



Sarvam Ekam
HOLISTIC LEARNING PLATFORM



Pallankuzhi

Four Traditional Indian Counting Games

PLAY • COUNT • THINK • SHARE



1

Sowing Seeds



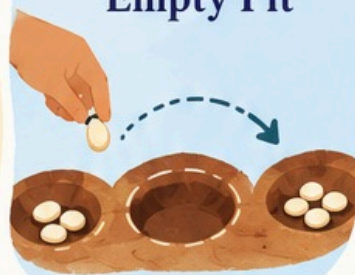
2

Catch the Pasu



3

Jump the Empty Pit



4

Pallankuzhi: the Full Game



A play book for children, teachers and families

Step-by-step pictures • puzzles • maths • thinking • feelings and friendship

Before you *play*

Pallankuzhi is a game of seeds, pits and patience. Children love it because it is fast, fair and full of surprises. Teachers and parents love it because, without a single worksheet, children count, compare, predict, plan, wait their turn and talk.

This book teaches four games on the same board. They go from easy to hard, and each one adds **one new rule**. **Game 4 is the traditional game** played across Tamil Nadu. **Games 1 to 3 are simpler versions**, each built from one rule of the full game, so that a three-year-old can start playing and a six-year-old can grow into the full game.

1

Sowing Seeds · ages 3+

Pick up, then drop one seed in each pit, going round. *Learn: counting one by one.*

2

Catch the Pasu · ages 4+

Make a pit hold exactly four seeds, and you catch it. *Learn: seeing groups of four.*

3

Jump the Empty Pit · ages 5+

If the pit after your last seed is empty, take the seeds beyond it. *Learn: zero, planning ahead.*

4

Pallankuzhi: the Full Game · ages 6+ and grown-ups

Keep sowing, catch pasu, jump empty pits, and play round after round. *Learn: strategy and big numbers.*



Every game has the same parts

- ◆ **A short story** of where the game comes from
- ◆ **What you need** and **how to set up**
- ◆ **Your Turn:** a puzzle to try (answers at the back)
- ◆ **Thinking questions** to ask while playing
- ◆ **A teacher and parent activity**
- ◆ **The board**, ready to set up
- ◆ **How to play**, step by step, in pictures
- ◆ **Counting and maths** in the game
- ◆ **Feelings and friendship** (social-emotional learning)
- ◆ **Easier and harder versions** for each age



How to read the pictures

- Gold seed = the seed just dropped ● Green arrows and numbers = the order of sowing
- Dashed gold ring = pick up here ○ Dashed blue ring = pick up again ● Orange = a pasu (exactly four)
- Dashed red ring = an empty pit ● Brown = seeds you take to your store

The white circle on each pit shows **how many seeds are in it**. Before you check it, let children count the seeds in the picture themselves.



Meet *Pallankuzhi*

In Tamil, **pal** means “many” and **kuzhi** means “pit”. Pallankuzhi is the game of many pits.

For generations, Pallankuzhi has been played in homes across Tamil Nadu: on verandas and thinnais in the afternoon, during festivals and holidays, and between grandmothers and grandchildren. Boards were carved from wood, sometimes shaped like a fish or decorated with brass, and were kept and handed down in families. When there was no board, children scooped pits in the sand.

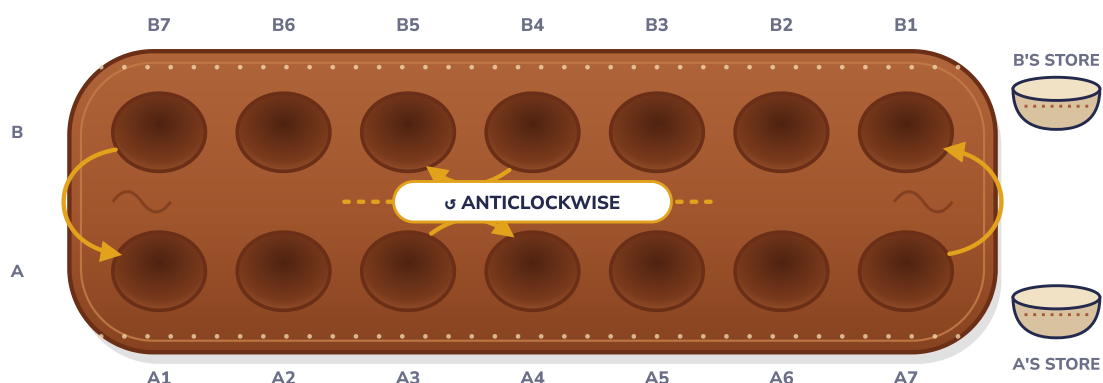
Pallankuzhi belongs to a very old family of “sowing” games found across Africa and Asia, called **mancala** games, such as Oware in West Africa and Congkak in Malaysia. In India, close cousins of the game are played as **Ali Guli Mane** in Karnataka and **Vamana Guntalu** in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

EVERY FAMILY PLAYS A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY

Rules change from village to village and from home to home: how many seeds go in each pit, who takes a pasu, how a round ends. The rules in this book are one common way to play. If your family plays differently, play your way and talk about the differences. That is part of the fun.

The board

The board has **14 pits in two rows of seven**. Each player owns the row nearest to them. In this book, **Player A** sits at the bottom (pits A1 to A7) and **Player B** sits at the top (pits B1 to B7). Seeds always travel **anticlockwise**: along A’s row from left to right, round the end, then along B’s row from right to left.



The counters



Tamarind seeds

Puliyankottai: glossy, brown and easy to hold



Cowrie shells

Smooth shells, used as counters for centuries



Manjadi seeds

Bright red seeds collected by children



Pebbles

Small smooth stones from the garden or river

SAFETY

Seeds and shells are small. Children under three, and any child who still puts things in their mouth, should play only with an adult beside them, or use bigger counters such as large buttons or bottle caps.

