

# Concepts in Go

by Ian Davis

Go is a game of **territory**, whoever controls the largest area wins.

It also involves **life** and **death** – killing stones or making stones live is very important in the game.

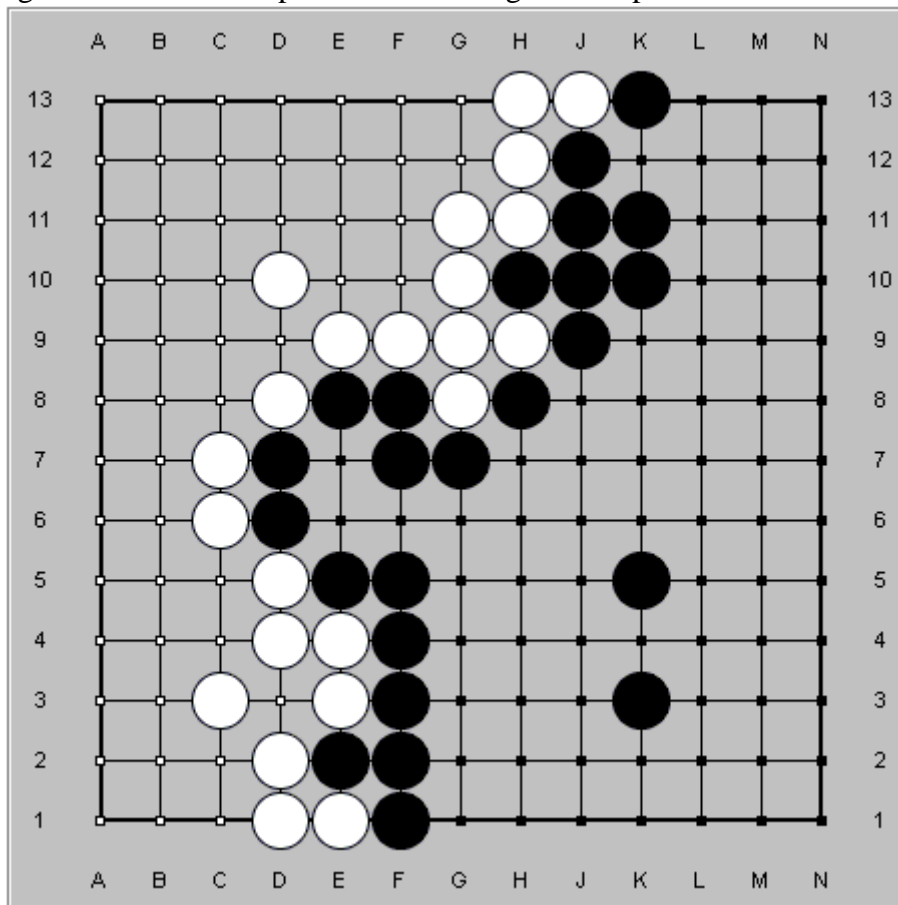
In life and death the concepts of **shape** and **liberties** are important.

**Influence** is another important factor in our games.

Infact much of the game involves striking a balance between territory and influence, At the beginning, when we are learning how to play Go, these concepts can be hard to understand.

## 1 - Territory

After putting down so many stones, you reach a point where the game ends. Both players agree that there is no point in continuing. At this point we count territory.

