

How to play the medieval game of Hnefatafl



During the 9th century, Vikings established a town between the Liffey and Poddle rivers. They called it Dubh Linn after the black pool on the Poddle river where they moored their boats. The town of Dublin grew with the arrival of the Normans in 1170.

The Vikings brought many new skills and ideas to Ireland. One of these was the game of Hnefatafl.

Evidence of playing Hnefatafl has been found in the many countries the Vikings invaded and traded with in the 8th to 11th centuries. A version of it is still played in Scandinavian countries today.



When Chess arrived in Ireland from the 12th century onwards, Hnefatafl was played less and less until it gradually disappeared. Hnefatafl boards have been found across Ireland, from Antrim to Westmeath and Dublin.

The game I'm going to teach you is the Irish medieval version played in Dublin in the 9th to 11th centuries.

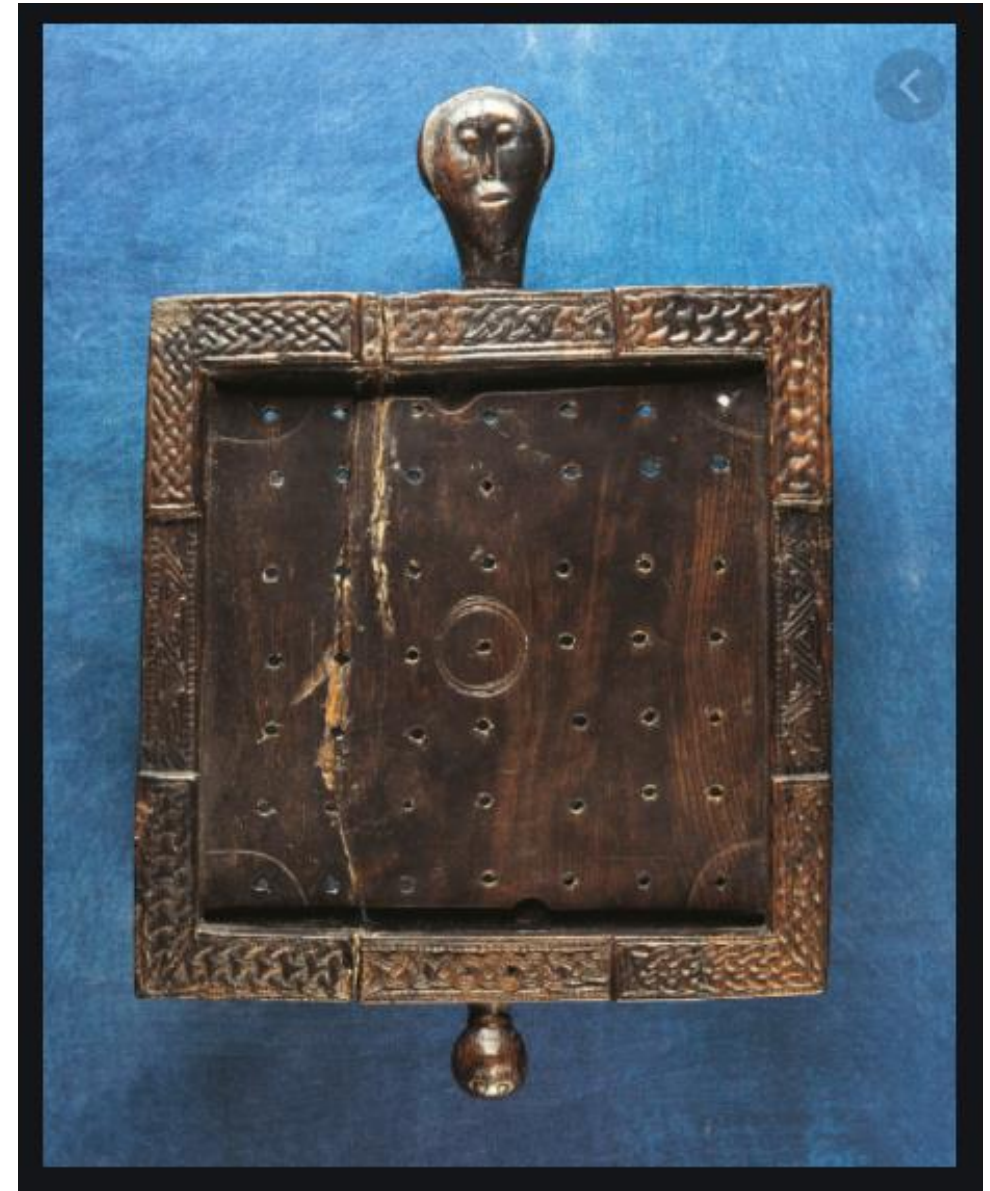
This beautiful board, made from the wood of the yew tree, was excavated in Ballinderry, Co. Westmeath in 1932. It dates to sometime between the 9th and 11th centuries. It was beautifully made and was probably a much treasured possession. When the board was found, there were no playing pieces.

