



Board and Playing Card Games

Background Notes for Teachers

Board and playing card games have a long history in China, and from there travellers took them to other parts of the world where they also became popular pastimes.

Playing cards have been used in China since ancient times. The Chinese word for card is P'ai which means 'playing rectangle'.

Tile games have been around in China since the 12th century. By the 14th century they had travelled from China to Italy and from there they went to the rest of Europe. One particular Chinese game was renamed dominos, probably after the black and white hoods worn by Christian priests in France.

Xian Qi is the name for Chinese chess. Its existence was first recorded in 847 AD in the Book of Marvels written by Nui Seng-ju. The game was made of round discs with Chinese characters on them.

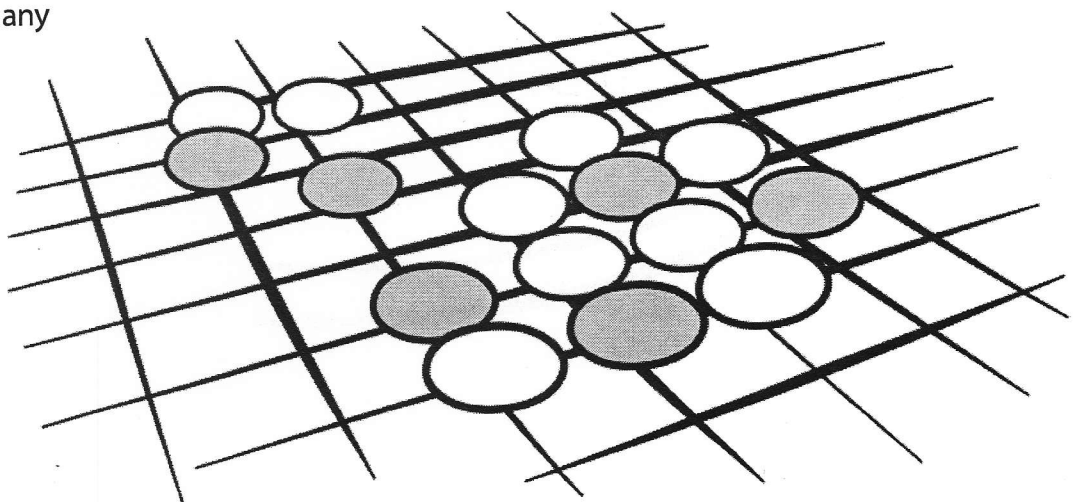
The game of Go is another old Chinese board game. It is known as Weiqi in China. It is said that it was invented by the Emperor Shun (2255-2206 BC) as a way to develop his son's intelligence. A stone Go board was discovered in Wang Du County in 1954 and is now in the Beijing Historical Museum. There is also a painting from 750AD of a Tang lady playing the game.

It is believed that Tangrams are very old, but because they were at first only played by women and girls it was not thought important to record their existence. The first record of tangrams appears in 1813. By the 19th century they had travelled to Europe and America and had become very popular in those parts of the world.

There is one game that is commonly thought to be of Chinese origin because it is called Chinese Checkers. But this game was actually developed from an American Game called Halva, a checkers type board game invented in the 19th century.

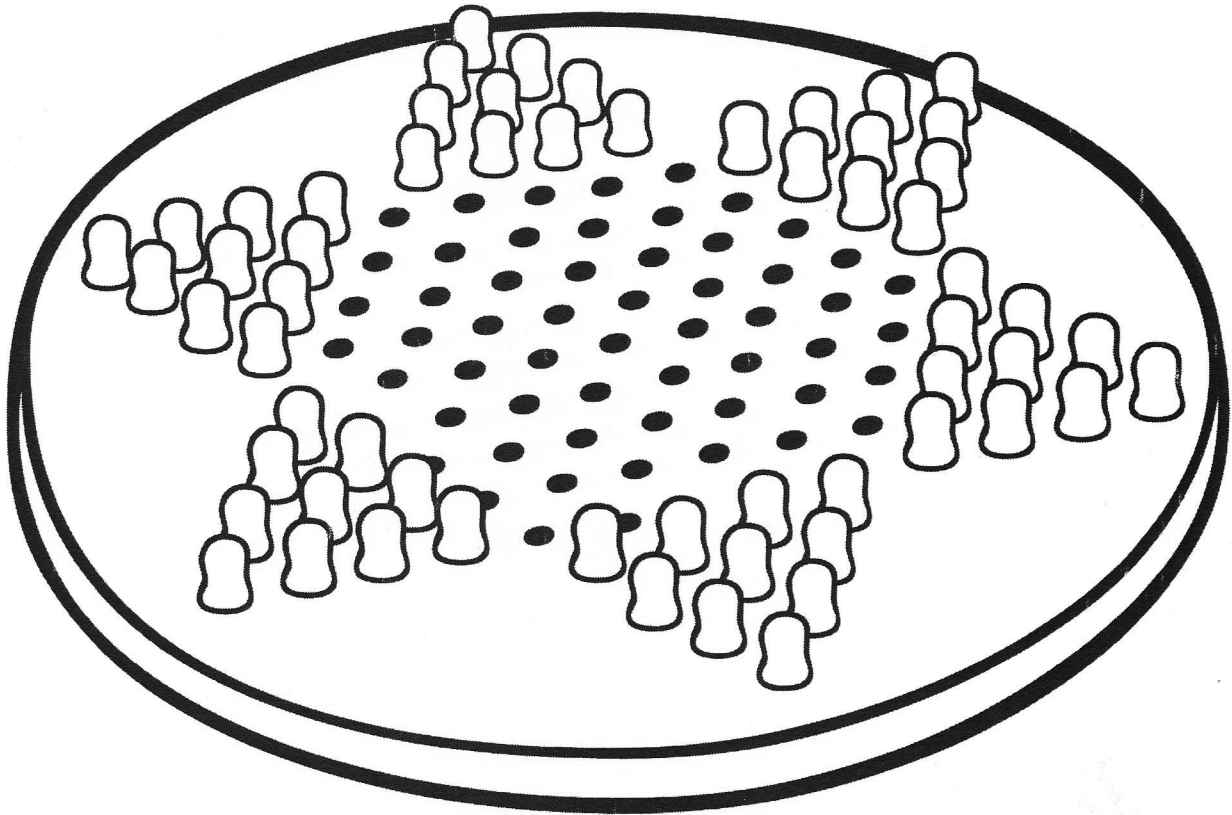
Over time the rules and appearance of these games has changed. For instance, traditionally Chinese dominos were longer than they became in Europe. Chinese chess is played on the points rather than within the squares as in Europe. There is also no such thing as stalemate; if a person could not move the game was lost.