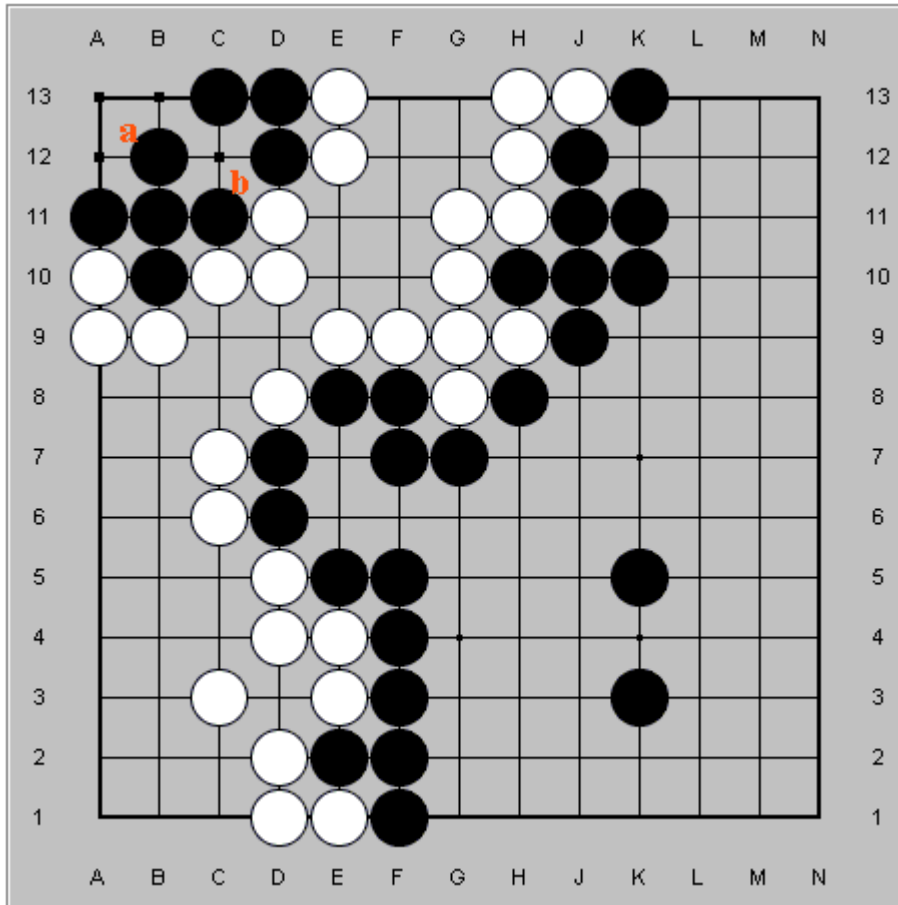


Marked white territory is shown with a white dot, black with a black dot. Each dot is worth a point.

Scores:  
Black – 71  
White – 50

Black wins.

It is possible after one player passes for the other player to continue.



Black invaded and made two eyes for his small group.

The eye at **a** is worth 3 points

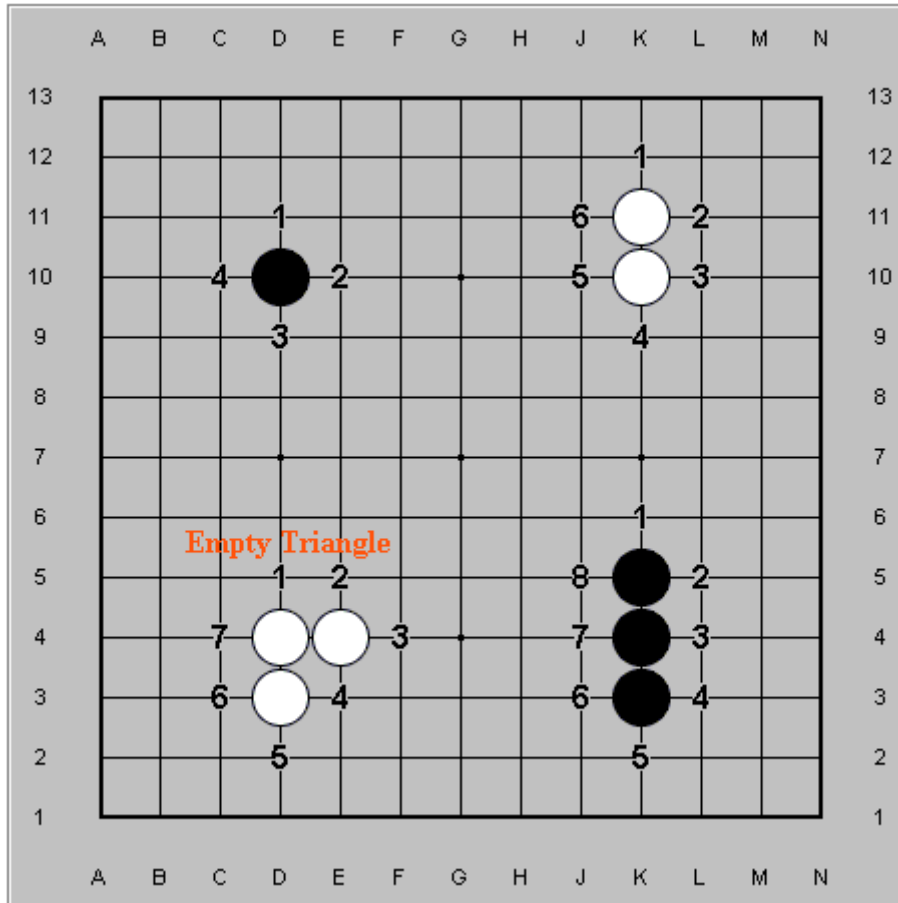
The eye at **b** is worth 1 point.

When you begin playing, it is very hard to decide whether or not you should pass. If there is a big enough space, often it can be invaded.

Can White get his own back here?

## 2 – Shape and Liberties

The previous struggle for life and death took place in a closed corner. At the beginning of the game, the board is wide open during any fighting. In order to keep our stones safe we use the concepts of shape and liberties to help us.