No board? Make one

- ◆ **Egg trays:** join two six-hole trays and cut off two extra holes from a third, to make two rows of seven.
- ◆ **Small bowls:** 14 katoris, steel cups or clay diyas in two rows.
- ◆ **Clay or sand:** press 14 pits into a slab of clay, or scoop them in damp sand outside.
- ◆ **Chalk:** draw 14 circles on the floor, kolam-style, and play with pebbles.

Add **two small bowls** as stores, one for each player, to keep the seeds they win.

Game words

Sow

Drop seeds one at a time into the pits, one in each pit, going anticlockwise.

Pick up

Take all the seeds from one pit into your hand.

Store

Your bowl for the seeds you win. They are out of the game.

Pasu

Tamil for “cow”. In the game, a pit that holds exactly four seeds.

Empty pit

A pit with no seeds: zero.

Round

One game from full board to empty. The full game has many rounds.

1

GAME ONE

Sowing Seeds

The first thing every Pallankuzhi player learns

Ages 3+

Players 2

Time 10 minutes

Seeds 56



The story

Long before there were games, there were fields. Farmers walk along a furrow and drop seeds one by one into the earth. Pallankuzhi copies this: you walk your seeds along the board and drop one into every pit. Players call it **sowing**. In this first game there is nothing to win or lose. Children simply learn to sow carefully, count aloud and watch the seeds move round the board.



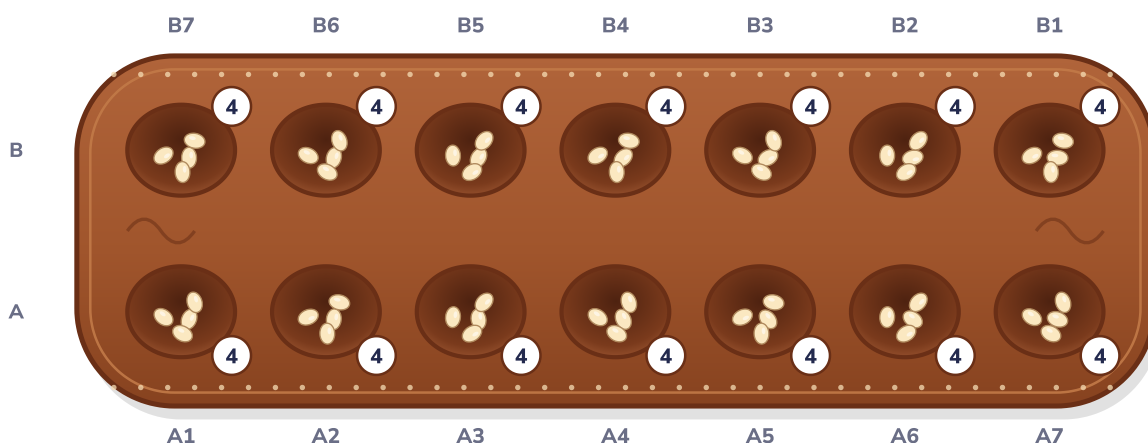
What you need

- ◆ A Pallankuzhi board, or 14 cups in two rows
- ◆ 56 seeds, shells or pebbles
- ◆ 2 players (or a child and a grown-up)
- ◆ No stores needed



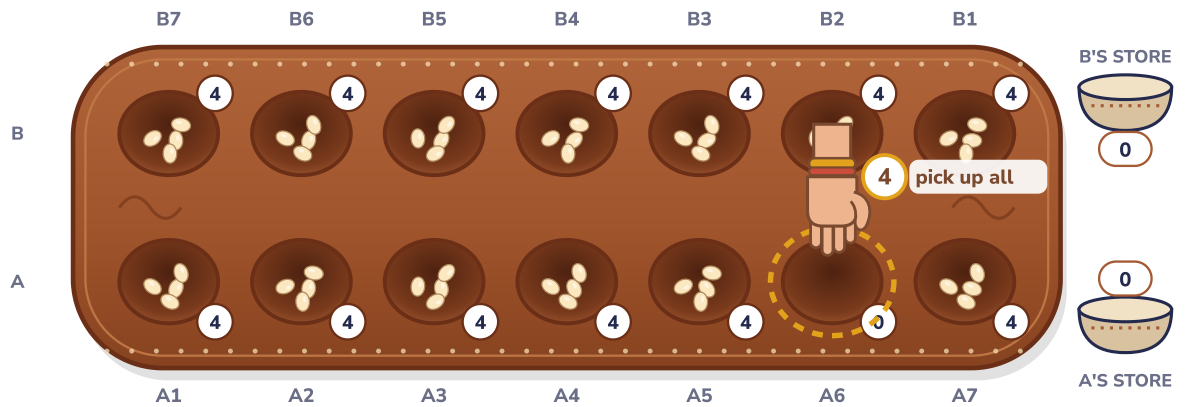
Set up

Put **4 seeds in every pit**. Count them in together: “one, two, three, four”.

