



LEARNING CORNER

Tic-Tac-Toe

Eliza Cherian

Noughts and Crosses or Tic-Tac-Toe as it is popularly known in American English is probably one of the first games that children play. The game has many synonyms including Hugs and Kisses (USA, Canada), Ta-te-ti (Argentina), Ezys-Ozys (northern Ireland), X, O (Iran, Egypt), X, Mix, Drix (Israel). Noughts and Crosses seem the most prevalent name for it (except in the USA where a single 'x' is not referred to as cross and 'nought' means an archaism and not '0'...!)

Other than keeping young children amused for long spells of time, it also teaches them the rudiments of strategy and logical thinking. Unfortunately because of the simplicity of the game, few adults or adolescents play it. (Well! as long as the players pay some attention and do not make foolish mistakes, a draw is guaranteed.)

How to play

To play, all you need are some suitable writing implements and writing surfaces like pen and paper, stick and sand, or even finger and foggy window and two people. Set up a grid like the # symbol and you are set to play!

The players choose between the two symbols 'O' (nought) and x (cross). When one of the players manages to get his/her symbol in a straight line vertically, horizontally or diagonally, he/she wins the game. If either player doesn't succeed, it's a draw (also referred to as a cat's game!). Once children feel they have discovered an unbeatable strategy for tic-tac-toe, they normally move on to more sophisticated games like dots and boxes.

History

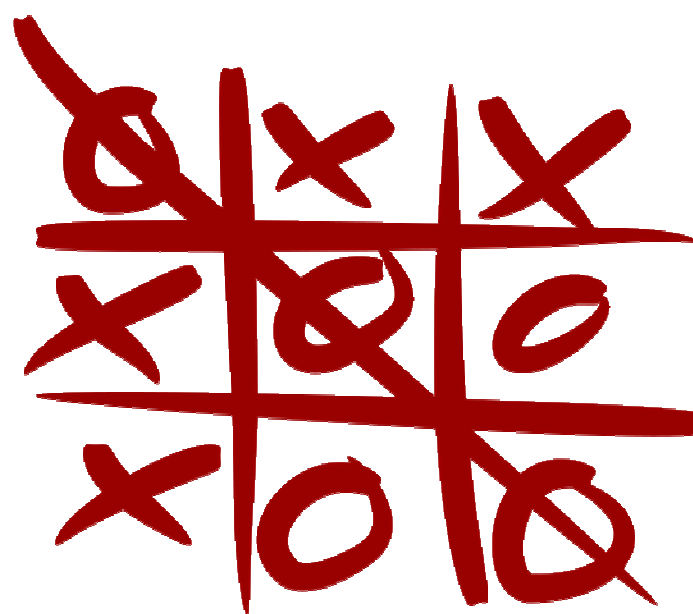
Though this game has been played for several centuries, its precise history seems unknown. Evidence is somewhat mixed, but it may be that the ancient game of Terni Lapilli was similar. It is certainly true that identical grids to noughts and crosses have been found scratched and etched into surfaces all over the ancient Roman Empire. However no X's or O's accompany the markings.

RELATED RESOURCE FOR CHILDREN

Sutradhar has a three dimensional game of noughts and crosses. It has sticks and peg-people in two types of hats. A good way to start playing the game with little ones!

FOR AGES

Suitable for ages 5 plus. Good travel game.



Interesting trivia

Let us not put aside this game as one for simpletons. The history of computer-based noughts and crosses goes back to the beginning of modern electronic computers and continues to recent research in artificial intelligence. There are 26,830 possible games of noughts and crosses. Without eliminating symmetries (rotations and reflections), there are 255,168 possible games. Here are some interesting trivia about the game...

- Steve Wozniak built a machine he called the 'ticktacktoe' computer when he was 11 years old.
- Charles Babbage designed a noughts and crosses playing machine.
- The reputation for easy winning has led to some casinos offering gamblers the chance to play tic-tac-toe against trained chickens!
- Tic-Tac-Chess is an interesting variation, where players play a game of chess and tic-tac-toe simultaneously.