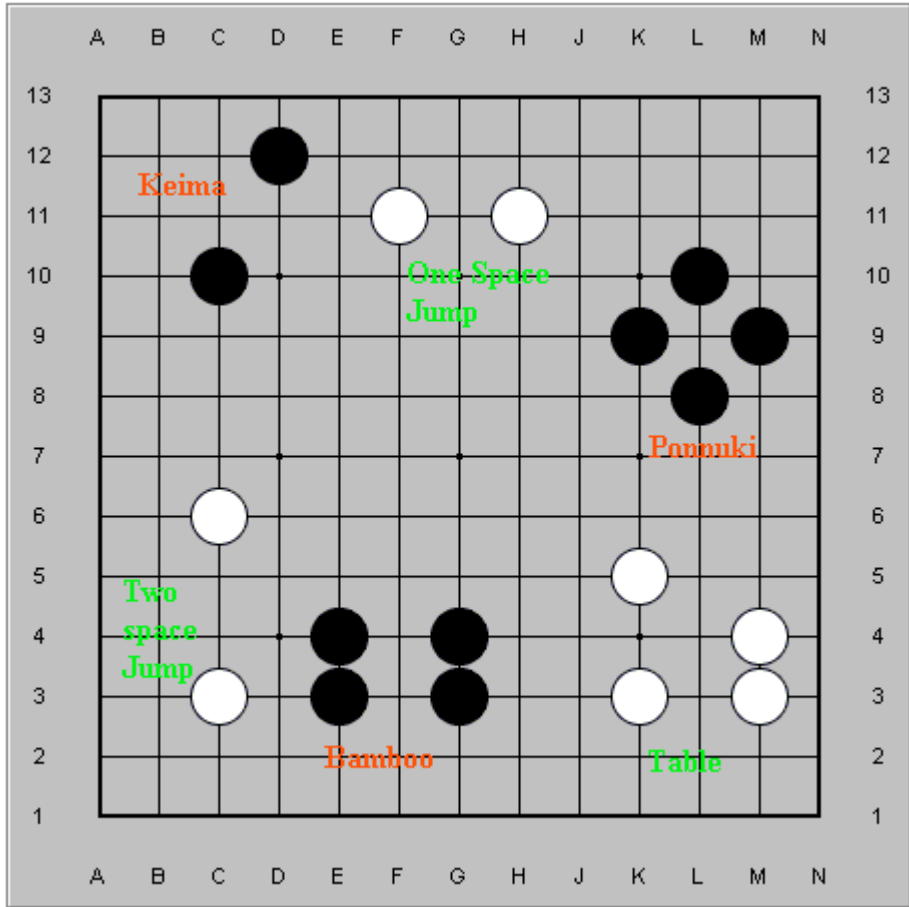


Stones start with 4 liberties, try not to place them in situations where they have fewer.

Forming a chain of stones increases liberties, so makes them harder to capture.

Note the difference between the straight line and the empty triangle. The empty triangle is **bad shape** because it has 1 less liberty.

Playing good shape is very important in Go. It is said that you can be rubbish at most other aspects of the game, but nevertheless, just by playing good shape you can achieve the rank of 1 dan.



A small sample of basic shapes.

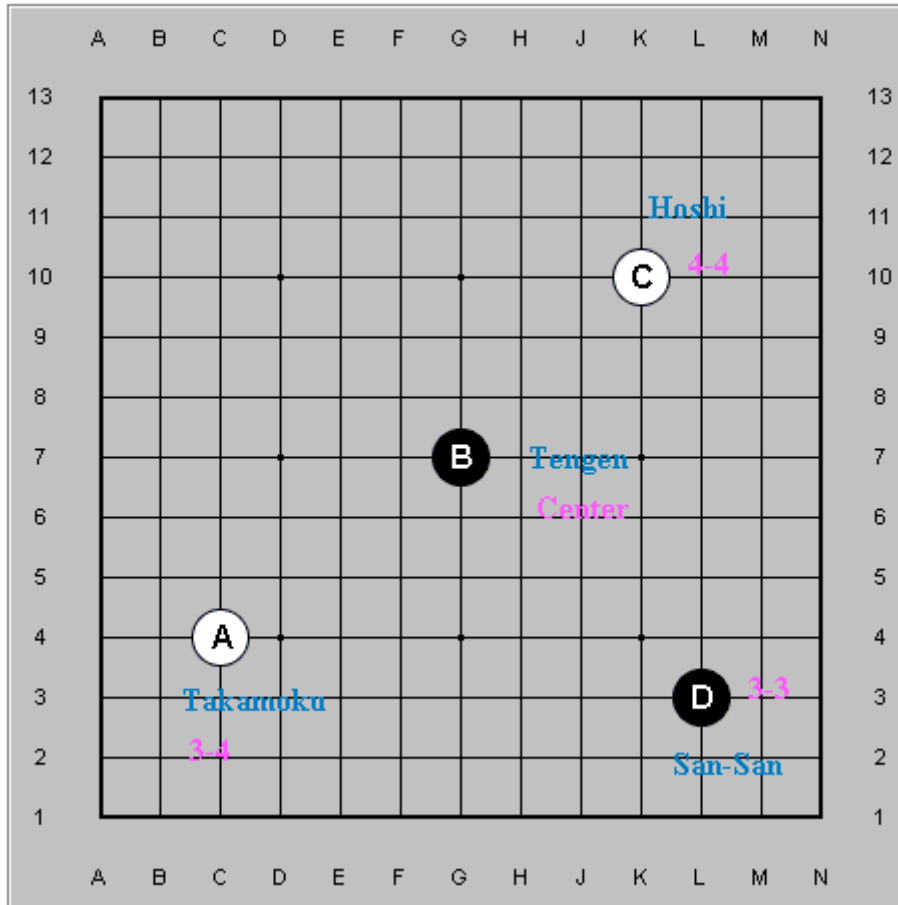
Keima (Knight's move), 1 and 2 space jumps are faster ways to play than making a chain.