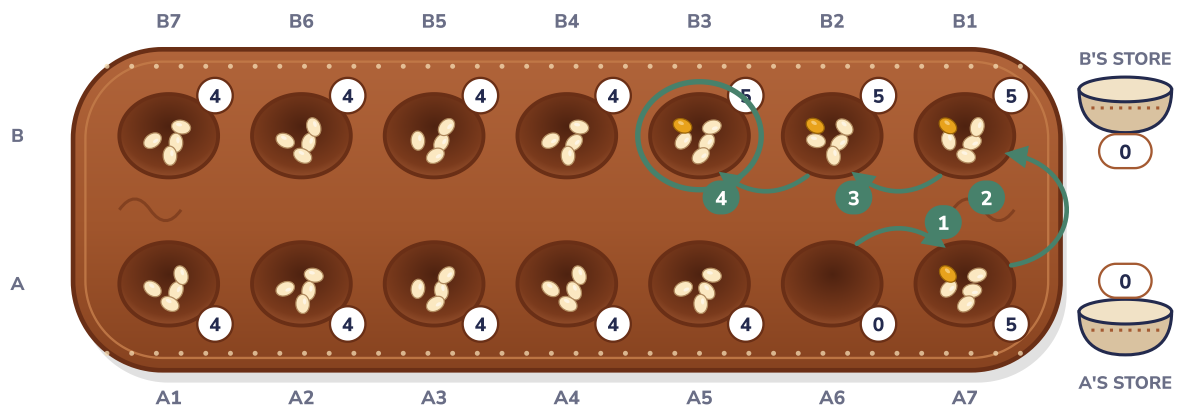


▶ How to play

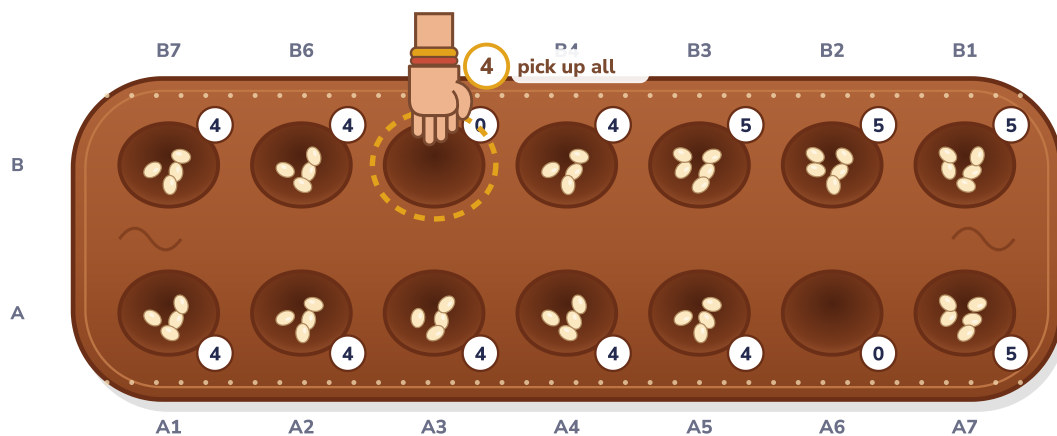
- 1 Pick up.** Player A picks up all 4 seeds from **A6**. The pit is now empty.



- 2 Sow.** Drop one seed in each pit, anticlockwise: 1 in A7, 2 in B1, 3 in B2, 4 in B3. The last seed falls in **B3**. The turn ends.

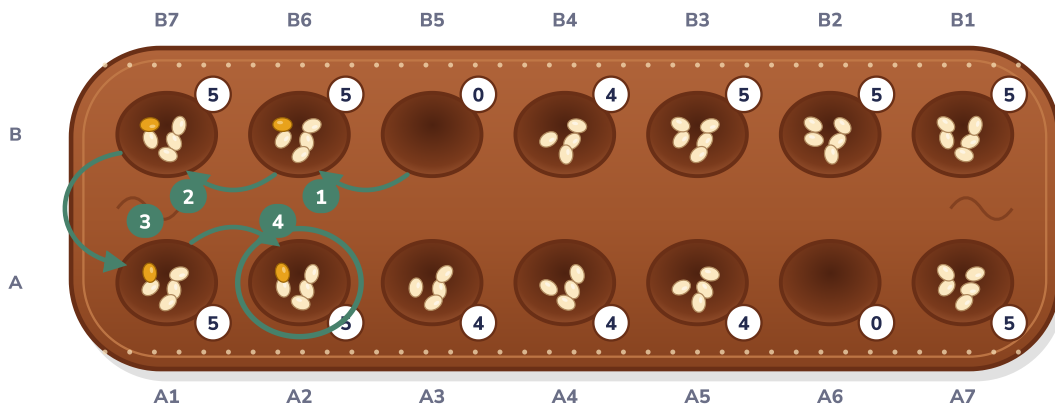


- 3 Your friend's turn.** Player B picks up all 4 seeds from **B5**.



4

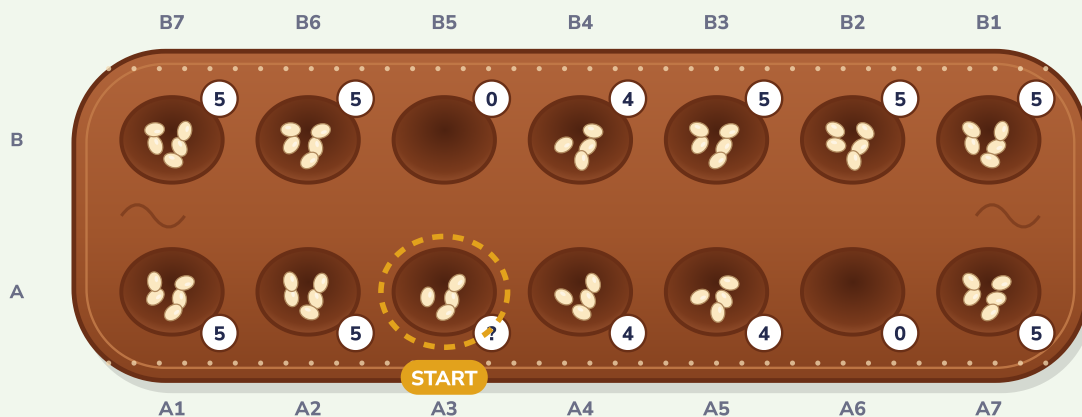
Sow round the corner. B sows 1 in B6, 2 in B7, then round the end: 3 in A1, 4 in A2. The last seed falls in **A2**.



KEEP GOING

Take turns. On your turn you may pick any pit **in your own row** that has seeds. Play 5 turns each. At the end, each player counts the seeds in their own row. Then count all the seeds on the board together: there are **still 56**. Seeds move, but none are lost.

YOUR TURN



It is Player A's turn. A picks up the seeds in A3. Count them. In which pit will the last seed fall?

My answer _____

Counting and maths

- ◆ **One-to-one counting:** one seed, one pit, one number word. This is the base of all counting.
- ◆ **Counting on:** "I have 4 seeds and start after A6. A7 is one, B1 is two..."
- ◆ **Prediction:** before sowing, guess where the last seed will land, then check.
- ◆ **Conservation:** the total stays 56 however the seeds move. Young children find this surprising.
- ◆ **More and fewer:** which pit has the most now? Which has the fewest?



