

Alexey W. Root

**THINKING WITH CHESS:
TEACHING CHILDREN
AGES 5-14**



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FOREWORD

Too often we teach children how the pieces move and then immediately get them playing (or trying to play) full games with all the pieces. The problem can be made worse by throwing in a lecture about the Sicilian or Spanish for good measure.

What we really should do is to get the children involved in absorbing play using the chessmen and the chessboard. We must avoid “talking down” to them and at the same time refrain from setting them tasks that are too complicated for their chess understanding. I believe this book is an excellent attempt at providing what we need.

I have often been asked, “What exactly should I do?” by those undertaking chess teaching or coaching. The detailed timetable of a five-day chess camp in Chapter 10 will be a boon to those wanting answers. The reader will find many other useful topics and answers to other practical questions. Not only that, but the reader is assured of the fact that the challenges and puzzles have received thorough testing, not only at the hands of

children, but some also – unusually – by experienced educators, chess teachers, chess masters, and chess trainers.

When I accepted an invitation to the Second Koltanowski International Conference on Chess and Education in Dallas in November 2011, to present the story of chess in schools in Turkey and how the World Chess Federation (FIDE) is working to build on that as a model for developing chess in schools around the world, I anticipated finding the other presentations of interest. However, I was expecting that to be a passive interest and I was somewhat surprised when Alexey brought out the boards and sets during the presentation she shared with Dr. Joseph Eberhard. All those in the room, attendees and presenters alike, were paired off with their neighbors, in my case with presenter David Barrett. We were soon all wrapped up in two of the challenges (*Classify* and *Game Theory*) that are included in this book. During the previous two months, the challenges and

puzzles had been tested with children during Dr. Root's chess classes.

I find it remarkable (and remarkably good) that the very same challenges can be enjoyed by one and all. Many are the chess books (most of them best forgotten) that have laid claim to being appropriate for players of all ages and levels, but these challenges genuinely meet that claim.

The *Classify* challenge was hugely enjoyable. David and I came up with a variety of different classifications. But it was the *Game Theory* challenge, in which children have fun figuring out whether one's best strategy for achieving castling

is to aim for it directly or to disrupt the opponent's plans first, that was the most intriguing. You can see our effort in Appendix A. The stipulation was for kingside castling; nonetheless, I claim to be better in the final position because after any move of the b8-knight, although I will not be able to castle kingside, queenside castling two moves later is unstoppable!

We were involved and motivated. I'm sure this material will do the same for children.

FIDE Senior Trainer Kevin O'Connell
April 2012



Figure 4.2.

Children playing the *Lines* challenge.

Public Library class playing the *Lines* challenge.

DECODE

Objectives

Children write letters on sticky notes. Each child places the letters on a board such that another child's chessman may capture one letter per turn. Children's chessmen capture letters. Children form words from the captured letters.

Materials

Thirty sticky notes per child. Each sticky note should be slightly smaller than a square on the chessboard. Set and board for every pair of children. Demonstration board (or equivalent) and sticky notes for the teacher are optional.

Spelling words should be at an appropriate level for the children playing the *Decode* challenge. Choose words studied in Language Arts or words from chess. The chess list might include board, file, rank, diagonal, win, lose, draw, move, rook, king, bishop, pawn, queen, knight, capture, castle, check, checkmate, and stalemate.

Procedure

Pass out sets, boards, and sticky notes to pairs of children. It is optional to place sticky notes on the demonstration board to show Figure 4.3. Figure 4.3 shows a possible starting position of the *Decode* challenge. The word "queen" can be decoded after the letters are captured by the white rook. Point out that the rook on f3 needs to capture a letter on each move. So the rook capturing on f5-f7-c7-c5-a5 works, but the rook capturing on f5-c5-a5 leaves it stuck on a5 with nothing to capture on its next move. Sticky notes may be placed letter-side up (as in Figure 4.3) or letter-side down.

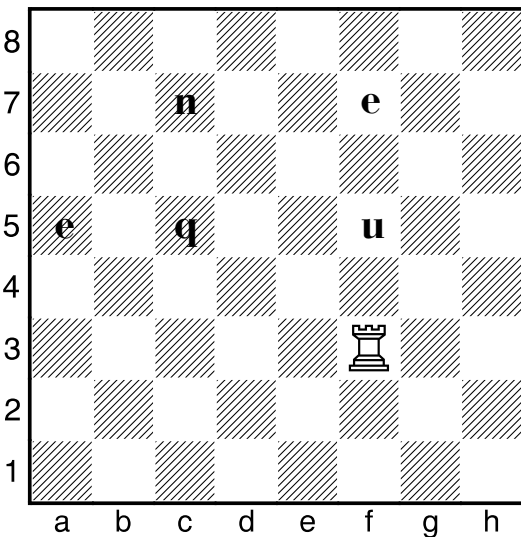


Figure 4.3.

Decode the word “queen.”

Within each pair of children, the first child holds a list of spelling words (or the chess words listed under Materials). He or she decides which word to spell, letter by letter, on sticky notes.

The first child places the sticky notes on the board. The word’s letters should be out of order, but with each letter a rook’s move away from the previous letter. The first child positions a rook on the board such that it can capture one letter per move.

The second child uses the rook to capture each letter. The sticky notes don’t move from their squares. After repeated rook captures, the second child has collected all the sticky notes. The second child unscrambles the captured letters to reveal a word. The first child confirms that the word is the intended one. If a

new word has been created instead, that is a “Eureka!” insight about how letters may spell more than one word. Then it is the second child’s turn to take the spelling list and some new sticky notes. The second child writes letters on the notes and places them on the board. The first child will repeat the rook captures and word decoding.

As written, this challenge reinforces how the rook captures. If desired, chessmen other than the rook can be used for this challenge. Place the letters so that the selected chessman captures one sticky note



Figure 4.4. Girl placing letters for the *Decode* challenge.

Bishop and Rook

per move. Figure 4.4 shows a 6-year-old girl placing letters a diagonal move apart from each other.

Evaluation

As children play the *Decode* challenge, monitor to make sure they write one letter per sticky note. Each child could be the decoder twice before the pair switches to playing chess games for fun.