The other 3 shapes are solid structures you will often see in games.

There are many more basic shapes to learn. Good shape is hard to attack.

### 3 – Influence

Influence is an annoyingly tough concept to get right.



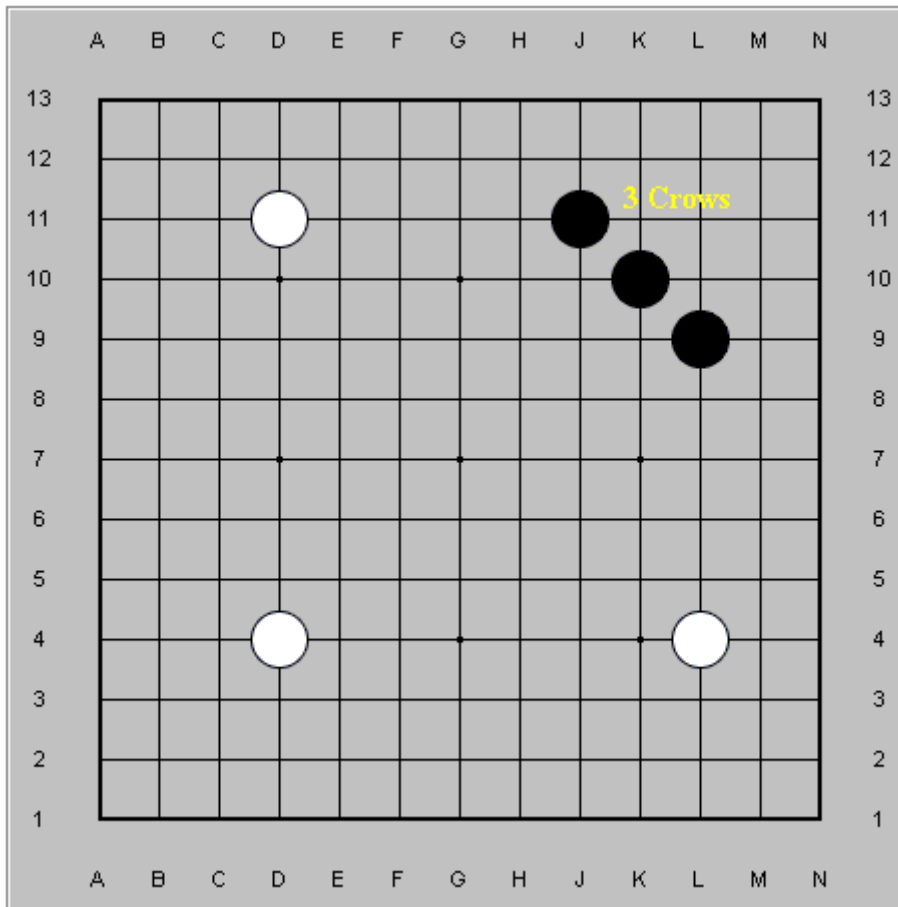
Right from the first stone we have to think about influence

Tengen is played only for influence

San-San is played only for territory

Takamoku and Hoshi are more balanced moves.

What does the above diagram actually mean though? When you start playing it's really hard to get a feel for the meaning of each move. Each move may have a different name, but the difference between them seems hard to define.



Let's extend the opening.

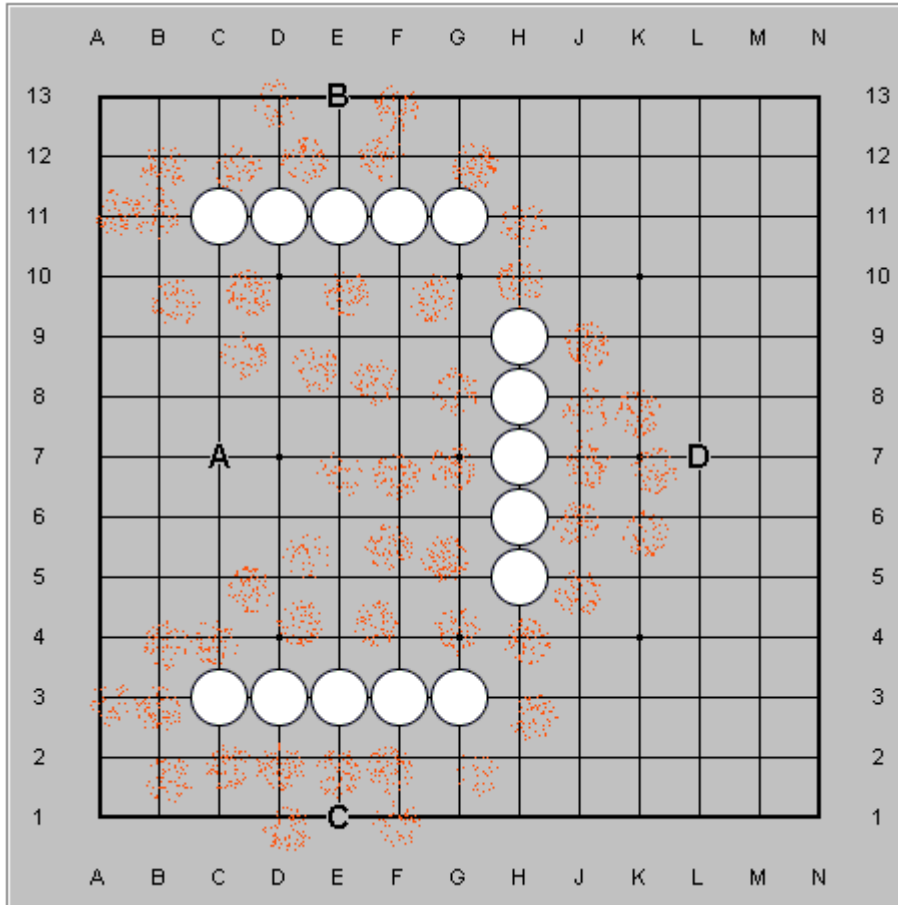
Black plays the **3 Crows** shape, banking only on territory in the top right