WHAT'S NEW

Navtika: journal of ECCE

Just over a year and three issues old, this journal provides an important space for writing and reflection on Early Childhood Care and Education. The articles straddle aspects of nutrition, early learning, special needs etc. There are voices of both practitioners and researchers, parents and teachers. Book reviews and notices of upcoming conferences in the field add to its value.

To subscribe (three issues a year at Rs 300), write to navtika_ecce_journal@salwanmontessorigurgaon.org



TEACHER TALK

The Treasure House of Stories

Jane Sahi

There is a Sufi story of a poor farmer who journeyed to Delhi to the Sufi saint Hazarat Nizamuddin Aulia. After some days of staying with him, the peasant realised that he was not going to receive the money he had hoped for. He went to the saint to bid him farewell, but to his surprise Hazarat Nizamuddin Aulia gave him a gift of his own well-worn slippers. The man returned, taking rather reluctantly, the holy man's slippers wrapped in his turban.

On the way he met a richly dressed disciple of the saint who halted before him, sensing the fragrance of his master. When the rich man discovered that, indeed, the farmer was carrying something of the holy man, he offered to give his horse, a bag of gold, and the silk coat he was wearing, in exchange for 'the blessed slippers'. The farmer, thinking he had come face to face with a rich but genial madman thought himself lucky to make such a fine bargain. The story concludes that each felt that they had gained the greater treasure.

This story illustrates how we often fail to recognise treasure in any other sense than material benefit and how often we do not value what is apparently ordinary. The role of the story in school, which one could compare in the well-worn slippers of the Sufi Saint, is often peripheral or merely entertaining. It is often seen as a diversion from the serious process of learning, and is therefore not valued.

Charles Dickens in his novel "Hard Times" satirises the over-rational system of education, which prevailed in Europe in the 19th century. The novel opens with the headmaster addressing his fellow-teachers: "Now, what I want is facts, teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon facts; nothing else will ever be of any service to them. Stick to facts, Sir!....."

The power of the fairy tale, the parable or the legend, lies in its capacity to go beyond the fact. It is the language of art, poetry and the story that often transforms through the active imagination of the listener and the teller into something new and hitherto unknown.

An old Jewish tale touches on the heart of the meaning and value of the story. "Fairy Tale and Truth went together for a long journey. One day Truth said to Fairy Tale, 'how come, whenever we are seen together, people receive you with open arms and leave me outside? What could we do about this?' At that moment Fairy Tale gave its clothes to Truth, and from that day on Truth walks on earth dressed in the clothes of the Fairy Tale".

It is through the story that the child moves towards maturity and a greater sense of responsibility,

because the story is not merely abstract, disembodied moral injunctions, but an invitation to make the story a part of oneself. A response to a story often draws together the intellect, the imagination, and the emotions.

Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian traditions have the short and pithy story that jolts the listener into seeing afresh. The well known Nasrudin story about learning gave my eleven year old son immense pleasure. The story goes that Nasrudin was acting as a ferryman to a scholarly grammarian. The scholar enquired pompously whether Nasrudin had learnt grammar. On hearing that Nasrudin was ignorant of such things, he informed him that half his life was wasted. Mid-stream, Nasrudin, the ferryman, asked the grammarian whether he knew how to swim. The scholar disdainfully said that he had never learnt how to swim, to which Nasrudin replied: "Then the whole of your life is wasted, because the boat is sinking!" This story, vividly and dramatically, tells how knowledge must be related to life itself, otherwise it is empty of meaning or value.

Stories may work on many levels: conscious, pre-conscious or unconscious, and one writer has compared the storyteller to a sower of seeds. Some seeds may fall on fertile ground and quickly spring up and take root. Other seeds may lie dormant until the time is ripe to grow, and yet others may fall on waste ground only to be re-absorbed and re-formed, for nothing is ever lost.

