The game of Oware is an ancient board game that originated in Africa around 1400 BC and is still played today in Ghana, Malawi, the Caribbean, South America, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. There are many different versions and names for this game, depending on what country you are from. Mancala is one name; Sungka, Bao and Oware are other names. Because of its wide appeal, many of the students in our schools know the game and have played it.

Oware can be played by students in all grade levels. The level of complexity is entirely dependent on the players. Oware boards are sold in Canada by MACPRI, an organization committed to supporting Africa's development through the promotion and marketing of Made in Africa art. Their website is www.macpri.com. Although a representative of MACPRI came to Sts. Cosmas and Damian to sell Oware boards from Ghana, many staff, students and parents learned to play with their own Oware board, an egg carton and 48 buttons, seeds, marbles, beads, beans, etc. Students can also learn to play online or on the smart board.

As part of our African Heritage Month celebrations, the students at Sts. Cosmas and Damian Catholic School were taught how to play Oware. Resource teachers, Adrian Pope and Monica Rohel from the Toronto Catholic DSB’s Mathematics Department, arrived at the school on a Wednesday morning. Using a presentation developed by Rose Salerno, Aggie Nemes and the TCDSB curriculum and accountability department, the two teachers were able to teach eight classes how to play Oware. A lunch and learn was organized for primary and specialty teachers. Intermediate students were asked to take on leadership roles and to help teach younger students. They also acted as student ambassadors for our Family Math Night. Students in grades 4 to 8 from across Toronto can also participate in an Oware tournament, organized at St. Jean de Brebeuf School in Scarborough (Principal Carol Soper). MACPRI will be organizing Canada's First International Oware Tournament in the fall of 2011.

Family Math Night

Family Math Night is a fun event for students and their parents to experience math beyond the curriculum. Although students were at first reluctant participants, they soon learned that math is fun! Students enjoyed playing Oware with their classmates and were excited to play the game with their siblings, parents and friends. Families filled the gymnasium, the hallways and the classrooms. Parents and children competed for prizes, which included OWARE games from Ghana. Although the Toronto Catholic DSB mathematics department brought about 40 games for the evening, and parents purchased games through MACPRI, other students simply made their own Oware game with egg cartons and buttons.
Why have a Family Math Night?

- Family Math Nights introduce math topics to students in a different way, appealing to their different learning styles.
- Multicultural games and activities, such as Oware provide a context that makes mathematics significant and meaningful for all Canadians.
- The host school models positive attitudes towards mathematics by encouraging families to engage in mathematical activities beyond the classroom and engaging students in positive mathematics activities.
- Children do better in school when parents are involved in their learning. Family Math Night emphasizes that parental support will benefit children’s attitudes, self-esteem and potential to understand mathematics.
- Community-building Family Math Night gives busy parents, teachers and students one more chance to connect with each other. In one community, high school students helped to teach elementary students how to play Oware as part of their transition and community building.
- Math Night shows students and parents that math is fun. It offers an opportunity for children and their parents to learn mathematics together and have fun.

How to play OWARE: A Simplified Version

Place the egg carton or Oware board between the two players, lengthwise. The cups closest to you are your side of the board. Place four buttons (seeds, beans or pebbles) in each of the cups. Choose a player to go first.

The first player picks up all the buttons/seeds in one of their cups. The player then starts with the first cup to the right and drops a button/seed in each cup.

When the last button/seed is placed in a cup on the opponent’s side and the buttons/seeds add up to two or three, the player wins the buttons/seeds in the cup. A player can only win buttons/seeds on the opponent’s side. If the cup immediately behind the last cup also has two or three buttons/seeds, the player wins the buttons/seeds in that cup as well. The player can win up to four cups behind the cup with the last buttons/seeds, provided there is an unbroken sequence of two or three buttons/seeds in each cup.

When it is no longer possible to feed any more buttons/seeds to any side, the game is over and the player with the most buttons/seeds wins the game.

Resources:
Josie DiGiovanni, superintendent, Toronto Catholic DSB curriculum and accountability department
The Esso Family Math Project: www.edu.uwo.ca/essofamilymath/index.asp
Oware: www.macpri.com/macpri/oware/index.php

A Mathematics Prayer

We give thanks to God who created numbers:
Who adds to our days
Takes away our sins
Multiplies the loaves
And divides our sorrows.

We pray for the faith
to understand Your most wonderful of equations:
“When two or more are gathered in My Name,
there I am,
one with them”

Amen

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