White spreads out across the board, building up a lot of influence.

Who is better?

If Go is a game of territory, you might suggest that Black has already won the game above. However, most stronger players would say "Black has played too slowly, White should win easily". In practice, (certainly for beginners) you might find that this is still anyone's game.

As an exercise you might want to play from this position to see who wins.



Extreme example of influence.

White has 3 walls on the board.

Can Black live anywhere?

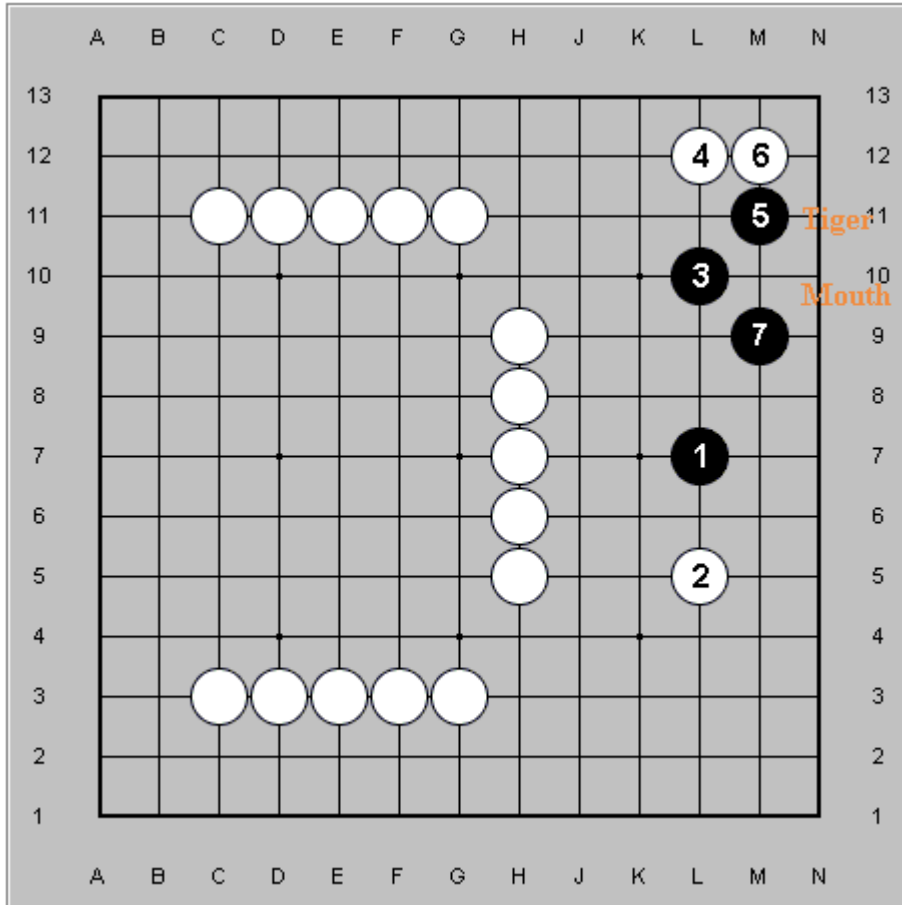
Influence can be used to great effect. When influence is really strong it becomes territory. We can also use influence to safely establish positions elsewhere on the board.

Of the 4 areas chosen A,B,C and D. Can Black invade any of them and live? B and C seem impossible, they are surrounded by the edge of the board and a wall. A is surrounded by 3 walls and the edge. Again it seems impossible to live.

Only D offers any chance of survival.

Trying to live with / kill a stone played at A is a good exercise.

Here we see what can happen after Black plays at D



White 2 seals off a corner.

Black makes a 2 space jump with 3.

With 4 and 6 White tries to reduce the space available for Black to live.