The Ballinderry board has 7 holes across and 7 down, giving players 49 spaces to play in. There is a double inscribed line around the centre space and a single line around each of the corner spaces. These are the King's spaces.

It is believed this board was used to play Hnefatafl or the Irish version, Brandub.

As we play this game over and over, we develop strategies and insights that we share with those in medieval times, a meta-knowledge.

The Ballinderry Gaming Board



The Ballinderry Gaming Board measures 26.5cm x 17cm x 2.5cm. It is currently on show in the National Museum of Ireland, Kildare St, Dublin

How to make the board and the game pieces

Materials for the game:

- Sheet of white cardboard about 30cm x 30cm
- Coloured marker pens in Black, Purple and Grey
- Ruler
- Coin
- 12 stones in a dark colour
- 9 stones/shells in a pale colour
- 1 larger stone in a pale colour that you can stick on top of one of the pale stones/ shells.

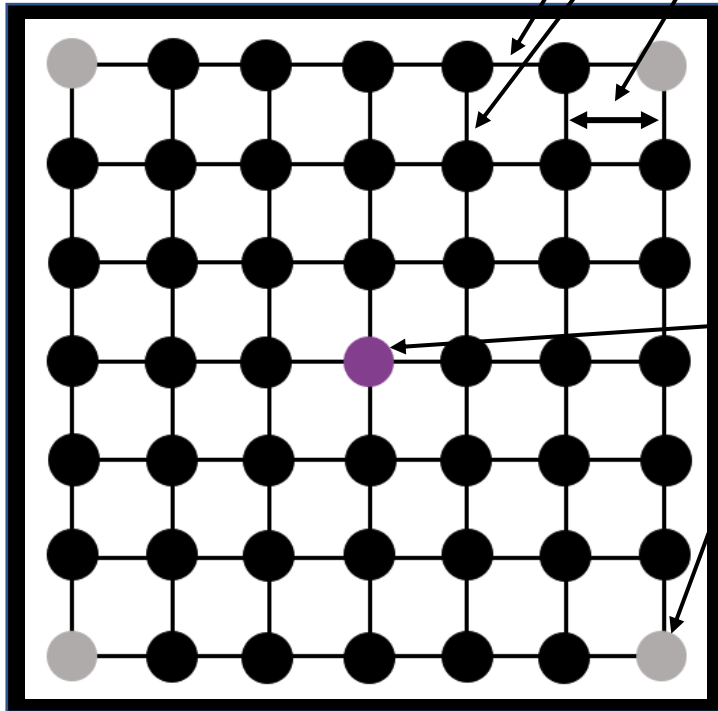
Instructions

1. Draw 7 lines across, equal distance apart.
2. Draw 7 lines down, equal distance apart.

The distance between the lines is 4cm

3. Draw 49 circles where the lines meet. Use a coin to draw around so that they are all the same size.

4. Colour the centre circle purple and the four corners grey. These are called the King's circles. Colour all the remaining circles black.



You will need:

A king plus 8 defenders of one colour
12 attackers of another colour

Here are some ideas for the pieces

Stones and shells
Cardboard circles in 2 different colours
Modelling clay



These pieces are decorated with Viking Runes

The game pieces

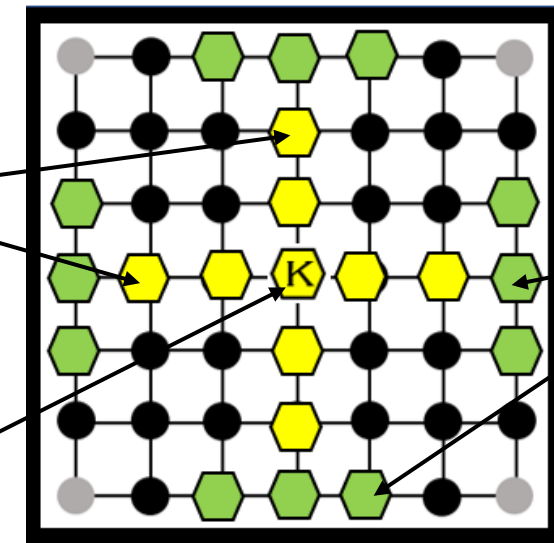


12 grey stones
9 broken shells (one of which is used for the king)
The King is made from a white stone stuck to a shell