Thinking questions



How many seeds are in your hand? How many pits will get a seed?



Where do you think your last seed will fall?



Which pit is fullest now? How did it get so full?



If you pick a pit with 6 seeds, will you reach your friend's row?



Feelings and friendship

- ◆ **Waiting:** watch your friend's whole turn before starting yours.
- ◆ **Gentle hands:** sow slowly so seeds don't jump into the wrong pit.
- ◆ **Counting aloud together** keeps the game fair and lets your friend check.

TEACHER AND PARENT ACTIVITY • SEED WALK

Draw 14 large circles on the floor or ground. A child holds 4 big beans and walks anticlockwise, dropping one bean in each circle and saying the number aloud. Ask the group to guess, before the child starts, which circle the last bean will land in. Repeat with 5, 6 and 7 beans. The body learns the pattern before the board does.



Easier and harder

AGES 3–4

Use 2 seeds per pit and only the 7 pits in one row. Use big counters. Sow side by side with a grown-up.

AGES 4–5

Play as written. Before every turn, the child says where the last seed will land.

AGES 5–6

Choose your pit so your last seed lands in a pit named by your friend: "Can you finish in B3?"

2

GAME TWO

Catch the *Pasu*

Make four, and the cow is yours

Ages 4+

Players 2

Time 10–15 minutes

Seeds 28



The story

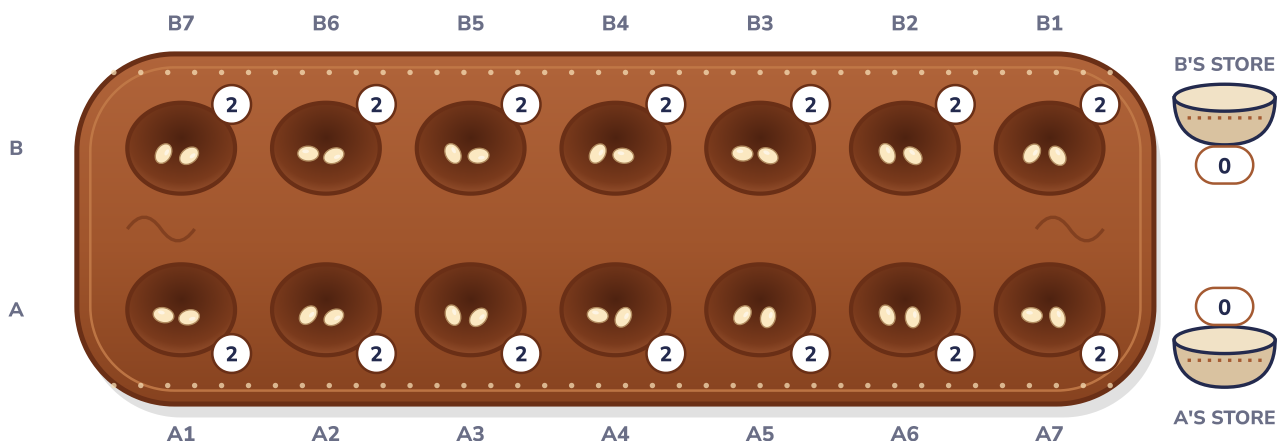
In village life, cows were wealth: they gave milk, pulled carts and were cared for like family. In Pallankuzhi, a pit that fills up to exactly **four seeds** while you are sowing is called a **pasu**, the Tamil word for cow, and it can be taken away to a store, like bringing a cow home. In the full game there are a few rules about who gets each pasu. In this game we keep it simple: **whoever makes the four catches it**.

What you need

- ◆ A board, or 14 cups
- ◆ 28 seeds
- ◆ 2 store bowls
- ◆ 2 players

Set up

Put **2 seeds in every pit**. Place a store bowl beside each player.



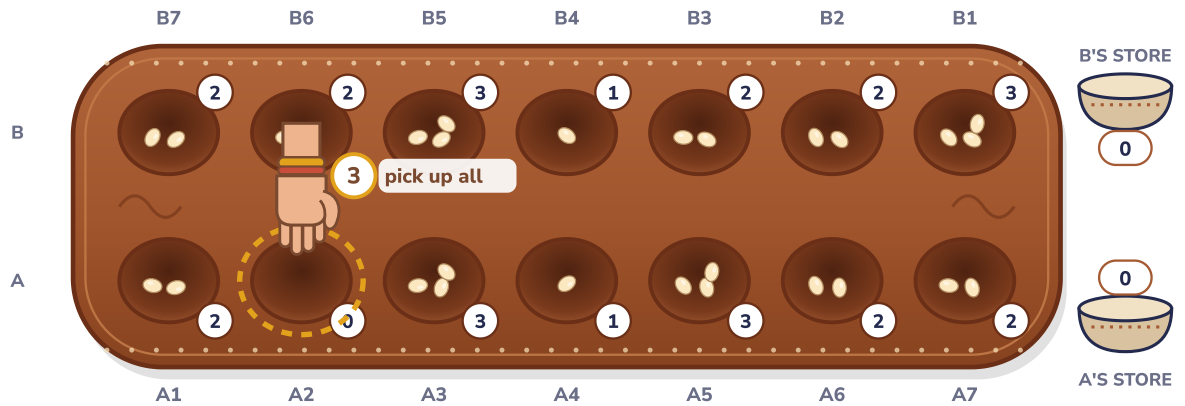
How to play

- ◆ On your turn, pick up all the seeds from **one pit in your row** and sow them anticlockwise, one in each pit.
- ◆ Watch every pit you drop a seed into. If it now holds **exactly 4**, shout **“Pasu!”**. When you finish sowing, take every pasu you made to your store.