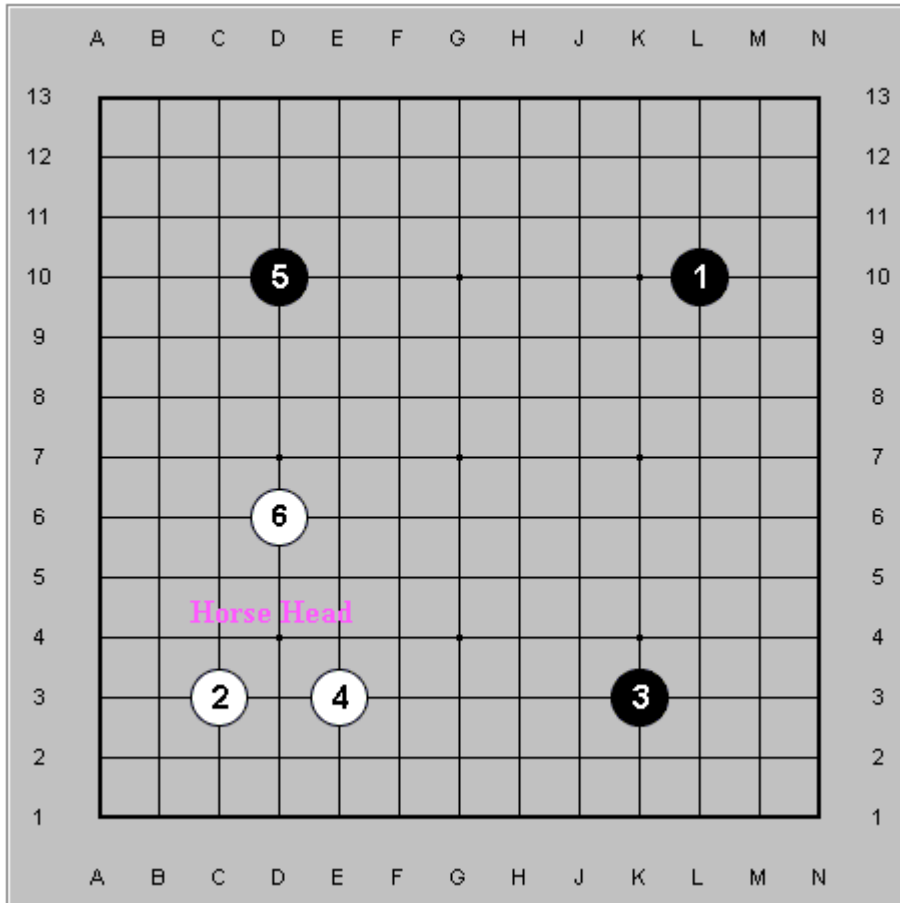
3-5-7 form the **Tiger's Mouth** shape. Black is now alive.

Note how good shape can help make life.

With practice you will get a feel for the balance between influence and territory.

## 4 - Sample Game

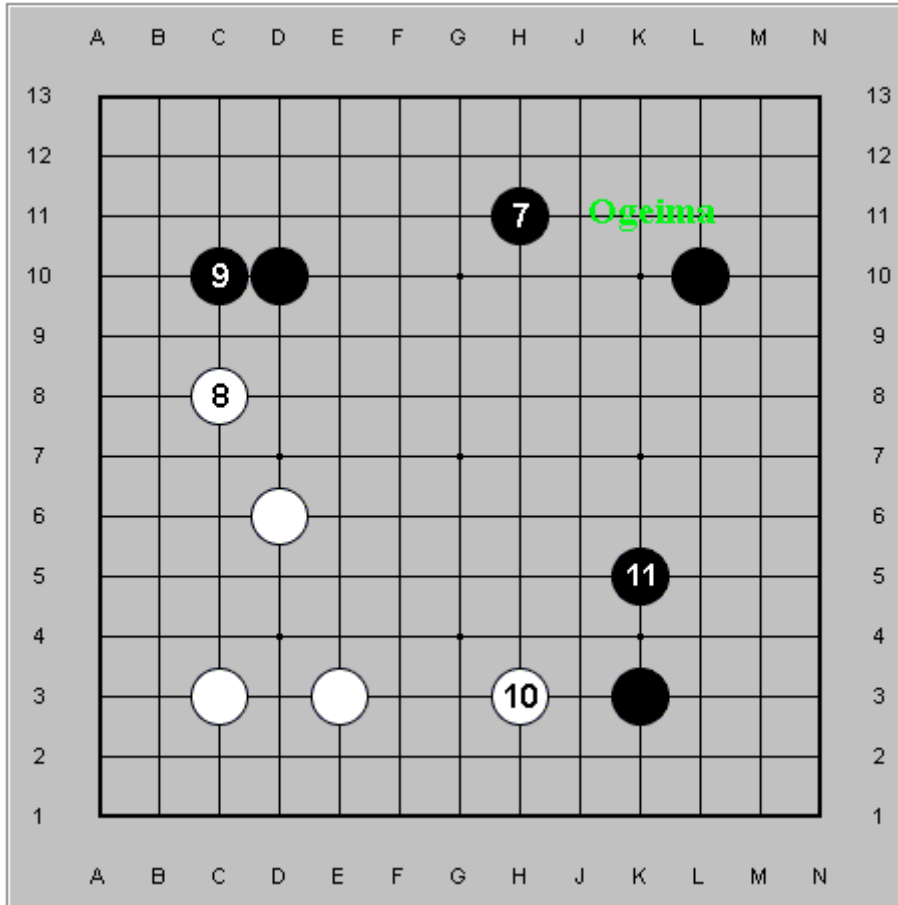
Here we see a struggle between influence and territory on a 13x13 board.



