my health.

This seeming short-term inefficiency enables a long-term payoff in the reduction of choice. Habits are powerful because once set, they no longer require decisions to produce results. We don't go to work because we are especially inspired. We go to work because it's 9am on a Monday. It's the rule. We build a reputation and a career thanks to our alarm clock.

Habits are also powerful because we naturally get good at them. The sacred ritual of doing homework before anything else in the afternoons encouraged me to complete it quickly so I could play video games. Because I knew my dad would be upset if there were mistakes, I learned to do the

assignments well. The habit of doing schoolwork quickly and thoroughly helped me succeed on my own once I got to middle school, then high school, then college. I attribute my proficiency in math, high test scores, and M.I.T. degree in large part to this simple habit of doing homework immediately, starting in kindergarten.

There are lots of habits we might want our children to adopt: opening doors for others, writing neatly, saying please and thank you, practicing an instrument or a foreign language, respectfully listening to their teachers, cleaning up after themselves. The key is to consistently enforce the desired behavior. This takes years of hard work on the part of the parent, because the children aren't going to enforce rules for themselves.

We have to pick and choose particular habits that are most important to focus on. With chess, maybe it's engaging in the game and looking ahead, thinking before moving. It's also shaking your opponent's hand and saying "good game." There's the enrolled

attitude to consider: when it's chess time, we're not complaining or fighting about playing chess, but rather sitting down for this hour and doing it. As adults, we have to establish patient expectations and clear empathetic boundaries to see us through.

Behaviors breed mindsets, not the other way around. Someone who has good habits will be able to learn and build other ones, since they have a high standard for what excellence looks like. On the other hand, telling someone they should be a good sport but not rigorously requiring they act like it is a recipe for hypocrisy and low standards.

Even if a child thinks something is right or wrong, they won't necessarily act on it of their own accord or do it to the proper degree.

We can't tell our children to be good kids. We have to show them how, through examples and rules, then make them act the part. Good habits last, and bad ones do too.

Minigame 5
Progressive Chess

Progressive chess is normal chess with a twist. White gets the first move, then black gets two moves, then white makes three, black has four, and so on forever.

If a player attacks the opponent's king (check), the game pauses. The player loses their remaining moves and the opponent has a single move to respond. If they can't evade king capture right away, it's game over. If they can, the game unpauses, and the opponent's turn proceeds.

Progressive chess helps a player understand and coordinate their full army. It focuses on the outcome of the game, emphasizing king attacks. Its fast pace keeps students engaged better than regular chess despite similar complexity. Players quickly iterate on their strategies and learn through rematches how to better attack and defend with various move sequences, easing into normal chess.

Teaching Method 5
Contextual Motivation

I am currently an expert-level player with a U.S.C.F. rating of 2015. That's pretty good, enough to take on street chess hustlers for money and win. I can also play blindfolded, where moves are communicated verbally.

Many of my friends think I'm amazing at chess, but I certainly don't. At age 8, Awonder Liang was a stronger chess player than me now. He's a fellow Wisconsinite who I had the great pleasure to meet and lose some casual games against. Now, Awonder is the top player in the state, a strong grandmaster rated 2600+ and still a minor.

When I was teaching in St. Louis, I had a couple classrooms that were not motivated to do any more chess exercises. I tried a lot of different engagement techniques, including minigames, which helped to some degree but didn't fully immerse the students as much as I wanted to.

Then, it occurred to me that the best school days for kids are often the ones where they get to watch videos. So I pulled together a bunch of YouTube clips to show them blitz games with Awonder and fun stuff like Timur Gareev skydiving with a chess board to celebrate a tournament victory.

We discussed the Elo rating system and how Saint Louis has become the chess capital of the United States, looking at a map and seeing how far the club was from folks' homes. We watched online chess commentary and looked at movie trailers for *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, *The Queen of Katwe*, and *Brooklyn Castle*. Students loved learning about the world championship, the connections between A.I. research and chess, as well as the history of the game, plus its many variants and quirky characters.

In other settings, I was able to bring students to real chess tournaments where they could walk among the silent, concentrating adults playing long, slow games. I brought in my own tournament

games to share and discuss. I played kids in blindfolded or simultaneous exhibitions, having them team up against me.

Exposing my students to chess-related stories and fun facts proved surprisingly effective. But it really shouldn't have been surprising at all, when I think back to high school and those great moments when Mr. Brown would regale us with stories of long-dead grandmasters or his own tournament exploits.

Five minutes invested in a couple videos at the beginning of class can produce higher yield during the next 55 minutes. You can point and say, "remember how focused Awonder was? And he's 2 years younger than you in that video! Alright, let's shake hands, like pros, and concentrate on taking your time and making thoughtful moves."

