

Chess & Strategy unit study

A homeschool curriculum built around chess — strategy, mathematics, history and the discipline of thinking ahead, for K-12 learners.

GRADE BANDS K-2 · 3-5 · 6-8 · 9-12

FULL GUIDE <https://handsdowneducation.com/homeschool/chess>

How to use this planner

The six weeks below are sequenced from the guide's sample week: five weeks that each take one core subject through the topic, then a showcase week that turns the portfolio into a final product. Run each activity at the level your child is at (the grade band notes tell you how), keep the output, and by week six you have a portfolio that shows the unit end to end.

Pace is yours. A week here is three to five working sessions; a topic that is going well can take two calendar weeks, and one that has run dry can be closed early. Tick the box when a week's output is in the portfolio.

Six-week scope and sequence

Wk	Focus	Key activity	Portfolio output	Done
1	Reading & Writing through chess & strategy	Read about the 1997 Kasparov-Deep Blue match, then write an argument about whether the machine was really 'thinking' — and what that word should mean.	Portfolio entry: the week's reading & writing piece, dated, with one line from your child on what they found out.	☐
2	Math through chess & strategy	Count the possible positions after three moves each, then meet exponential growth honestly — and why a computer still cannot brute-force the whole game.	Portfolio entry: the week's math piece, dated, with one line from your child on what they found out.	☐
3	Science through chess & strategy	Study how chess engines evaluate positions, then compare that to how a human grandmaster describes their own process — two very different kinds of intelligence.	Portfolio entry: the week's science piece, dated, with one line from your child on what they found out.	☐
4	Social Studies through chess & strategy	Trace chess from 6th-century India through Persia and the Islamic world into Europe, noting what changed about the pieces and what that says about each culture.	Portfolio entry: the week's social studies piece, dated, with one line from your child on what they found out.	☐
5	Art through chess & strategy	Design a themed chess set where every piece's form communicates its role — an exercise in visual hierarchy and function.	Portfolio entry: the week's art piece, dated, with one line from your child on what they found out.	☐
6	Showcase and review	Choose one final product that pulls the unit together — a presentation, an exhibit, a field guide or a short documentary — and give the week to making it. Finish with a portfolio review: lay every week's output on the table and let your child narrate what changed in what they know about chess & strategy.	The final product plus a one-page unit summary in your child's words, filed with the portfolio.	☐

Running it at your child's level

K-2 learners start with piece movement games before full play, plus simple puzzles — pattern recognition and spatial reasoning at exactly the right age.

Teens can study opening theory, annotate their own games honestly, compete in rated play, and even program a simple engine — a superb applied computer science project.

A sample week, subject by subject

Reading & Writing

Read about the 1997 Kasparov-Deep Blue match, then write an argument about whether the machine was really 'thinking' — and what that word should mean.

Math

Count the possible positions after three moves each, then meet exponential growth honestly — and why a computer still cannot brute-force the whole game.

Science

Study how chess engines evaluate positions, then compare that to how a human grandmaster describes their own process — two very different kinds of intelligence.

Social Studies

Trace chess from 6th-century India through Persia and the Islamic world into Europe, noting what changed about the pieces and what that says about each culture.

Art

Design a themed chess set where every piece's form communicates its role — an exercise in visual hierarchy and function.

Common questions

I don't play chess. Can I still teach this?

Yes — free apps and puzzle sites will outpace most parents quickly anyway. Your job is scheduling practice and asking 'why did you play that?', which needs no rating.

Does chess actually make kids smarter?

Honest answer: the research is mixed on broad transfer. What it reliably builds is calculation, patience and comfort with losing — worth having on their own terms.

What if my child loses interest after a few weeks?

Common, and fine. The strategic thinking transfers to other games; a short chess unit that ends cleanly is better than a long one endured.

Turn this into a full, standards-aligned curriculum

Generate a complete plan around chess & strategy for your child's grade and pace — free to try, no account required.
<https://handsdowneducation.com/curriculum/generate>