Lesson 5

Part 1: Capturing Free and Undefended Pieces

Key Concepts

- Recognizing and capturing undefended pieces.
- What is a “loose” or “hanging” piece?
- Protecting your own “loose” pieces and weak spots.

Why we need to win points in chess

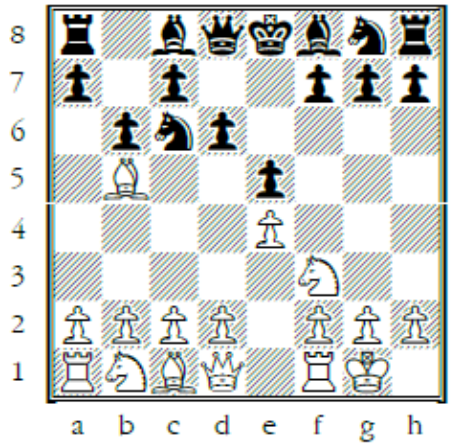
Even though it’s possible to win a chess game while having fewer pieces than your opponent, it is not common. Furthermore, winning chess games early, with an opening trap or quick mate (as we will learn in future lessons), becomes less and less likely as you face tougher competition. We know that the surest method to winning a chess game is to deprive the King of his allies: to take your opponent’s pieces and win points!

Once the King is alone, it's not so difficult to corner and checkmate him. Today, we are going to learn some techniques to eliminate every last member of the opposing army, and hopefully maintain most of your pieces along the way.

So how do we win points in chess? Well, we use *tactics*. But before we learn advanced tactics, we need to know the most basic tactics of all: how to capture loose, undefended pieces. In Part 1 of this lesson, we learn to look for chances to capture enemy pieces that are free to us. Every single piece counts, so winning a free piece from your opponent almost always puts you on the road to victory! We will also learn how to defend your pieces, so that your opponent can’t return the favor. Let’s get started.

ChessKid

Take undefended guys: look for free pieces.



Which piece would be better for White to capture?

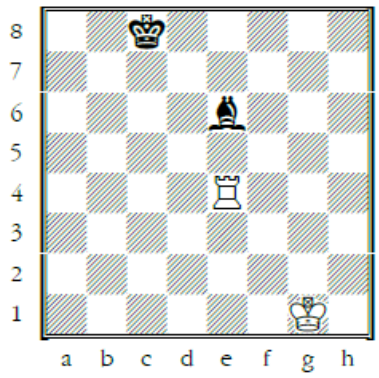
Look at the example on the left. It is White to move; can White capture any of Black's pieces? The answer is **yes!**

White can capture two different pieces: the Black Knight on c6, or the Black Pawn on e5. Which one would be better to capture?

The answer is that White should capture **the Knight on c6,** because that piece is *undefended*. Once White captures that Knight, Black will not be able to capture the White Bishop in return. If, on the other hand, White were to capture the Pawn on e5 with the Knight on f3, Black would just capture the Knight by the Pawn on d6. The Pawn on e5, therefore, is *defended*, so capturing it does not win material for White.

Essential Question, Level III: Application
What questions would you ask yourself before capturing a piece?

Keep in mind that pieces move in different ways.



One piece attacks, while the other does not.

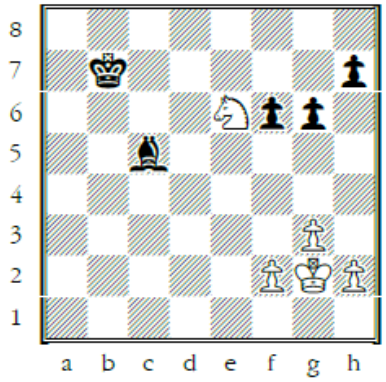
Remember, each piece in a chess game has different capabilities. While one piece might attack another, that piece is not necessarily returning the attack.

Here, the White Rook is attacking the Black Bishop, but is the Bishop attacking the Rook? No. If it is White's move, it should capture the Bishop before Black has a chance to move or protect the Bishop.

If it is Black's turn, its Bishop cannot capture the White Rook, since Bishops do not move that way. Therefore, if it is Black's turn, it should instead turn its thoughts to defense, by either moving the Bishop to a safe square (perhaps one that attacks the Rook but does not place it under attack, like d5), or protecting the Bishop, with the move 1…Kd7.

Essential Question, Level III: Application
What approach would you use to explain this position to a newcomer to chess? How would you explain the concept that not all pieces are always attacking each other in the same way they are being attacked?

Defense, defense!



Black to move and defend against White's threat.

While capturing your opponent's pieces might be fun, it is just as important to prevent them from capturing yours.

Let's look at the diagram to the left. If it were White's move, what would it do? That's right; White would capture the unguarded Bishop on c5 for free. However, if it were Black's move, then it would have the chance to deal with White's plan and stop White's threat.

Black has two ways to save the Bishop in this position.
1. Simply **move** the Bishop away. For instance, Black could move the Bishop to e7, or b4, where it is out of reach of the Knight.
2. **Defend** the Bishop. The way to do this would be to move the King to c6 or b6. Then, if White insists on capturing the Bishop, the Black King will be in position to capture the Knight back—a trade.

Essential Question, Level III: Application

Show your understanding of defense by setting up your own example of stopping an opponent's threat to attack one of your pieces.