I've also found it far more time-effective to have a student watch an engaging video explaining the importance of controlling the center rather than trying to lecture about it

myself from scratch. Students can discuss what they learned after watching, or we can apply the principle when analyzing games. It's also encouraging for students to know they can look up information online if they want to learn more and get better on their own.

Kids are way more excited to do stuff they find interesting, and one of the best ways to earn and maintain enrollment is to stoke their enthusiasm by offering new information, context, and stories about the magical world of chess.

Parenting Principle 5
Sacrifice

My dad used to tell us that he would gladly take a bullet for us. It's natural to love your kids so much you'd do anything for them, including making the ultimate sacrifice.

But how many times did my dad perform the chess equivalent, tipping his king and resigning? Not nearly enough. I felt little love through his actions at the chessboard.

Occasionally, he would let me win inconspicuously enough that I felt accomplished. But one way or another, I would soon be reminded of our status roles as father and son, chess authority versus chess learner. We were never true partners.

You've probably experienced this mode of learning in your life, whether with a parent, teacher, student, friend, or romantic partner. The activity varies—cooking, painting, cleaning, driving, bird watching, golf—but

the outcome rarely deviates. The teacher fails to inspire, and the student is left with a lingering sense of "I'd prefer if we didn't do that." It's simply not fun; it's an unpleasant situation to be avoided or escaped.

In my mind, there are two major ways to avoid this unhealthy relationship developing with your kids. The first is using appropriate teaching tools, like minigames, that match the child's skill level. Even when one side wins convincingly, the other player is empowered to learn from their mistakes and improve without feeling stupid or inferior.

The second component is attitude and how it's communicated through interaction.

The best parents and teachers do not act as arbiters of truth or strive to label right and wrong. Rather, their goal is to be a conduit of love, humility, and playfulness. To inspire a sense of wonder and self-sufficiency, so the student can become a more curious learner.

And perhaps one day, a teacher to others.

Conclusion
What's Next?

After completing all the minigames, your child should be equipped to play chess with confidence. Congrats, they're a chess player!

My top recommendation after the minigame sequence is to simply play more chess. Tournaments can't come too soon, and there are free ones daily online. Try Lichess.org or ChessKid.com for younger ones.

If there's interest in continuing the chess journey and studying more seriously, watch Paul Morphy's "Opera Game" on YouTube by John Bartholomew. Grandmaster games are beautiful and instructive!

For a minigame software platform aligned with this book, check out AcornChess.com.

For links, contact, books, and more study resources from me, visit "Coach Andy's Chess Corner" at andytrattner.com/chess.

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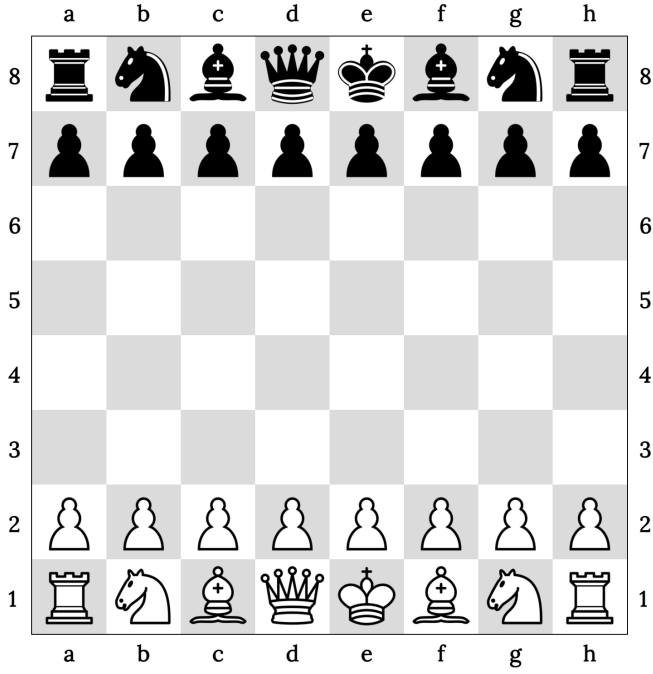
Appendix: The Rules of Chess

Chess is a two-player game played on a checkered board of 64 squares. Each player starts with an army of 16 pieces. The goal is to trap the opponent's king.

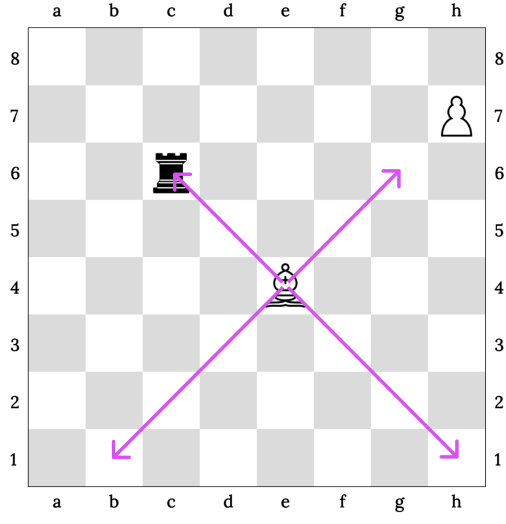


Initial setup. Notice bottom right h1 is white.

