

The Table of Contents shows you all the great topics in this book, even though only the first two chapters are in this document.

Chess Handbook for Parents and Coaches

Ronn Munsterman

United States Chess Federation Certified Coach



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Munsterman, Ronn. Chess Handbook for Parents and Coaches / Ronn Munsterman

www.ronnmunsterman.com

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Manufactured in the United States of America 10 9 8 7 6 5

ISBN 1-451-57625-0

For

Berta wife and love of my life. Family Stefanie, Nathan, Alexandria, Eric, Julia, and Jessica

I love you all.

Acknowledgments

The idea for this book came from my wife and best friend, Berta. Her encouragement was key to this book being what it is. Berta, thanks for a fine job of editing. You keep me from wandering too far off the path "now and then."

To my first readers: John Skelton, my friend, high school buddy, and chess club cohort; my son, Nathan; and my friends Derek Williams and Mike Holmstedt. Thanks to each of you, the book is better.

Thank you to Ralph Bowman for his decades of dedicated service to the Kansas Scholastic Chess Association, and the larger world of scholastic chess. He is currently a member of the USCF Scholastic Committee and the driving force behind the USCF Certified Coach program.

Cover Photo: Ronn Munsterman

Checkmate Pattern 1 – Queen and Knight

Back Cover Photo: Ronn Munsterman

Of Nathan Munsterman

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Introduction

What this book does for you, the parent or coach

Kids are drawn to chess; they can't help themselves. Place the pieces on a board in an elementary school setting and the kids will flock to you. They love to watch someone play. They love to touch the pieces. The feel of them, the weight, the beauty, all call to them.

Whether you're a chess player yourself, or are new to chess, this book will help you teach your child how to play chess. We start with the basics. The lessons are the same ones I used while coaching elementary and then later, as my players grew older, high school students. Based on the repeated success of my students in scholastic tournaments, this teaching program passed with flying colors (See About the Author). Each lesson is laid out in bite-sized nuggets, which makes it easier for you to judge how your child is soaking up the information, and simplifies things so he grasps it quickly, and most importantly, so both of you have a lot of fun

May I repeat that last part? So you and your child have a lot of fun. Chess players (the adult ones) often discuss aspects of chess that I like to call its nebulous factor: is it science or art? Is it a game or a sport? Ask kids the same questions and they'll look at you with a "huh?" expression. Like, what's the point of that? To young players, it's a game and it's fun. It's just that simple. We shouldn't complicate things.

Whether a parent wants to teach chess or find a coach instead, this book gives everyone insights into the game, and the world of chess, including tournaments, and answers the questions many people ask.

I lay out the minimum requirements for a player to play in a tournament and this information will help you determine when your player is ready, if that's something you and he decide to do.

I'll give you, the teacher, what you need to know and what your student needs to know in each lesson.

Not only will I present the information for you to give to your child, I'll give you some tips on how to explain it.

My kid play chess? You're kidding, right?

Depending on your child's age, if you ask whether he would like to learn to play chess, you may get a "Huh?" or a shrug, or an "Oh, I guess," and if you're really lucky, an eye roll.

In an age where our children's attention is pulled first one way then another through their activities, as well as Wii, Play Station, X-box, and PC games, it's a wonder they can keep up with anything. Not to mention the challenges *you* face as their chauffeur and administrative assistant, and yet remain the parent.

The question isn't always whether they want to play, but how you can entice them to try it. One thing you might try is to get the movie *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, which tells the true story of Josh Waitzkin. At the age of seven, Josh began playing chess, and I won't give away the story except to say that he's now an adult and is ranked as an International Master (just below Grandmaster). Josh is a terrific young man, and when my son, Nathan, played in the 2001 Supernationals, held in Kansas City, Nathan got to speak to Josh for a few minutes while getting his autograph. Josh has a ready and quick smile, and is wonderfully friendly. Not your stereotypical chess player.

What do I mean by that remark? Chess isn't just for geeks, nerds, or whatever labels folks like to assign to people who choose to exercise their mind. Chess appeals to people of all ages,

genders, and professions. I've played tournament games against truck drivers, doctors, lawyers, ministers, accountants, government employees, computer programmers, teachers, PhDs, and high school drop outs. I could go on and on, but I think you get the idea.

