



# The Master of Games

by Kari Anderson

What if there were a pill that could help kids with their math problem-solving skills and reading comprehension while increasing their self-confidence, patience, logic, critical thinking, observation, pattern recognition, analysis, creativity, concentration, persistence, self-control, sportsmanship, responsibility, respect for others, self-esteem, and their ability to cope with frustration? There is not currently a medication that does all this, but there is something on your shelves that can. It's chess, and the game has so many intellectual benefits that it could be called a multivitamin for the brain.

We spoke with several manufacturers of various chess games, who agreed that chess is gaining in popularity. "Chess sales are surging," said Ron Reyes of Wood Expressions, a company that has been selling traditional wooden board games, including chess, for 30 years. "These products are difficult to find today, since quality traditional board games are generally not found in big box stores, but are often found in boutique stores and toy stores," he said. "[Wooden chess sets] evoke a sense of nostalgia from playing games with our parents, grandparents, family and/or friends when we were growing up. There is also a great deal of history involved with wooden board games."

## More buzz about chess

Michel Alvarez, founder of WonderChess LLC, noted that chess is getting the spotlight in a variety of media outlets these days, which helps to increase awareness of the game. "You see it in movies like 'X-Men,' books like *Harry Potter*, and even in cartoons like 'Arthur.'

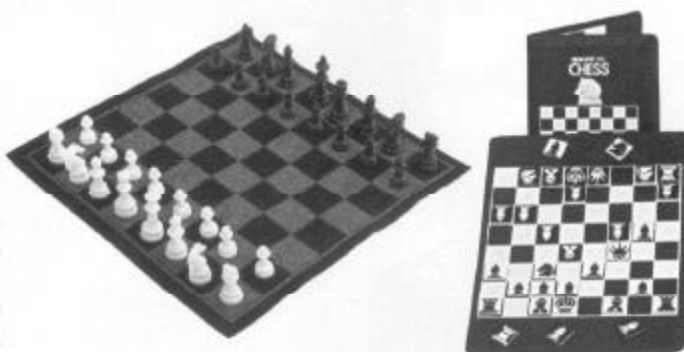
"As far as learning and playing chess, I am seeing a growing trend especially among elementary schools," he continued. "You can look to the nonprofit America's Foundation for Chess ([www.af4c.org](http://www.af4c.org)) as just one example. It was created a few years



In addition to standard wooden chess sets, Wood Expressions also makes a variety of sets with intricately made, hand-painted chessmen in a variety of themes, from gladiators to the Simpsons.

ago and uses chess as a teaching tool for other subjects. It continues to add more and more second- and third-grade students to its program.

"I also hear from scholastic chess tournament organizers that participation has steadily increased in recent years as more and more studies come out showing the benefits of the game," he added.



The magnetic Chess Set in a Tube (left) from International Playthings comes with a felt board that rolls up for easy storage. Magnetic Travel Chess (right) from Lauri Toys is a pocket-sized version with two-dimensional chessmen for a game that goes anywhere.

Several chess manufacturers pointed out that online versions of the game are booming. "Chess has become an online phenomenon," said Scott Cavagnaro, owner of Lauri Toys, the maker of Magnetic Travel Chess. "There are hundreds of sites, including chess chat rooms. Adults and children are no longer starving for chess companions; they simply go online and play against people from all over the world.

Michel Alvarez believes that with the rising awareness of the game, there are untapped opportunities in the marketplace for selling chess sets. "As part of my business-plan research prior to launching WonderChess, I found that only 5 percent of families in the United States truly introduce this great game of chess to their children. I believed there was a great opportunity to make an impact on the other 95 percent and introduce chess to the masses."

## A classic of classics

The phrase "old-fashioned board game" takes on a whole new meaning when you're talking about a game that is literally centuries old. AF4C states that the history of chess goes back at least 1,400 years, and that the last rule change was made about 500 years ago.

"Chess is not just any old game," contended Ron Reyes of Wood Expressions. "It is one of the most revered board games ever to hit the market. Not only is chess a fun and exciting way to compete against your rivals, it offers an array of intellectual benefits. In fact, chess is part of the required curriculum in



for each player, as opposed to 16. This allows beginners to familiarize themselves with the pieces and the moves in a more limited playing space. The other side of the board is designed for a full chess game, and between the two boards, there are 10 different levels of play.

**Lots of instructions.** No Stress Chess, from Winning Moves, also comes with a two-sided board. The instructional side is illustrated with arrows and has words printed on it, explaining which pieces go where when the game is initially set up. It also comes

with cards that tell each player which type of piece to move on that turn. This makes the game go quicker for beginners.

WonderChess, from WonderChess LLC, includes a 54-page illustrated book that walks the players through 10 lessons that are each 15 to 20 minutes in length.

**Rewards for everyone.** In addition to the instruction book, WonderChess comes with an incentive chart and stickers to motivate young players, but the real grab for this game is the prize inside each playing piece. When a player captures a piece, the prize is his. Prizes are customizable and can be stickers, coins, jelly beans or anything else that will fit inside the playing piece. The prize-inside concept helps overcome the fear and stress associated with the game, and it soothes children who tend to have a hard time losing.

#### Chess with a twist

Other manufacturers are producing chess sets with a twist, either on the game itself or on the packaging. For example, the Magnetic Chess Set in a tube, from International Playthings, has a magnetic felt board that rolls up for easy portability. Likewise, the Lauri Toys' Magnetic Travel Chess is a pocket-sized version of the game that is easy to pack and carry.

Dream Green is a company with two chess-alternative games to its credit. Tic Tac Chec is a cross between Tic Tac Toe



*Each piece in WonderChess can be opened to reveal a prize inside, rewarding both players regardless of who wins. WonderChess LLC currently donates 1 percent of its sales to help sponsor chess tournaments at schools and community centers across the country.*