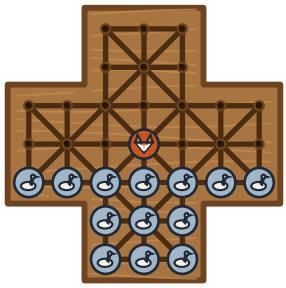
Fox and Geese

Name _____

Read about a hunting game played across Europe for hundreds of years.



The board at the start of a game.

Fox and Geese is a hunting game for two players. One player has a single fox. The other has a flock of 13 geese. The fox tries to catch geese by jumping over them. The geese try to crowd the fox into a spot where it cannot move. It is a battle between one strong piece and many weak ones.

Games like this were played across Europe for hundreds of years under many names. In France it was "the fox and the hens," in Germany "fox and geese," and in Iceland "fox chess." They probably grew out of tafl, an older family of Viking board games in which one side also had more pieces than the other.

A fox game called halatafl, which means "tail board," is mentioned in Grettis saga, an Icelandic story from the 1300s. The tail was probably the fox's tail. In England, King Edward IV, who ruled in the 1400s, bought two foxes and 26 hounds to make two sets of what was probably a fox game.

In Sweden the fox game is still played on a wooden board with holes and pegs, like the one on the game board page. Fox and Geese stayed popular for centuries. In the 1800s it was a favorite pastime of Queen Victoria of England.

Questions

1. How many foxes and how many geese are in the game?

2. How do the geese win?

3. What does the name halatafl mean, and what was the "tail" probably?

4. Which English king bought pieces for a fox game, and what pieces did he buy?