Nowadays, students are rarely known by one label, the jock, the honor student, the artist, the geek. They are well-rounded. Today's young people are busy. They have lots of activities, some think too many, but that's a topic best discussed elsewhere. It was my experience, and I knew of other coaches who had similar experiences, while coaching chess for elementary and high school students, that chess was only a part of these young people's lives. Many played sports; baseball, football, basketball, and were starters on their teams. Many were good students, some outstanding, others struggled in school, but all loved chess.

Some of the things about chess that attract people are its logic, purity, and variability. No two games are exactly the same. The permutations of chess are staggering. If you're interested in numbers, the number of possible positions is somewhere on the order of 10^{50} , or a ten followed by fifty zeroes. If you wrote the number one on the goal line of a football field, and wrote a zero on each yard line going toward the other goal line, the last zero would be on the fifty yard line! I don't know about you, but this is a number just too big for me imagine. In reality, though, there are plenty of games that start out exactly the same, and then one of the players makes a move that is called a variation, which is like taking the left fork in the road instead of the right, and the game takes on a completely different path and tone.

Chess is a wonderful game. It pits one person's mind against another's. Teaching your child or a team of players to play the game well is a rewarding experience. No matter how well you yourself play the game, teaching the game to someone else can seem daunting, but that's what this book is for. It will give you the tools and guidance to not only teach children how to play the game, but to have fun at the same time.

Teach Chess? Who me? Yes you!

Regardless of your child's age, you *are* a teacher. You teach your child daily, sometimes directly by showing or telling him or her something new, or indirectly as a result of your example.

If you can play chess, you can teach it to your child by following the lessons. If you don't know how to play, I recommend that you read each lesson first by yourself and play through any exercises. Then, when you're comfortable with the material and by following the instructions as presented, you can teach your child. In either case, this book has you covered!

An aside to chess coaches

Perhaps you've been coaching awhile, or you're thinking about starting a chess club or program. Perhaps you teach at a school. Maybe you want to volunteer at the school your child attends. Everything in this book applies to teaching a group of children to play chess, after all, that's how these lessons came to be. All of the information about tournaments will help you prepare your chess team to compete. Chapters 5 and 6 are written especially for coaches and include lots of coaching tips and a section called Funner Games, some of which are well-known in the chess world, and others I just made up, more or less on the fly, that kids love to play. These games are ideally suited to club time.

This book's structure

This book is divided into two parts: Part One – Teaching Chess, and Part Two – The Chess World. The chess lessons are in Part One and each is titled Lesson "number." Information about the chess world: tournaments, chess organizations, chess clubs, and coaching, is in Part Two and each is titled Chapter "number."

Benefits of playing chess

There are many analysis papers and articles on the benefits of playing chess. If you do an internet search for "benefits of chess," you'll find an enormous number of articles.

The New York City Chess-in-the-schools program (www.chessintheschools.org), which has been around for over twenty years, provides chess instruction for elementary and middle school kids as a part of their school day. Since its inception, the School Program has taught over 400,000 kids to play chess.

Here are some of the benefits of chess as written by Christine Palm in her New York City Schools Chess Program Report in 1990:

- Chess instills in young players a sense of self-confidence and self-worth;
- Chess dramatically improves a child's ability to think rationally,
- Chess increases cognitive skills;
- Chess improves children's communication skills and aptitude in recognizing patterns;
- Chess results in higher grades, especially in English and Math studies,
- Chess builds a sense of team spirit while emphasizing the ability of the individual;
- Chess teaches the value of hard work, concentration and commitment;
- Chess makes a child realize that he or she is responsible for his or her own actions and must accept their consequences,
- Chess teaches children to try their best to win, while accepting defeat with grace;
- Chess provides an intellectual, comparative forum through which children can assert hostility i.e. "let off steam" in an acceptable way;
- Chess can become a child's most eagerly awaited school activity, dramatically improving attendance;

- Chess allows girls to compete with boys on a non-threatening, socially acceptable plane;
- Chess helps children make friends more easily because it provides an easy, safe forum for gathering and discussion,
- Chess allows students and teachers to view each other in a more sympathetic way,
- Chess, through competition, gives kids a palpable sign of their accomplishments, and finally;
- Chess provides children with a concrete, inexpensive and compelling way to rise above the deprivation and selfdoubt which are so much a part of their lives.

