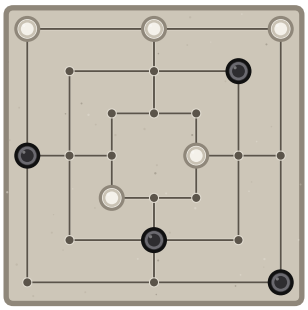
Nine Men's Morris

Name _____

Read about a three-in-a-row game people have played for 2,000 years.



A Morris board in carved stone. The light player has just made a mill along the top.

Nine Men's Morris is a game of three in a row for two players. It is a little like tic-tac-toe, but each player has nine pieces and can move them around the board. People have played it for about 2,000 years, at least since the time of the Roman Empire.

The board is easy to make: three squares, one inside another, joined by four lines. People scratched and carved boards into stone all over Europe. In English cathedrals such as Canterbury, Gloucester and Salisbury, boards are cut into the stone benches of the cloisters, the covered walkways where monks walked.

The game traveled far. A board found in the Gokstad Viking ship burial in Norway, from about AD 900, has a Morris board on one side and a Viking game on the other. In 1283 King Alfonso X of Castile, in Spain, had a book of games made, and it includes Nine Men's Morris.

In England, people cut giant boards into the grass of village greens. In William Shakespeare's play A Midsummer Night's Dream, a character complains that after a rainy summer "the nine men's morris is filled up with mud." Some people think a board cut into an Egyptian temple is even older, but experts disagree about when it was made.

Questions

1. How is Nine Men's Morris like tic-tac-toe? How is it different?

2. Where in English cathedrals have Morris boards been found?

3. What was on the other side of the board from the Gokstad Viking ship?

4. In Shakespeare's play, what happened to the outdoor Morris board?