

# Suggestions for starting a successful Go club for kids

## **Know your market.**

Pick up a copy of Shonen Jump from the grocery store and read a chapter of Hikaru no Go. Better yet, buy volume one of the graphic novel (10 chapters for \$7.95) from any bookseller or online. This is not some idle kiddie tripe. It is a very well written and beautifully drawn story, with great characters and a thrilling plot line. Once you have started reading it, you will become hooked. Being able to talk about the characters in the story will give you an in with kids and librarians.

## **Find a free venue.**

Go talk to the librarian in the children's department of your local library. Bring a copy of Shonen Jump, a Go set, and a sample of publicity materials. Tell them that kids' clubs are springing up in libraries all over the country and are very popular. Librarians are excited when people from the community come to them with programs for kids. You can take the same approach for an after school club, although it usually helps if you know a teacher or have a kid enrolled in that school. If anyone seems dubious, you can provide them with references from other schools and libraries (ask me for these if you want them).

## **Get free equipment.**

The American Go Foundation will give starter sets to any new club that forms. These are just laminated paper boards with plastic stones, but it will get you started. Don't forget to check for local resources too. Many club members have old sets they aren't using, and chapters in nearby cities may have extra sets too. I got 6 ING sets, which had been languishing in someone's basement, from the Denver club.

## **Publicize your club.**

Make posters! You can modify the free samples we will have on the AGA website, all you have to do is add your meeting location and time. You should also make a press release and send it out to your local papers. Again, you can copy freely from the sample we have put up on the AGA site. Put your posters up in the library, at game stores, and at comic stores, as well as anywhere you know kids hang out.

## **Be there every week.**

You can try having meetings every other week, but it is a lot harder to get folks to remember when to come. Your best bet is to meet every week; you can start with one hour and add time as kids begin to come. You should find another person to cover any days that you can't make it. Or launch it with three other people from your club, that way each of you only needs to commit to once a month. Whatever you work out, make a point of being there and staying until your allotted time is over. There will be times when no one comes, there will be times when it is just a couple of kids. But if you are patient and consistent, kids will come.

## **Keep it simple.**

Do not overwhelm kids with rules when they come for the first time. You basically have about five minutes to get the kid engaged and playing. Make it fun, if you see glazed eyes when you are teaching, you need to rethink your approach completely. I teach only on 9 x 9. I show them how to capture, how to connect stones, and how to count territory. I do not tell them about Ko or eyes. I then play the kid, or as many as are in a group, all at the same time. I give them a five stone handicap and tell them that it is enough of a head-start that they have a good chance of winning their first game. I encourage them to ask questions while they are playing. If a Ko comes up, I explain the rule. If an opportunity to make eyes appears, I explain how to do it. I usually play any newcomers two or three times in a row, and then pair them off with other kids. All the kids at my club know I teach this way. So I can hand-off a kid to another

kid and tell them “she doesn’t know about Ko yet”, or “show him how to make eyes if it comes up.” After they have gotten the hang of 9 x 9, move them to 13 x 13 for five games or so, and then up to the full board. For any kids under 7, teach them First Capture instead. This is a simplified version of Go. All anyone has to do is capture a single stone, and then the game is over. Obviously it is very fast, so you just play over and over again with the kid until they can capture a stone. Once they have captured one stone, change the game so that they need to capture two stones to win next time. This game was enough for the younger kids at Creekside Elementary School. And they played it weekly for several months without getting bored.

### **Establish club ratings.**

Kids are hyper competitive and love to check their ratings often. We have taken to making our own ratings as the AGA site took too long and was only for AGA members. We start kids out at around 40 kyu, and usually find that the 30 kyus can actually give nine stones to the 40 kyus. We have written a computer program to update our ratings, and the library has a ratings page on their website. I print a copy and take it to club every week, so I can pair the kids and track rated games. Kids check it online too.

### **Make a website.**

Even if you have no web skills, you can still have a site. Talk to your library or school, they will usually be happy to put up a page for you on their site. We have information about the game and the club up on ours, as well as a link to the current ratings (updated weekly), and pictures of past tournaments.

### **Write a grant.**

Many cities and towns have grant programs for youth. The City of Boulder has one that specializes in Multi-Cultural activities for kids. We received \$1,000 from them last year, and another \$1,000 in matching funds from the AGF. The grants I wrote for both of these organizations will be posted on the AGA’s website. Feel free to copy anything you like from them and put them in your own proposal. Libraries usually have grant funds available, and school districts do too. Go appeals to all math teachers, most computer folk, and social studies teachers, to name a few.

### **Teach the parents.**

Always offer to teach the parents at the same time. Many of them become actively involved and play with their kids at home and come to club as well. Parents are also quite useful to have around when you have thirty kids in a room, make them your allies! We also have plenty of parents that leave their kids and come back later. Meeting at a library, or school, where kids and parents feel safe, is very important.

### **Hold tournaments, give prizes!**

Even if you don’t have money for prizes, hold tournaments when you can. We give out attractive certificates to the winners. These also will be available for download online. If you have funds, buy trophies or plaques. Kids compete like crazy for these, but even simple ribbons will generate a fair amount of excitement. If you have enough kids, do a team tournament. This is central to the action in Hikaru no Go and many kids ask if we have team tournaments right off the bat.

### **Give away equipment, buy books for the library.**

Obviously you need funding for this one. We buy those lovely magnetic sets from Korea, which are kid sized and cheap. Any kid who comes six times gets one for free (only one per family though). If you can get 9 x 9 cardboard hand-out sets from the AGA or AGF, give them to newcomers along with *The Way to Go*, by Karl Baker. These come in and out of stock, but are free when they have them. We also have bought and donated over 50 Go books for the library. Before us they had two books, now all of those books are constantly in use. Samarkand, Yutopian and Kiseido all give generous discounts to educational programs involving kids.