Is chess for boys and girls?

In a word, yes. This is a question I wish we had grown past. The chess world, particularly the United States Chess Federation (USCF – which is discussed in Chapter 1), is working extremely hard to encourage girls to play chess. Although most scholastic tournaments are coed, there are tournaments specifically for girls only.

A word on pronouns in this book. I'm sensitive to the fact that some of you will be teaching your daughter, and some of you, your son. I have a daughter and two granddaughters, so I understand how it can feel when a book is written all about "he" and "him." I chose to roughly alternate between pronouns, so sometimes I'll be calling your child or your player a he and sometimes a her, as well as referring to your daughter or son. If this proves to be awkward, I apologize and hope you'll just mentally replace the pronouns as needed.

Teaching chess – some techniques

While playing chess is fun, teaching chess is flat out a blast. Teaching chess is really no different from teaching any other kind of board game, like Chutes and Ladders, Monopoly, or Risk. We start with the board [a map of the world – 64 light and dark squares] and the pieces [a colorful plastic marker – Knights and Rooks and Queens, oh my]. Then how to move, [roll the dice –

move the chess piece], the consequences of some moves [landing on Boardwalk with a hotel – putting your Knight where your opponent can take it for nothing] and how you win the game [take over the world in Risk – checkmate the King].

I'll grant you that chess is more complicated than those games and it will take longer than a few minutes for anyone, not just a child, to learn to play a complete game. However, it's still just teaching a game, and we break it down into small, easily digestible bits of information. Let me illustrate: The first time I took my then four-year-old son outside to play catch with his brand new glove, he did really well for the first three throws, then to my horror on the next one, he just didn't get the glove up high enough and the baseball sailed right over the web and smacked him in the forehead. Square on. We were only about six feet apart, so it mostly just made his eyes water and left a swelllooking red spot on which I'm pretty sure you could see a seam mark. After a little bit, we started up again and I took the "teaching moment" to tell him, again, to watch the ball go into the glove. What I didn't do is explain trajectory, ball speed, and anticipating the landing point because he wasn't ready for that advanced information. We'll keep things simple, until they aren't anymore, then we'll slow down even more to ensure both you and your child are first still having fun, and secondly that he's grasping the new concepts.

Chess is full of teaching moments, and nothing is quite as wonderful as when your child has an "ah ha" experience. It might be when she first sees a checkmate three moves ahead, or she might make a move you didn't expect, *and* it's a sound and strong move.

No one knows your son like you do. You know his personality, his likes, his dislikes. You know his limits. But one thing I've discovered over the years of coaching chess, is that young players will continually surprise you with their perceptiveness and understanding of the game far beyond your expectations. Don't sell your son short. Using patience and patience and patience, repeat the lesson until you're sure he's ready to move on. Sometimes you'll decide to move on and discover you need to backtrack a bit. Just remind your child of the forgotten information, and move ahead.

As you are playing a game with your son, keep in mind that mistakes will happen. He'll make a weak, maybe disastrous (from the game point of view) move, and the game would be over in a just a few more moves. This is teaching moment. One of my favorite and effective methods is the "Take-back" rule. It's just like it sounds. I tell my student to take back the move he just made, and look for a stronger one. I also immediately explain why the move was weak.

We all have our preferences in the way we communicate, and my choice is to label the move as "weak," rather than "bad." I know it's semantics, but as parent-teachers we must be careful not to let our daughter associate our criticism of a move with herself

Rules - Just-in-time

The book of chess rules, *U.S. Chess Federation's Official Rules of Chess*, is 370 pages long. It covers so many topics, some of an obscure nature, that it can make a grownup cry. Don't ask your child to read it. *You* can read it if you want, and if your child is going to play competitively, you should. The rules that may seem obscure, in a tournament setting can make the difference between a win and a tie (a draw) or a win and a loss, or getting that draw instead of a loss. I will mention the rules that you *need* to know, when you (and your son) need to know them, so they'll be just-in-time.

Chapter 8 - A short rules list for tournament players covers the most common rules and problems a player will run into. Coaches: I recommend that you make copies of that chapter and give it to your players, covering it in detail in class.