Black starts the game by opening in 3 different corners.

White decides to play super solid and chooses to make the **horse head** shape in one corner. This shape is pretty much invulnerable here, but it only influences one corner.

Remember that White begins with 5.5 points head start (as he starts second) .

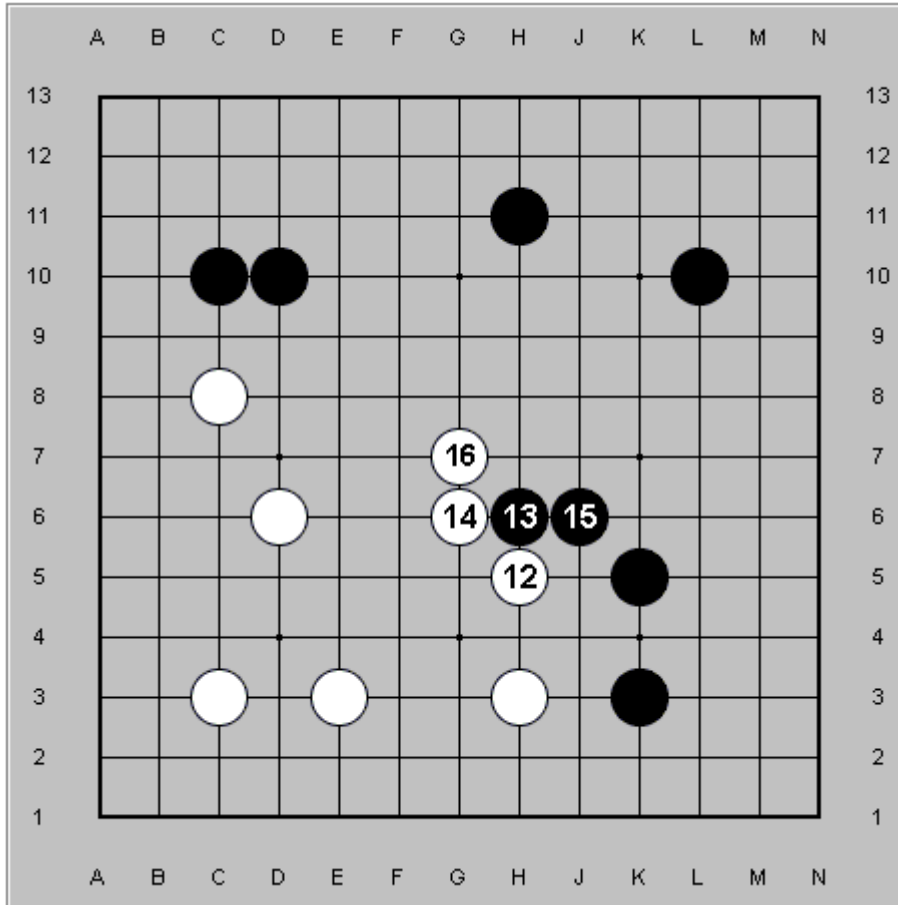


Black decides it is his turn to secure some territory, so he makes the **ogeima** shape to protect his corner. – this is very like the **Keima** and **two space jump** shapes we saw earlier. ( Infact ogeima means large Keima, or large knight’s move)  
 Note that this also starts to link up his stones.

White approaches the other corner with 8 (making a keima shape), Black defends with the solid 9. Notice that White is also expanding his base.

White 10 expands his base again (with a two space jump) Black defends his corner with 11, a **one space jump**.