Story water

Rumi, the 12th century Sufi poet

*A story is like water
That you heat for your bath
It takes messages between the fire
and your skin.
It lets them meet,
and it cleans you!
Very few can sit down
in the middle of the fire itself
like a salamander or Abraham.
We need intermediaries.
A feeling of fullness comes
but usually it takes some bread
to bring it.
Beauty surrounds us,
but usually we need to be walking
in a garden to know it.
The body itself is a screen
To shield and partially reveal
the light that's blazing
inside your presence.
Water, stories, the body,
all the things we do, are mediums
that hide and show what's hidden.
Study them,
and enjoy this being washed
with a secret we sometimes know
and then not.*



The proverbial grandparent who kept the child spellbound with stories is, alas, becoming rarer and so the school may be the child's main resource from which to build a fund of stories. As parents and teachers, we can choose to share with children, and draw on our own and other's treasure house of stories, and so bring alive in our relationship with the child stories of treasure lost and found, stories of journeys that mirror our own passage through life.

Each of us is marked consciously or otherwise by stories that have shaped our way of thinking and being. Mahatma Gandhi recalls the lasting impact of the stories of Shravana's devotion to his parents and Harishchandra's adherence to truth, both of which he wrote of in adulthood as still 'living realities to me'. He writes in his autobiography of the questions he remembers asking himself as a child: "Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?" and adds: "To follow Truth and go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through, was the one ideal it inspired in me." For each one the story is something different and maybe still in the process of being discovered; but it becomes an integral part of our identity and self.

SPOT LIGHT

Open House: Books for the early years

An interactive discussion was facilitated at Sutradhar recently on the topic of books and reading for the first three years. People brought along books that were special or favourites. Some of the points discussed on choosing and using books were:

- 1) Sensory stimulation: Children respond to board, squeaky and textured books. While vivid colours appeal, also provide books that use muted colours, or have diffused washes. Some illustrations can have a sense of space and lack of clutter that children enjoy. The sound of words also stimulates children (eg Toot toot the engine).
- 2) Format: Size is important – not too large or too small for this age. Peekaboo, pop-up and puzzle books have an element of surprise that works well.
- 3) Themes: Animals, the sequence of the day, the moon, nature – these are some everyday and loved themes.
- 4) Pace: a leisurely pace works well for this age.
- 5) Rhyme and repetition: A repeating refrain, visual, or a song makes the story come alive (eg Gingerbread man).
- 6) Emotions and values: The story, visuals, and how the parent reads all communicate emotion. Stories can help children cope with fear, anger, exclusion etc. and teach them about humour too! Children love parents reading in a dramatic voice!
- 7) Gender: Many books avoid stereotypes or the use of he/she and this makes them special.

ON CHILDREN'S BOOKS

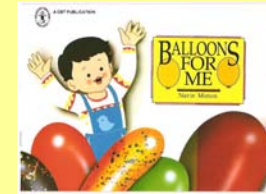
Children discover language and play with it. They meet its physical nature before the sense.

- Michael Rosen, writer for young children

ONLINE STORYBOOKS

www.magickeys.com

TOP TEN FAVOURITES AT SUTRADHAR



- 1) Look the Moon
- 2) Line and Circle
- 3) Visit to the Zoo
- 4) Visit to City Market
- 5) Colour colour Kamini
- 6) Me too
- 7) The seed
- 8) I like the world
- 9) Balloons for me
- 10) Norbu's new shoes

Tips for parents

1. Book reading is an intimate, comforting activity. For a child it is linked to the warmth of the parent or teacher. It helps to make a regular time for reading, such as bedtime.
2. Make and use other type of books: use photoalbums and make books with newspaper cuttings or textured materials as an activity with your child.
2. Balance books with real life experiences and social interaction.
3. Try to read to the child or tell stories in different languages, particularly your mother tongue.

The session was facilitated by Usha Mukunda, a librarian and teacher with a passion for children's books.

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