

Grade 5 Informational

Let's Have a Chess Club

Good morning. I am happy to have the chance to talk to you during our class meeting today. First, I want to ask you two questions. If you could get better scores on math exams simply by learning to play a game, would you be interested? And if I told you that playing a particular game would give a boost to your reading skills, would you want to learn the game? Sure you would. The game I am talking about is chess.

Someone may have told you that chess is a game for “brainy” people. Wrong! I read that some kids learn to play when they are four years old. The game is not difficult to learn. There is a second grader in my neighborhood who plays chess with his big brother. If a second grader can learn to play, I know we fifth graders can learn to play. I want to tell you more about the game, but first I want to talk about starting a chess club here at school.

I said that you could get better scores in math by learning chess. When I was getting facts together to talk to you about starting a club, I did a lot of research on the library computer. I found many, many pages on the Internet telling how this game is so much more than just a way to pass the time. Chess requires problem solving. Educators and researchers have done studies with students just like you and me. These studies prove that chess teaches how to think ahead, how to plan, and how to be systematic in an approach to problem solving. If we know better how to use these skills, it figures we can use these same techniques to solve math problems. I read that one junior high school teacher in California said that he saw improvement in his math students’ scores after they had been playing chess for only three weeks. Is there any one of us who couldn’t improve his or her math skills?

Memorizing worked for us when we learned the multiplication tables, but chess is not about memorizing. Sometimes trying to memorize too many facts or formulas gets in the way of figuring out things for ourselves. Playing chess is a mental workout. It is thinking and analyzing. When we read, we think about and analyze the material and hope that we comprehend it. Playing chess also will help us learn to concentrate, something we must do when we read.

There is no cost for chess lessons. There is no special equipment to buy or uniform required. The only thing you have to bring to the club meetings is a determination to learn how to play. Learning how to shoot baskets is great exercise, but unless you are another David Robinson, it will not be that much help in your future life. Strategy and reasoning are tools we can use for a lifetime. Chess will help us develop these skills.

Chess is not the least bit dull or boring. Maybe you have heard of Garry Kasparov. In 2004, he was rated the highest-scoring chess player in the world. In 1999, he played a game of chess on the Internet. It was called the Kasparov vs. The World online chess match. Kasparov faced a team of players from seventy-five different countries. He made the first move on June 21, 1999. Then the opposition

had twenty-four hours to make its move. Four chess experts suggested certain moves and posted them online to world team players. The world team then voted for the move they thought best. The move that received the most votes was the move the experts used against Kasparov. This game was over in October 1999. Garry Kasparov made move number 62 and won the game. It is said that over 3 million people logged on to watch this thrilling match. I would not call that a boring game.

Are you excited yet about learning to play chess? I hope so, because I am. Thank you for giving me this time to talk about organizing a club that I am sure you will enjoy and that will help all of us. Vote yes for chess!

Grade 5 Narrative

Wagon Wheel Tracks

Miles grinned when Ms. Hennessey announced a history project about the Oregon Trail. He knew entering the words "Oregon Trail" into a computer search engine would produce a large amount of information. He thought he would be able to finish the project quickly. Then he would be able to start reading his new mystery book. As Miles listened to Ms. Hennessey, he realized that the project would require more work than he had expected.

"We are fortunate to live near Chimney Rock National Monument," stated Ms. Hennessey. "Tracks carved in the earth by covered wagons more than 150 years ago are still visible. We are going to gain an understanding of how pioneers must have felt on their journey by taking a field trip."

The class was becoming excited about taking a field trip. Ms. Hennessey continued, "Some of you may have ancestors who traveled on the Oregon Trail and passed Chimney Rock. Your assignment is to gather information at the monument and from your family, if possible. We will build a display that records the importance of Chimney Rock."

As Miles walked home after school, he thought about the project assigned in history class. Miles wondered how events that happened long ago had a connection to his life, but he could not think of any ways.

Miles gave his dad the field trip permission form. Then handing it back to Miles, his dad said, "This will be an excellent way for you to experience history firsthand. It will be much more exciting than reading a book or using a computer."

"At least I'll have time on the bus to read my mystery book," Miles said.

After a short ride the next day, the bus arrived at the monument. Miles reluctantly set his mystery book aside and stepped off the bus. He was amazed by the unusual shape of the rock formation nearby. It looked like an upside-down funnel.

"Chimney Rock stands 470 feet high," recited a park ranger. "Pioneers traveling west could see it from miles away. The rock marked the end of the Great Plains and the beginning of rugged-mountain travel."

Miles followed his classmates through exhibits. He attempted to pack a wagon at the hands-on demonstration, but a red light blinked to announce that the wagon was overloaded. The afternoon included watching a film about the Oregon Trail and hiking to the track site. Each student placed a foot in the deep ruts made by wagon wheels long

ago.

Miles pretended to walk beside a covered wagon loaded with his family's belongings. He imagined how the pioneers felt—not knowing what waited beyond the next hill. He wondered what it was like to sleep on the ground and cook meals on a campfire. He thought about wild animals, perilous river crossings, sickness, and unpredictable weather. On the bus trip back to school, Miles could not focus on his book. He kept thinking about the information he learned that day. He wondered whether he had ancestors who had traveled exactly where he had stood today.

When Miles returned home from the trip, he was surprised to see his grandmother. She had arrived for a visit with the family. Miles told her about his field trip and asked her if she knew any information about Chimney Rock.

“When I was a little girl,” Grandma Lucy said, “I used to pretend I was a pioneer heading west on the Oregon Trail. My parents used to tell me stories about how my great-grandparents traveled west to follow dreams of a better life.”

“Grandma!” Miles interrupted, “are you saying I have relatives who traveled on the Oregon Trail?”

“That’s exactly what I’m telling you,” said Grandma.

“Did they have a covered wagon? Did they meet any Native Americans? Do you have a photograph I can use for my school project?” Miles asked excitedly.

“I can do better than that,” Grandma said with a smile. “I have my great-grandmother’s diary.” She opened her handbag and pulled out a slim, leather book with ragged edges. Grandma Lucy carefully lifted the cover. Miles spotted handwriting so old the ink was golden brown against the yellowed pages.

“As a girl, I read this book so many times, I had it memorized. It tells the story of a perilous trip,” Grandma said.

Miles could hardly wait to hear more. He finally realized how exciting history could be.