Part One – Teaching Chess



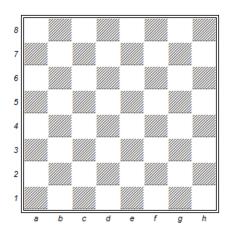
Lesson 1 – The Board

Buying boards and sets.

Any board and chess set will do. Chess boards come in infinite colors, composition, and size, but one thing remains constant, the layout. Light squares and dark squares, 64 of them, 32 of each color. But certain boards are better for your daughter to learn with, and for you to teach with. You might have a very beautiful, and likely expensive, showcase set in your house, or you might have a plastic set that sells for about three or four bucks, the kind with red and black squares like a checker board. I don't recommend using either kind. The kind I suggest is one that has the Algebraic notation on it (next page).

Here's an alternative for you: if you prefer to buy a set locally for a lower price, go ahead, but it probably won't have algebraic notation. What I suggest is using masking tape along the edges and letter and number the board like the one on the next page.

When it's time to talk about the notation and what it's for and how to use it, we'll come back to it. For now, you need to know where to order a board like this. It's up to you how much you want to spend, but I recommend starting with what's called a tournament board and The set



board is made of vinyl for easy transport to, yes you guessed it, tournaments, but actually anywhere. The pieces are large and durable. They pretty much bounce quite well off tile floors and come out unscathed. They also survive the washer and dryer. Don't ask. Where do I get these magical pieces? you ask. Well, it's up to you. One thing you can do is Google "Chess Sets" and start browsing the different online stores. Or you can go to www.uschess.org and shop there. This is the web site for the United States Chess Federation (USCF) and all of the items purchased through their store help support chess in the United States, including scholastic chess.

As soon as your set and board arrive, immediately use a permanent marker and put your daughter's initials on the felt bottom of *every* piece. Trust me on this. If you start going to clubs and / or tournaments, you'll see that many, many sets are identical. Then put her full name and school on the back of the vinyl board. Same reason.

Let's Play

When it's time for your son's first chess lesson, find a place where you and he can be comfortable. If he's on the young or small side, make sure the table you use is one where he can reach across it most of the way. There should be plenty of light. Chess players hate dim light. It's as though we're afraid we'll miss a brilliant move in the darkness. A bright overhead light is best.

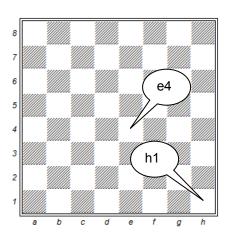
Stash the board and set by the table, but not on it or in view. Keep the set in its carry bag (if you ordered one) or the bag it came in.

The board - explained

Get your child situated on his side of the table, then sit down across from him. For the first lesson, a little showmanship won't hurt. If you're using a rollup vinyl board, grab it by two corners, one in each hand, and unfurl it with a flick of the wrists. Let it settle onto the table like you're putting a tablecloth on. If you're using a solid board, deftly lift it to the table top and slide it into place. Arrange the board so row 1 is in front of your child. Invite him to touch it.

Let's introduce the board to your player. There are files a-h (go up and down) and ranks 1-8 (go left and right. I will

generally call ranks rows because it's easier for kids – and me). We use the chess board's built-in grid along with combination of a letter and number to identify each of the 64 squares. I call this the square's address, just as the house where you live has an address. When we say the address. it's square's alwavs letter-number.



like e4 or h1 in the diagram. If your child has played the game Battleship, point out the similarities of calling out your hits or misses.

Now do this: poke a square and ask your son to say its name. Pick about ten or so at random. Then have your son touch the square and you call out its name. Mess up a couple of times and let him correct you. Look sheepish and say "oops" a lot. Trust me.

We're ready for light and dark. Simple I know, but poke a square and ask if it's light or dark. Do this to three or four squares. That's enough.

Rotate the board so row 1 is in front of you and row 8 is in front of your son. Repeat the little exercise of naming the squares. Players must become accustomed to seeing the board from both sides.

Lesson 2 – The Pieces

It's time for the really cool stuff. Pick up the bag, open it, and dump the pieces onto the board. Let them roll around. Let your son pick them up. If he's very young, five or so, don't be dismayed if he grabs the Knight and starts neighing. Ask him to put all the white pieces to the right (his) of the board. He may group them according to type, or he might just shove them around in no order. Either way is fine. You do the same with the black pieces.