Learning about these games can help children to appreciate the contribution that China has made by creating games that many people enjoy. It will also help to teach them basic maths ideas such as counting and recognising the differences between numbers, sizes, and shapes and also encourage them to problem solve.



Discussion

- Before beginning the discussion collect some games that were originally invented in China. The class can add to this collection by bringing games from home. Set up a games table to display them on and encourage the children to invent their own way of playing these games. It would be a good idea to invite Chinese parents or another person from the Chinese community to explain and demonstrate some of their traditional games such as Chinese chess.
- Show the class games that originally started in China and ask them how many they have seen before and what their names are.
- Introduce the idea that these games were first invented in China, but that over time travellers brought them over to other countries, and now they are played all over the world.
- Introduce the idea that games can be played using different rules, and that we can play them in the traditional way, but can also use our brains to make up our own rules for playing these games.



Activities

Tangram Activity

Before beginning this activity enlarge the tangram so it is about a metre square. It can simply be made out of cardboard (black would be the most authentic colour to use but white is also acceptable). Ask the class to sit in a circle around you and the tangram.

Ask the children to name the outline shape of the tangram and to take notice of how it is made up of different shapes. Teach them the names of the 3 geometric shapes in the tangram; the triangle, square and parallelogram, and help them to identify each of these shapes as they are lifted out of the tangram. Then ask the children to help to put them back. This will help them to recognise the way in which shapes can be divided and joined to make other shapes.

Explain how tangrams were first invented in China and were taken by travellers to other countries so that now everyone in the world can enjoy them.

Show how the tans can be joined to make different shapes such as animals, people and objects. Children can join in this activity.

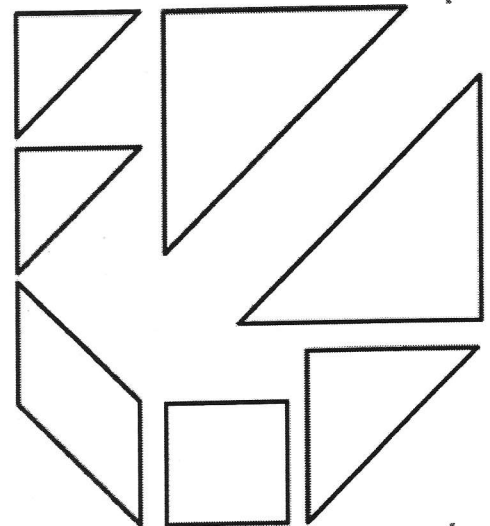
Give children the tangram worksheet and instruct them to cut out the pieces (younger children may require help with this).

Explain the 3 tangram rules:

1. All of the tans have to be used to make each tangram.
2. No overlapping is allowed.
3. The pieces must not be separate; they should always touch the edge/edges of another tan.

Ask them to create first an object, then an animal and then a person. Help them to make up and write a story that includes all three.

An alternative to this would be for each student to work with a partner. Each child makes one tangram pattern which represents an object/person/animal. Then they have to make up a story that includes both of these and tell it back to the class.



Music

Music plays. Children are given a number from 1-8. When the music stops children who have that number must go to the middle and shift one of the tans to somewhere else. It must still touch the edge of another tan. When the tans have been shifted children can suggest what the tangram shape now looks like. The game can then be played again.

Domino Activity

- For this use the Western domino game. Although it looks somewhat different from the traditional Chinese game it is readily available.
- Show the children a domino game, and explain that dominos were originally invented in China many years ago, but that they shared this game with other countries, and now we can all enjoy playing with them.
- Practise counting from one to six in English and Chinese. Display the Chinese characters for each of these numbers, and underneath display the appropriate number of white stickers to show the value of each number.
- Hold up cardboard dominoes, enlarged so all the children can see them clearly, and practise counting the dots in English and Chinese.
- Children can now make some of their own dominos using round white stickers and black paper.
- In groups, children can use the dominos they have made to create domino trains. The back part of each carriage should always have the same number of dots as the front part of the carriage behind it. If no such domino is available they can simply create another one to fit, or add more dots to an existing one.
- Children can also be asked to work with a partner to make up more domino games.

