

# Play Mancala

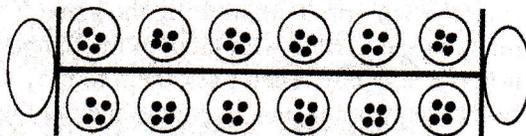
Mancala is one name given to a game of strategy that has been played in Africa for generations. The object of the game is simple: capture more pieces than your opponent. But as with any game that has enjoyed wide popularity, rules vary. A representative version and two variations are given below. Practice the game several times to become familiar with the rules, and decide before play begins which variations, if any, will be followed.

## Equipment

You will need a playing board consisting of a piece of wood with 12 shallow holes (or use the bottom of an egg carton); 48 small playing pieces (marbles, seeds, small stones, buttons, etc.) of any color; and two bowls, placed at either end of the board and used as the players' storehouse for captured pieces.

Drop four playing pieces into each of the 12 holes on the playing board (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1



## To Play

The aim of each player is to capture as many playing pieces as possible. The strategy is to decide which set of playing pieces to play in order to capture (or to set up for capture) the most pieces, regardless of which side of the board they are on.

Decide which player goes first. Each move consists of a player picking all of the playing pieces from any one hole on his or her side of the game board and dropping one piece into each hole to the right (counterclockwise) of the now-empty hole, continuing into the opponent's playing area if necessary. If the player's last piece falls into an empty hole or a hole that now has an odd number of pieces, that player's turn ends. If, however, the last piece lands in a hole that now has an even number of pieces (2, 4, 6, etc.) the player captures all the pieces in that

hole (see Fig. 2).

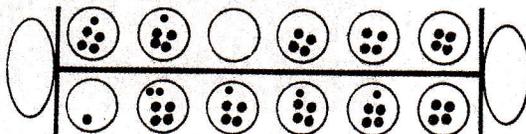


Fig. 2

Players may not touch the playing pieces except to pick them up to make a play. They may count their pieces (or their opponent's pieces) but may not touch them.

It is important to plan ahead. Once players have picked up the playing pieces from a hole, they may not put them back and start over, but must continue dropping them into the proper holes.

It is not necessarily to a player's advantage to empty one side of the board before the other, even if it means the opponent cannot play.

If a player cannot make a move because he or she has no playing pieces, that turn is lost, and the other player takes another turn.

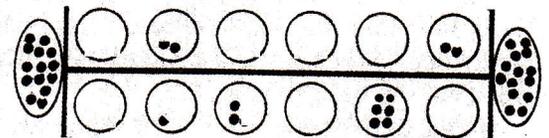
The game ends when one player has captured more than half the playing pieces

or when neither player can capture more

pieces (for example, see Fig. 3).

The game is most fun when players move quickly.

Fig. 3



## Variations

Many variations in rules and playing techniques exist. Players must agree on the rules before the game begins.

In one variation often used in competition play, players may capture consecutive sets of playing pieces, provided that each hole contains an even number of playing pieces and that they are immediately preceding the hole into which the last playing piece was dropped. For instance, if the player has captured the pieces in the hole into which his or her last piece was dropped, and the hole immediately preceding that hole also has an even number of playing pieces, the player captures those pieces as well (and the pieces in the hole immediately preceding that hole, provided it also has an even number of pieces). This variation requires more strategy and planning, for a player can capture enough pieces in a single turn to win the game.

Another variation allows players to capture only those pieces that are on the opponent's side of the board. If the final piece is played on the player's own side of the board, the turn ends.