White and Black. Oftentimes, you'll see sets where the pieces aren't actually white and black, but are, like one of my favorites, a rosewood for black and an oak-colored wood for white (on the cover). In any case, it'll always be a light color and a dark color, and we *always* call them White and Black.

Let's introduce the pieces' names and how many there are on each side. Hold up each piece and say its name. Invite your child to count how many he has. On the next page are the names of the pieces along with the symbol we'll use in this book, how many there are for each player, and the value for each piece.

The Pieces

Name	White	Black	Number	Value
	symbol	symbol	for each	
			player	
Pawn	ß	1	8	1
Knight			2	3
Bishop	£	ө	2	3
Rook	Ï	Ï	2	5
Queen	₩	~	1	9
King	ර්ත	S	1	Not
				valued

There are a total of 16 pieces for each player.

You'll notice that the King is marked as "Not Valued" in the chart. The reason for this is that since the way to win the game is to checkmate the King, he can *never* be captured.

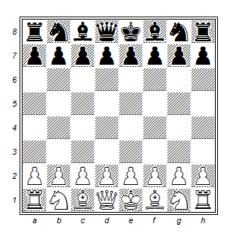
Spend a few minutes helping your child memorize the pieces' names and point values. Use pieces of both colors. Just hold up a piece and ask the name, and its value. Then, like you did with the squares, have your child hold up the piece and you say its name and value.

One method I use for helping a player understand the point value for the pieces is to equate them to dollars (\$). If they know money, they'll understand piece values, believe me!

For a fun exercise, close this book and show your child the photo on the cover. Ask him to name all of the pieces in the photo. Then ask him to name the one piece that is missing. Answer: there is no Bishop.

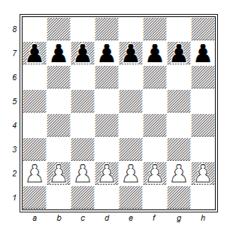
Where do they all go?

This diagram shows where each piece goes on the board. In the next few steps, we'll place all of the pieces on the board, a few at a time. In diagrams, white is *always* shown at the bottom.

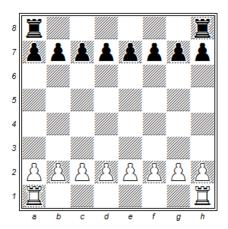


Setting up the board

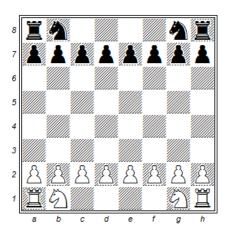
1. Starting with the white pawns, have your child place all of them on row 2, one per square, while you put the black pawns on row 7.



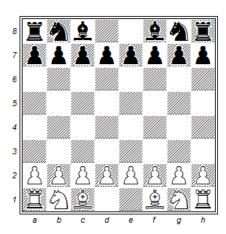
2. Put a Rook on each corner of row 1 and row 8; squares a1 and h1 for white, a8 and h8 for black.



3. Place a Knight next to each Rook; squares b1 and g1 for white, b8 and g8 for black.



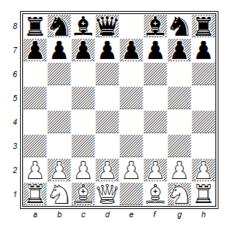
4. The Bishops go next to the Knights. Notice we're heading toward the middle of row 1 and row 8; c1 and f1 for white, c8 and f8 for black.



We have all the pieces on the board except the Queen and King. Before we go any farther, a couple of points to mention. Look at the board. The square on your child's right in row 1, and the square on your right in row 8, is white. If you ever play on a board without Algebraic notation imprinted on it, you must remember to set up the board with "white on the right." However, players using algebraic boards sometimes set them up sideways, or switch row one and eight so that the pieces start in incorrect positions. Teach your child to always double-check the board before setting up the pieces.

The pieces are currently perfectly symmetrical. Each of you has a Rook, Knight and Bishop on both your right and left sides. However, this changes with the placement of the Queen and King because the Queen always goes on her own color.

5. Have your child place the white Queen on the only uncovered white (light) square, d1 and you put the black Queen on the only uncovered black (dark) square, d8.



6. Now, both of you put your Kings on the only square left. Your child's King is on his right, your King is on your *left* and the Kings are on the same file, "e," while the Queens are opposite each other on file "d." Your board is now set up properly.