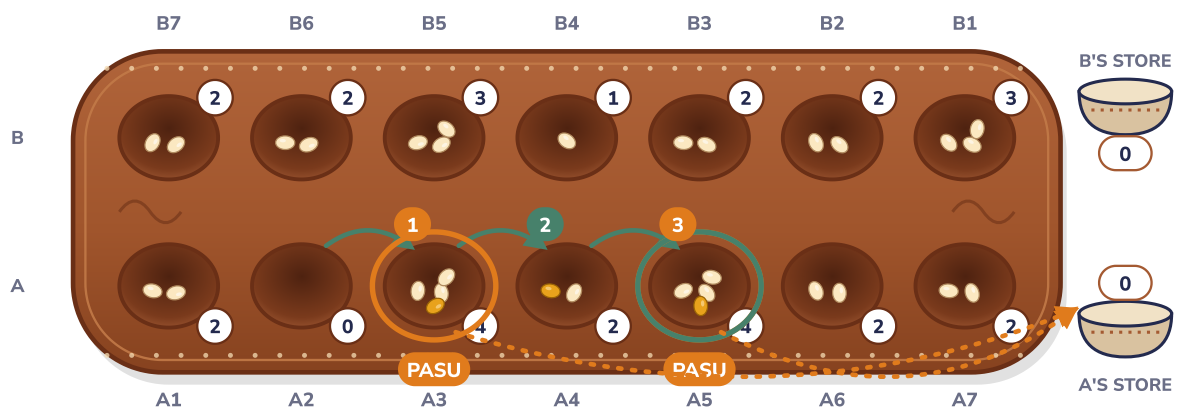
- Then it is your friend's turn. **The first player to catch 3 pasu (12 seeds) wins.** If a player has no seeds in their row, the game ends and the player with more seeds in their store wins.

Here is one turn in the middle of a game. It is Player A's turn.

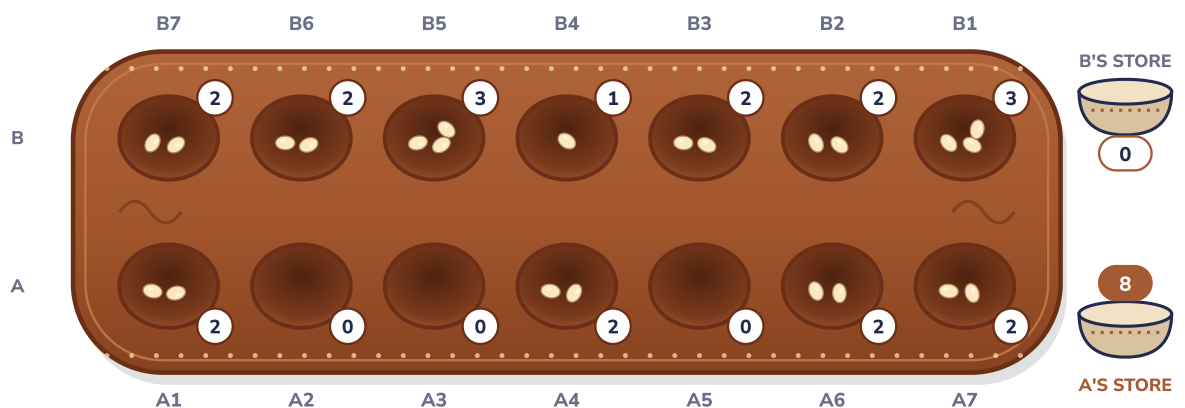
- Pick up.** Player A picks up all 3 seeds from **A2**. The pit is now empty.



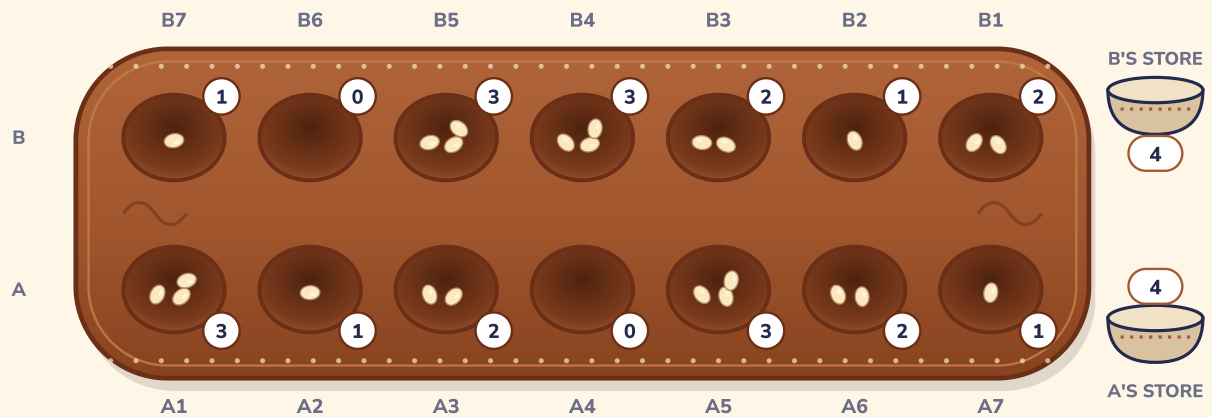
- Sow.** Drop one seed in each pit, anticlockwise: 1 in A3, 2 in A4, 3 in A5. The last seed falls in **A5**. **A3 and A5 now have exactly 4 seeds: pasu!** Player A takes them (8 seeds) to the store. The turn ends.



- Count the catch.** Player A's store now has **8 seeds**: that is 2 pasu. Now it is Player B's turn.



YOUR TURN



It is Player B's turn. Which pit in B's row should B pick to catch the most pasu? How many seeds will B catch?

My answer _____



Counting and maths

- ◆ **Seeing four at a glance** (subitising): good players don't count a pasu, they see it.
- ◆ **"One more makes four"**: a pit with 3 seeds is one seed away from a pasu.
- ◆ **Groups of four**: 1 pasu is 4 seeds, 2 pasu are 8, 3 pasu are 12. Children count in fours, an early step towards multiplication.
- ◆ **Comparing stores**: who has more? How many more?



