Lesson 2

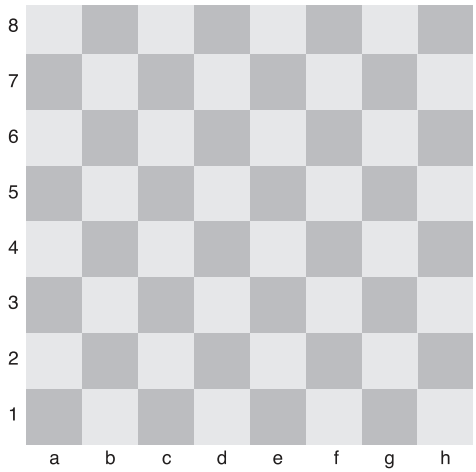
Getting to Know the Chess Board

Introduction to the chessboard, with the tale “The Two Know-It-All Mice.” The correct placement of the chessboard. The alternation of black and white squares. Ranks, files, and diagonals. Linear games.

Review what was covered in the previous lesson. Have the children recall the name of the game they are learning, and what kind of game it is (two players, moving wooden armies on a checkered board). Ask them to recall some parts of the story "The Shah and the Invention of Chess."

The Chessboard and the Squares

A game of chess begins with the chessboard placed in the following way:



A diagram of a chessboard, as is used in chess books.

Notice that a white **square** is always in the right hand corner. If there is a black square in the right hand corner, the board is not placed right. A good way to remember this rule is "white on right."

Begin the class with the children sitting facing each other on opposite sides of a chessboard (two children per board). The boards should be placed either correctly (with a white square in the right hand corner) or incorrectly. Ask the children to turn their board so that it is placed correctly. Go around the room, checking each board and turning it 90 degrees if it is not correct.

A chess game involves two "opponents"—one on each side of the board.

Here is a story for those who are just discovering the chessboard:

The Two Know-It-All Mice

Once upon a time in a green valley there were two brothers-mice who lived on a chessboard. One mouse was white and had his nest on a white square, and the other was black and had his nest on a black square. Both mice loved to brag, and thought they knew everything. This was why they were called the "know-it-all mouse-brothers". Because they lived on a chessboard, they thought they knew EVERYTHING about chess.

Show the children the chessboard, and point to the black squares and white squares.

Then one day a young girl named Polly came along. She listened to them brag about how much they knew about chess.

"You don't know anything about chess!" she said. "Look here—on this chessboard there are many black and white squares. See, this is a white square, and this here is a black square."

"We know everything about the chessboard—after all, it is our home!" said the mice.

"Well then tell me," said Polly, "which squares are bigger, the white ones or the black ones?"

"White," said the white mouse.

"Black," said the black mouse.

"What do you think?" **(ask the children)**

"Oh, you know-it-alls!" said Polly, "they are the same size. And can you tell me, what shape is the chessboard, and what shape are the squares?"

"The chessboard is round," said the white mouse.

"The squares are also round," said the black mouse.

"Is that so?" **(ask the children)**

"Silly mice! Your heads are round, a ball is round, but the chessboard and the squares are BOTH square. They have four sides and four corners."

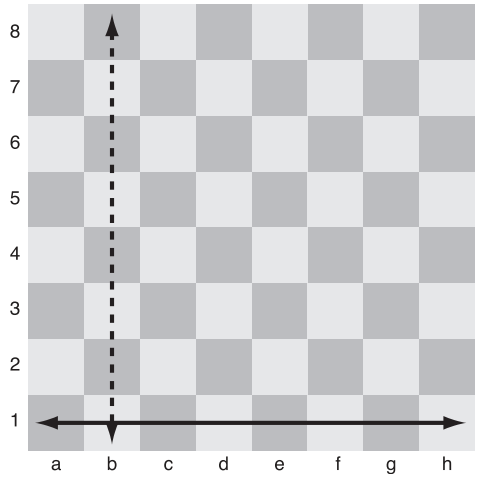
The mouse-brothers were very embarrassed. After that they stopped bragging, and even started to learn how to play chess!

The mice learned a lot about the chessboard from Polly. What do you know about the chessboard already?

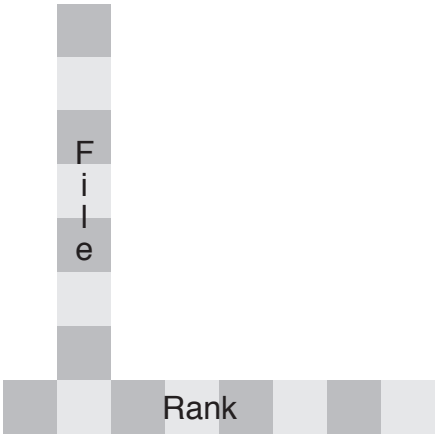
How many squares are there in total? **Have the children guess the number of squares on a chessboard. Once it is established, write it down on the chalkboard (64)**. And how many white squares and black squares are there? **Write this down on the chalkboard (32)**. There is the same number of white squares as black ones.

Pathways on the Chessboard

A chessboard consists of eight **"ranks"** and eight **"files."** Ranks go from left to right, and files go up and down, between the two opponents.

