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## COME ON MATE, LET'S PLAY!

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If you are a part of the 207 million households that stream Netflix, you may have seen the service's original miniseries: The Queen's Gambit.

Released in October 2020, during the initial wave of the coronavirus pandemic in the US, the series about an orphan girl

took the world by storm. The idea that a 9-year-old could learn the ancient game of chess from a janitor captured the imaginations of nearly 62 million viewers — as well as the inspiration to try it out for themselves. Within a month, sales of chess sets went up by 87% in the US, and sales of books about chess leaped 603% (according to a 2020 report by the NPDGroup).

## HISTORY OF CHESS

The war-centric game we know today can be traced back to India as early as the 7th century. There, it was referred to as *chaturanga*, which translates to “four divisions (of the military)”: infantry, cavalry, elephantry, and chariotry.

Over time, the game traveled to Persia and became a staple in royal education — a status of knowledge and wisdom. Here is where the names and the pieces of modern chess took shape. Chess's journey spread throughout China and East Asia, Africa, Europe, and Russia, gaining slight adaptations in each culture. However, the main components of the game remained. By the mid-12th century, the pieces of the chess set were depicted as kings, queens, bishops, knights, and men at arms.

Writings about the methods and rules of playing chess began being transcribed in the 15th century. With the development of titles such as master and grandmaster, as well as the ever-growing attraction to the game of strategic moves, competitive chess made its way into the world.

The first international chess tournament in London, held in 1851, would serve as a guide for future international, national, regional, and local tournaments that would follow.

## RESURGENCE OF CHESS IN RAPID CITY

Like many families in the Rapid City area, chess was simply a hobby or a game only the intelligently focused individual would play. However, in November 2021, coach and club president Nathan Walstrom brought a new light to the game at a local level for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

The Rapid City Area Scholastic Chess Club hosts weekly training time at the Rapid City Public Library. Nathan and other volunteers with a passion for the game lead training sessions. One of those volunteers is Jan McGrath, who is a mom of not one, but two chess players who were eager to expand their knowledge of the game by facing other opponents.

“We are not generational chess players,” explains Jan. “This came out of nowhere for our family, but that’s the joy of this game: you can come to the game at any level from a novice to seasoned player.”

At 10 years old, Jan's oldest son, Brogan McGrath, picked up a book at his school's library titled “Chess for Dummies.” He learned to play the game on his own and eventually taught his younger brother to play.







"Now he's 15, and he bleeds chess pawns," jokes Jan. "I'm happy he chose to be a part of the [Rapid City Area Scholastic] Chess Club. He's still learning, and I'm thankful he has others to play with and develop his skills."

The club is affiliated with the United States Chess Federation, and serves as the local organization where players can learn and hone in their skills. Each week, the club sees 30 students on average ranging in age and level of play. And with the momentum of players and volunteers, the club is facilitating as well as participating in competitions and tournaments.

"My son has taught me that the game of chess is not only a timeless game, it is also an ageless game that can be played by young and old. The game is not measured by your age, gender, or when you began to play. It is solely measured by how much time you devote to learning the game and then putting your knowledge to practice on the chessboard," Jan says.

Get started in learning the basics of chess by attending the weekly practice sessions (no charge) or by checking out the club's [suggested resources](#) page.

(<https://rcscholastic>

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[chess.weebly.com/](https://chess.weebly.com/))

PHOTOS: JESSE BROWN NELSON