Thinking questions

- ? Which pits have 3 seeds right now? Can you reach them?
- ? If you pick this pit, which pits will you drop seeds into?
- ? Can you make two pasu in one turn?
- ? After your turn, will your friend have an easy pasu? Can you stop it?



Feelings and friendship

- ◆ **When your friend catches a pasu**: clap for them. Their good move teaches you something.
- ◆ **When you lose seeds**: take a breath and say "next turn". There is always another chance.
- ◆ **Honest counting**: both players check that the pit really has four.

TEACHER AND PARENT ACTIVITY • COW PENS

Draw "cow pens" (squares) on paper. Give each child a handful of seeds. They fill pens with exactly 4 seeds each, then count: "How many pens? How many seeds altogether? How many are left over?" Try with 10, 13 and 16 seeds.



Easier and harder

AGES 4

Catch a pit that reaches 4 straight away, during sowing. First to 2 pasu wins.

AGES 5

Play as written, first to 3 pasu.

AGES 6+

Traditional twist: a pasu belongs to **the owner of the row it is in**, even if your friend made it. Now you must think about where your seeds land.

3

GAME THREE

Jump the *Empty Pit*

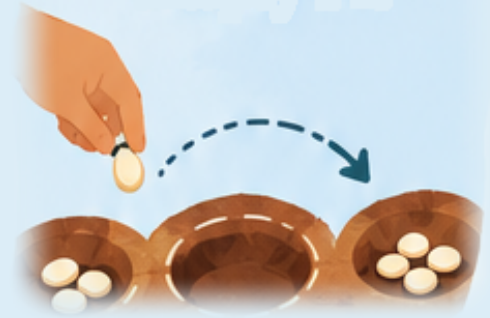
Nothing in the pit? Look what lies beyond it

Ages 5+

Players 2

Time 15 minutes

Seeds 56



9 The story

In the full game of Pallankuzhi, the most exciting moment is when the seeds run out just before an **empty pit**. The player jumps over the empty pit and takes all the seeds in the pit beyond it. This game teaches only that rule. It also teaches an important idea: an empty pit holds **zero**, and zero can matter a great deal.

What you need

- ◆ A board, or 14 cups
- ◆ 2 store bowls
- ◆ 56 seeds
- ◆ 2 players

+ Set up

Put **4 seeds in every pit**, as in Game 1.

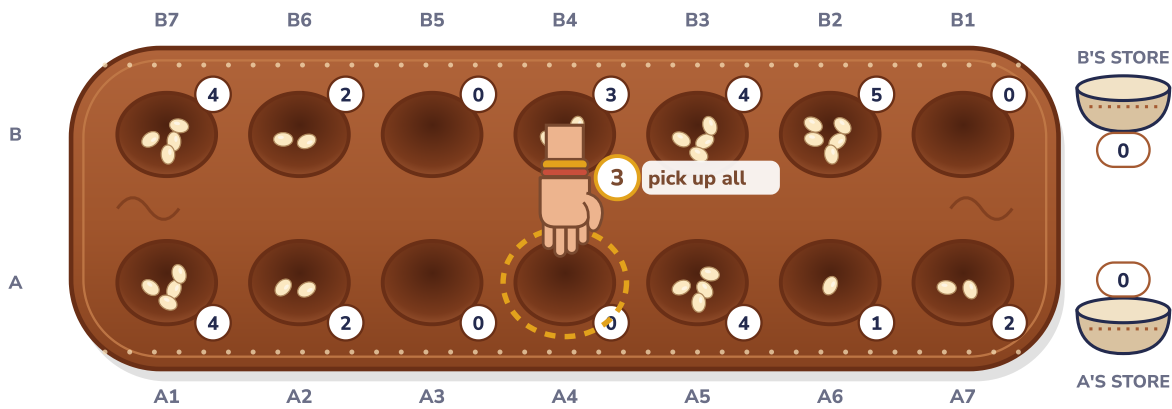
▶ How to play

- ◆ Pick up all the seeds from one pit in your row and sow them anticlockwise.
- ◆ Look at the pit **just after** your last seed. **If it is empty**, jump over it and take all the seeds in the next pit. Put them in your store.
- ◆ If it is **not empty**, you take nothing. Your turn ends either way.
- ◆ **The first player to collect 10 seeds wins.**

Here is a turn in the middle of a game. It is Player A's turn.

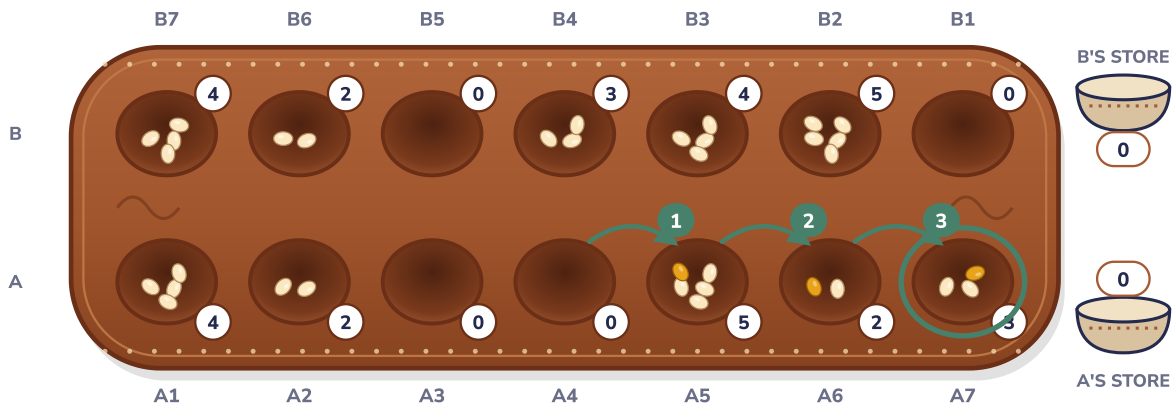
1

Pick up. Player A picks up all 3 seeds from **A4**. The pit is now empty.