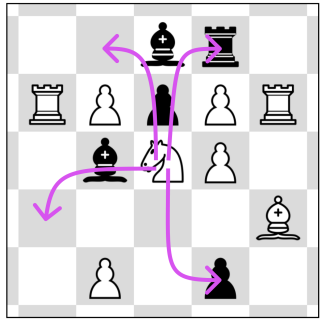
Players take turns moving one piece each, starting with white. Only one piece can occupy a square at a time.

Rooks move vertically or horizontally in straight lines. They cannot "jump" over other pieces. Capture a piece of the opposite color by moving into the occupied square and removing the captured piece from the board.

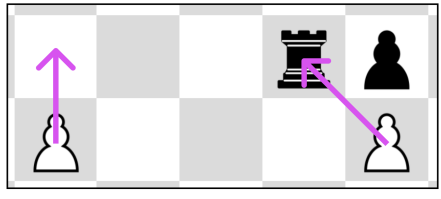
Bishops move in lines diagonally. Like rooks, they have to stop short of running into teammates, and they capture by occupying the square. They cannot jump over pieces.



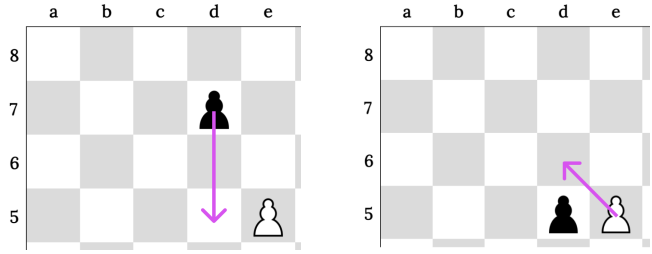
Knights move in an L shape, two squares in one of the four cardinal directions, then one square at a 90 degree angle. They jump always, without touching any pieces other than perhaps an opponent's piece in the end square.



Pawns move one square at a time forward towards the opponent's army. Pawns can only capture by moving one square diagonally, so they may be stuck "headbutting" an opponent's piece. They are the only piece which may not move backwards.



From their initial square only, unobstructed pawns may move two squares forward on a single turn. This creates a special circumstance when a pawn chooses to double-step from its home square.



If an opponent's pawn is on the square directly next to the moving pawn's destination, capture is not completely bypassed. Instead, on the turn immediately after the double-step, the opponent has the option to capture *en passant* (in passing), moving diagonally as in a normal pawn capture and taking the pawn which double-stepped off the board.

When a pawn reaches the 8th rank at the opponent's end of the board, "promote" it by replacing it with any piece you like (queen, rook, bishop, or knight) to end your turn.

The **Queen** is like a bishop and rook combined. She may move as far as desired in any unobstructed straight line: vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.

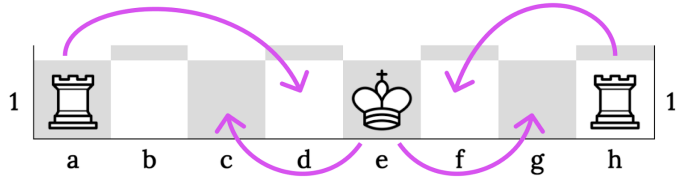
The **King** moves like the queen, but only one square in any direction.

You may say “check”, but are not required to, when one of your pieces threatens capture of the opponent’s king on the following move. A king that is under attack must defend. For example, by moving to avoid the check, capturing the attacking piece (with the king itself or another piece), or blocking the attack with another piece. It is illegal to make any other move when a king is under attack and may be captured the next move.

If the king cannot defend and capture is inevitable on the very next turn, then it is “checkmate” and the game is over.

Kings have one more special property, which is the ability to “castle” once per game. Castling involves moving two squares toward

a rook, then placing the rook on the other side of the king.



You can only castle if the king and desired rook have not moved at all during the game so far. The squares between the pieces must be vacant. The king cannot castle from, into, or through a check.

A draw occurs if it's no longer possible for either player to checkmate, if a player has no legal moves but is not in check (stalemate), if a player truthfully claims the same position has occurred three times, or if fifty consecutive moves each are played without any pawn moves or piece captures.

Games may be drawn by agreement as well. To offer a draw, make your move then state, "I offer a draw." The opponent may respond verbally or make their move to decline.

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