Let's set up the board

The 8 defenders (shown in yellow) form a cross shape around the King

The King stands in the middle space

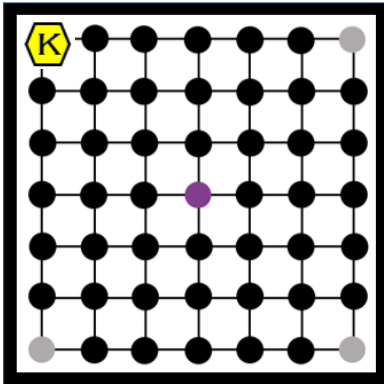


The 12 attackers (shown in green) are positioned 3 on each edge

The Rules of the game of Hnefatafl

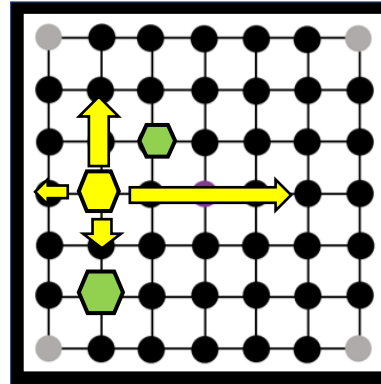
Hnefatafl is a military strategy game in which the king and his defenders are trying to get to safety and the attackers are trying to capture the king. The king is trying to escape to a corner with the help of his defenders and the attackers are trying to capture the king.

The aim of the game or how to win



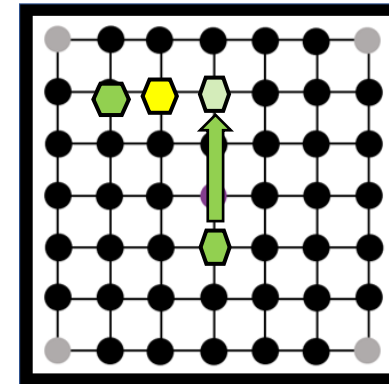
The **defenders** win by moving their king into one of the four corners.

How to move

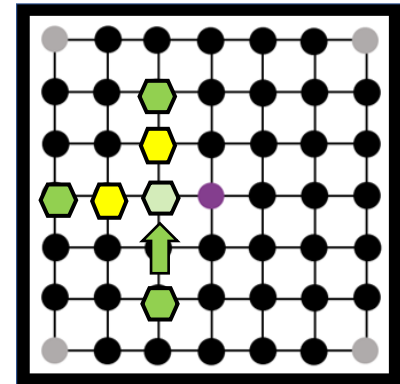


At each turn, a player moves one piece in a straight line in any direction. You cannot jump over another piece or move diagonally.

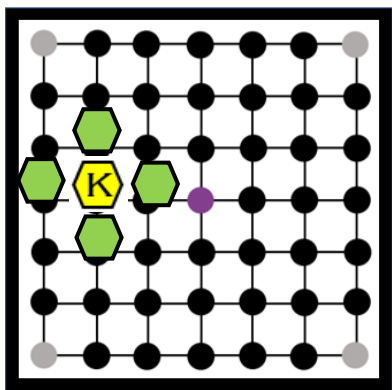
How to capture your opponent



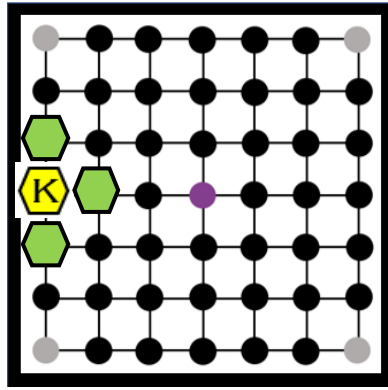
To capture another piece you move to sandwich it between two of your own players.



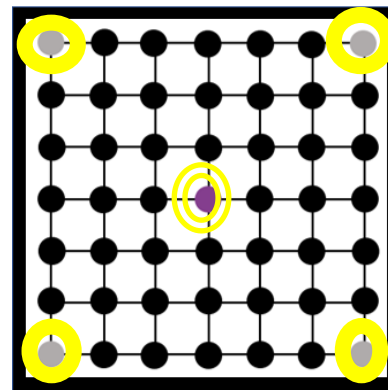
In this play, the green moves in to capture two yellow pieces



The **attackers** win by surrounding the king on all 4 sides anywhere on the board

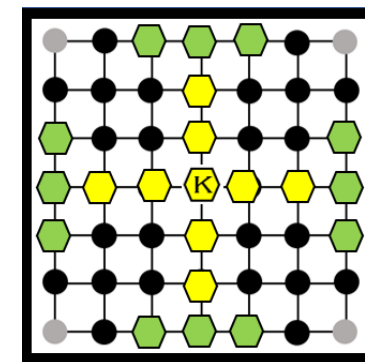


If the king is on an edge space, it can be captured by surrounding it on 3 sides.



Only the king can stop on the centre circle and the four corners. Other pieces can pass over the centre square.

Now, you are ready to start



The attackers go first.

Good Luck