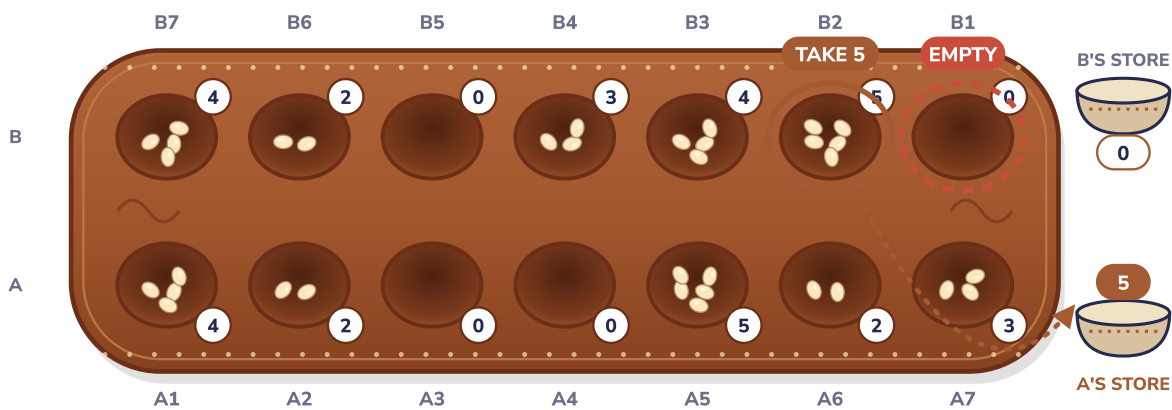
2

Sow. Drop one seed in each pit, anticlockwise: 1 in A5, 2 in A6, 3 in A7. The last seed falls in **A7**.

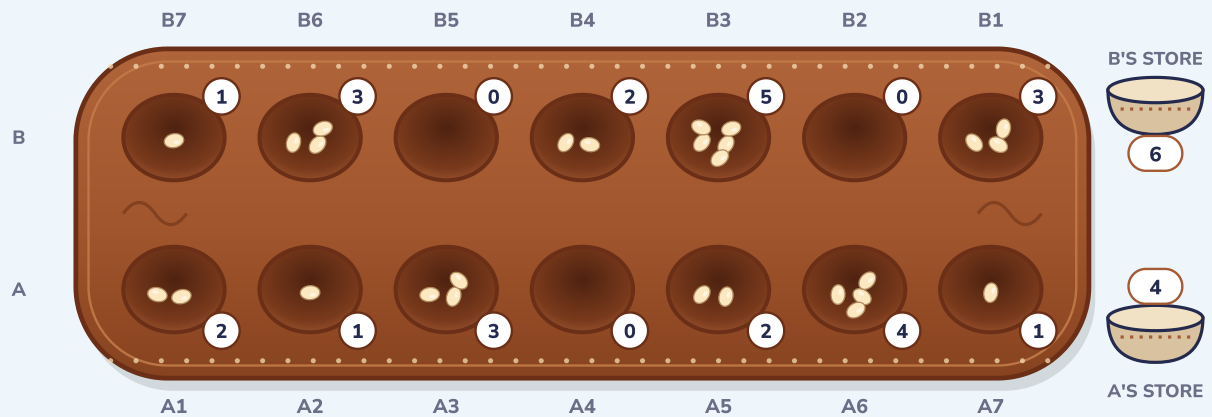


3

Jump the empty pit. The pit after the last seed, **B1**, is empty. Jump over it and take the **5** seeds in **B2**. The turn ends.



YOUR TURN



It is Player A's turn. Which pit in A's row wins the most seeds? (Remember: look at the pit just after the last seed.)

My answer _____

Counting and maths

- ◆ **Zero:** an empty pit has 0 seeds. Children learn that zero is a real number with a real place.
- ◆ **Counting on and adding:** a pit with 3 seeds, starting at A4, ends at A7, so the pit to check is B1.
- ◆ **Adding up to 10:** "I have 6 in my store. How many more do I need?"
- ◆ **Comparing choices:** this pit would win 2, that pit would win 5. Which is more?

Thinking questions

? Where are the empty pits on the board right now?

? Which of your pits makes your last seed stop just before an empty pit?

? Is it better to win a few seeds now, or to keep a big pit for later?

? Which empty pit could your friend use next turn?

Feelings and friendship

- ◆ **Think before you touch:** plan your move with your eyes first.
- ◆ **Fair play:** once you lift the seeds, the move is made.
- ◆ **Talk it through:** after the game, each player shows their best move.

TEACHER AND PARENT ACTIVITY · ZERO HUNT

Put 10 cups in a line with 0 to 5 seeds in each, including some empty ones. Ask: "Point to every cup with zero. What is in the cup after each empty one? Which empty cup is the best one to land before?" Then let children set up a line for each other.



Easier and harder

AGES 5

Start with 3 seeds per pit. Let the child try a move, check, and take it back once per game.

AGES 6

Play as written, first to 10.

AGES 6+

Add the pasu rule from Game 2. You are now very close to the full game.