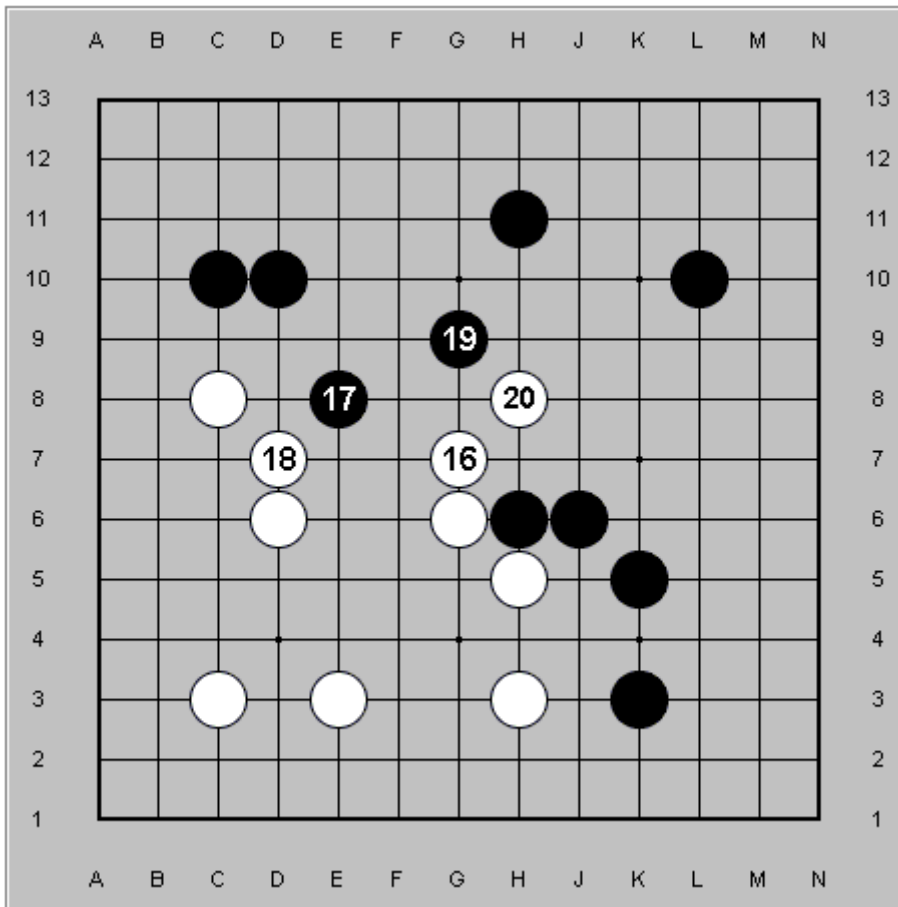
Notice how often the basic shapes occur.



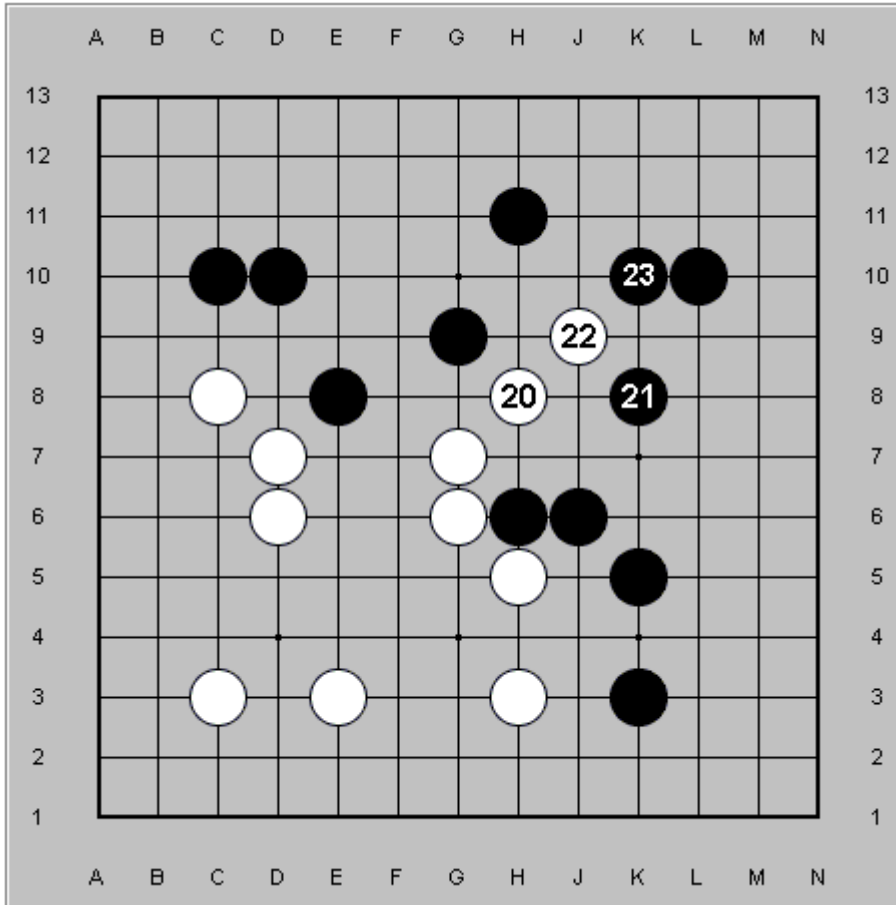
White decides to expand his territory a little more, so jumps up with 12.

Black tries to stop the expansion, and White continues into the center with 14 and 16.

Black 15 is necessary to protect 13.



Black tries to take the initiative with 17, making a keima shape again.  
White plays 18 to protect his stone.  
Black plays another Keima with 19, protecting the top side.  
White tries to reduce Black's territory with 20.



We end the game here. Black uses good technique to block White's invasion.

Who do you think is winning at this stage of the game?

First assume no more invasion, who is ahead on territory.

Then look to see if it possible to invade.

### 5 – Some Notes

There is one proverb about how many groups you can expect to keep alive during a game.

On a 19x19 board the maximum is 6.

On a 13x13 board it is 4.

On a 9x9 board is it just 2!

If you make an extra group it is likely to die. So be careful when spreading your stones across the board.