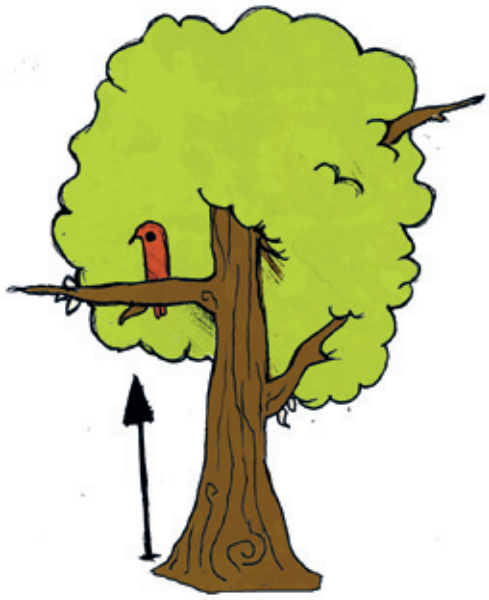


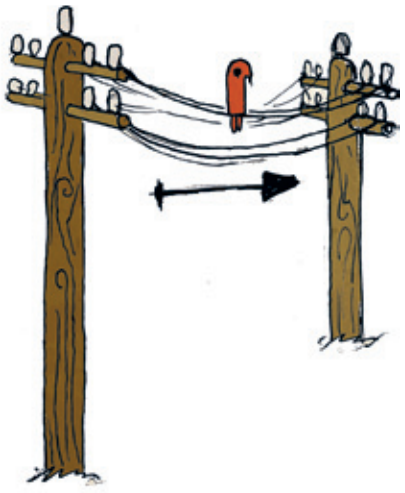
Here one rank and one file are shown. The file is noted by the dashed arrow, the rank by the regular arrow.



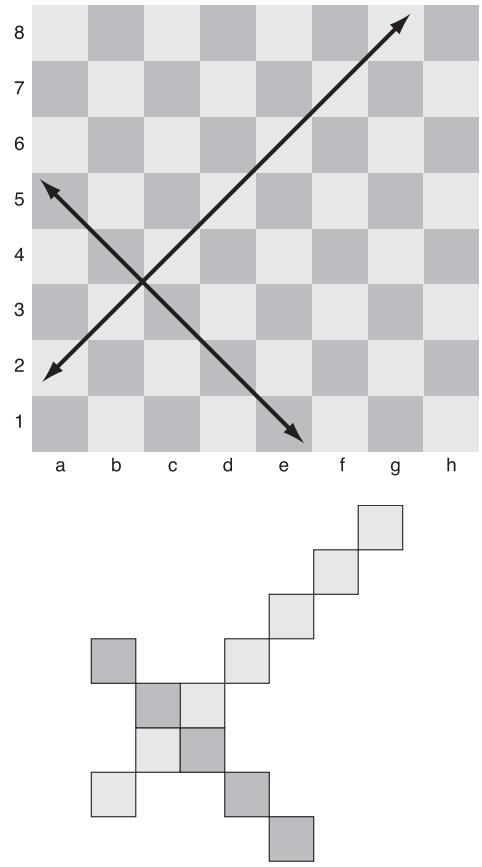
Understanding ranks and files

What things do you know that go up and down? **Some examples are light poles, trees, and legs.** These are files. And what goes from side to side? **Telephone lines, the floor, the ceiling.** These are ranks. Do you live in a house? How many floors are there in your house? There are eight floors on a chessboard. And how many streets are there in a city? There are many, but the chessboard has just eight streets. The streets go between one opponent and the other. **Point to lines on the demonstration board, either ranks or files. Have the children say what each is. Play this game until the children are getting it right.**



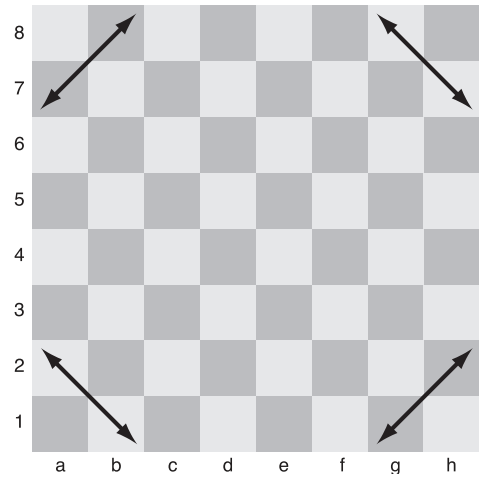


On the chessboard there are also **diagonals**. A diagonal goes from one side to another, and is of only one color. There are no diagonals with both black and white squares.



Two diagonals shown here.

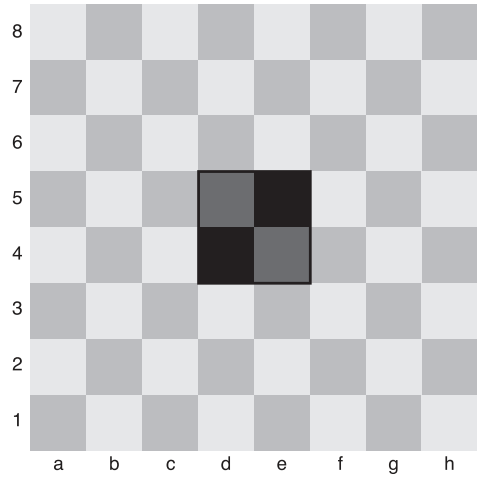
There are also diagonals that are only two squares long:



The four shortest diagonals.

There are four short diagonals, each only two squares long.

The chessboard also has a **center:**



The center of the chessboard.

The center always has two white squares and two black squares. The two long diagonals pass through it.

Games: Pathways on the Chessboard

• Have the children put one pawn on each rank or file. Two partners can take turns doing this.

• "Three-in-a-row"—have the children take turns putting a pawn on a file. The player who puts three pawns on adjoining files wins. If the children play well, it should be a draw, with all the files filling up before anyone gets three in a row. Repeat with ranks. If there is time and children are gifted, children may play "4-in-a-row"—where opponents take turns placing pawns anywhere on the chessboard, trying to get 4 adjoining pawns on one file, rank, or diagonal.

Vocabulary: square, rank, file, diagonal, long diagonal, center