4

GAME FOUR

Pallankuzhi: *the Full Game*

The game grandmothers play

Ages 6+ and grown-ups

Players 2

Time 20–40 minutes

Seeds 70



9 The story

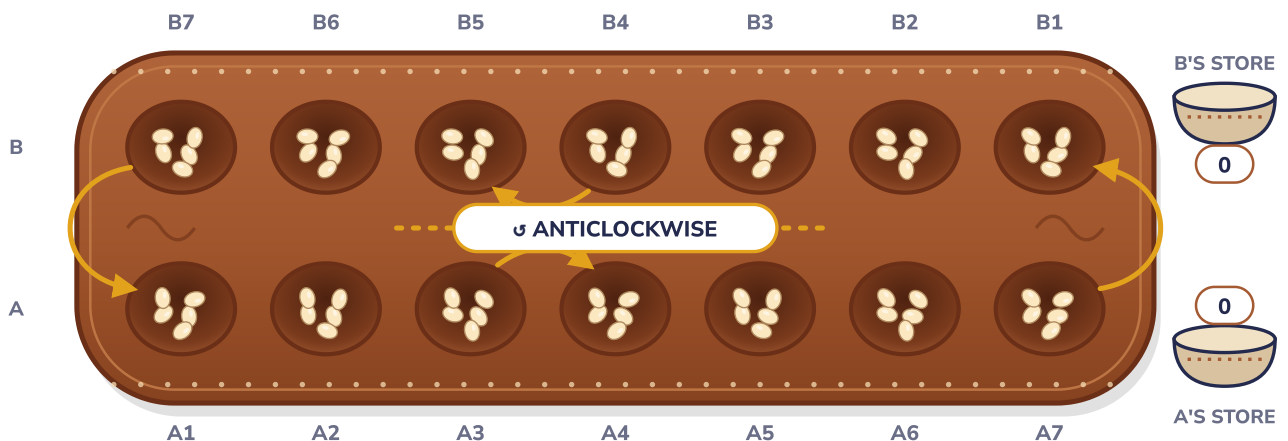
This is the game played on carved wooden boards on thinnais and verandas across Tamil Nadu. A single turn can travel round the board again and again, and players hold their breath to see where the seeds will stop. It is played in **rounds**: as a player loses seeds, they can fill fewer pits, until one player has too few seeds to play. It takes a few minutes to learn and a lifetime to master.

What you need

- ◆ A board, or 14 cups
- ◆ 70 seeds
- ◆ 2 store bowls
- ◆ A few small leaves or flowers to mark closed pits

+ Set up

Put **5 seeds in every pit**. Decide who goes first.



▶ The rules

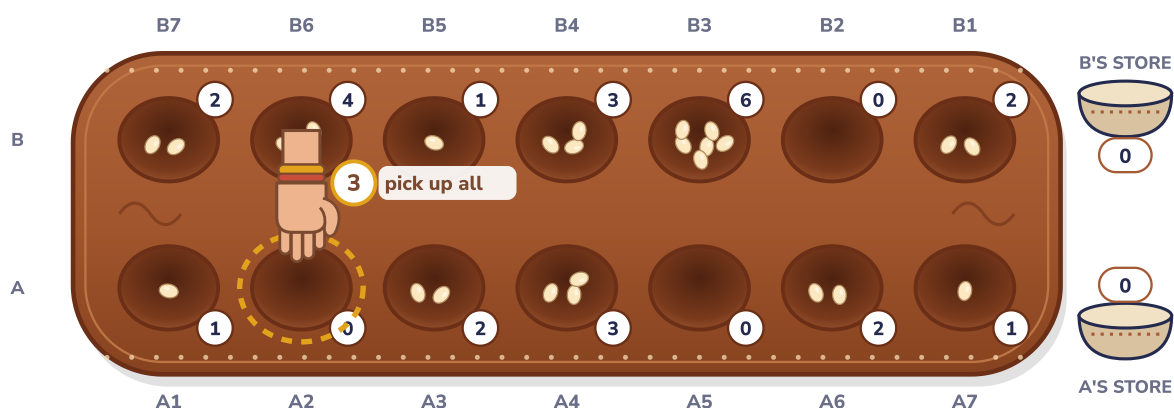
- 1 **Pick and sow.** Pick up all the seeds from any pit in your row. Sow them anticlockwise, one in each pit.

- 2 **Keep going.** When your hand is empty, look at the next pit. If it has seeds, pick them all up and keep sowing.
- 3 **Jump the empty pit.** If the next pit is empty, jump over it and take all the seeds in the pit beyond. Your turn ends. (If that pit is empty too, you take nothing.)
- 4 **Pasu.** Whenever a pit reaches exactly 4 seeds while you are sowing, it is a pasu. It goes to the store of **the player whose row it is in**.
- 5 **End of a round.** If it is your turn and your row is empty, the round ends. Your friend takes the seeds left in their own row.
- 6 **Next round.** Each player refills their own row from their store, 5 seeds per pit, starting from the left. Pits you cannot fill are **closed** for this round: put a leaf in them and skip them when sowing.
- 7 **The winner.** The game ends when a player cannot fill even one pit. The other player wins.

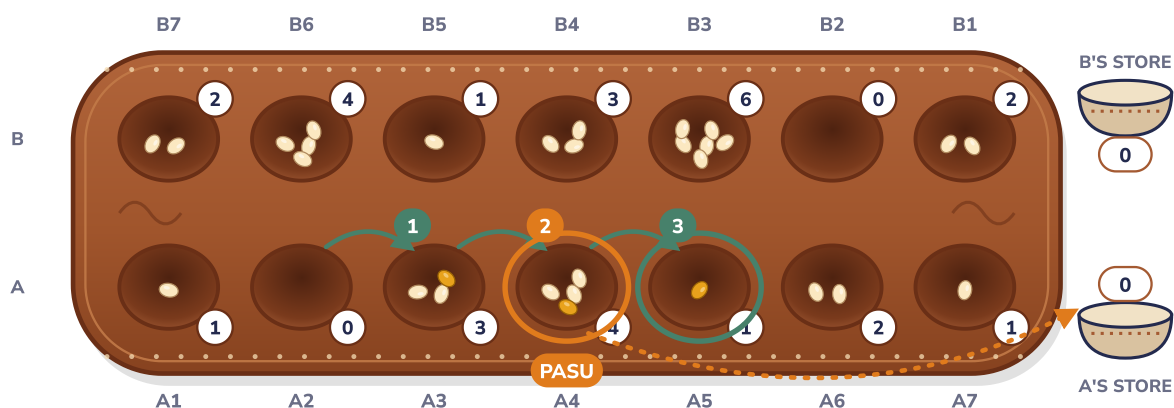
▶ One turn, step by step

Here is one exciting turn in the middle of a round. It is Player A's turn.

- 1 **Pick up.** Player A picks up all 3 seeds from **A2**. The pit is now empty.

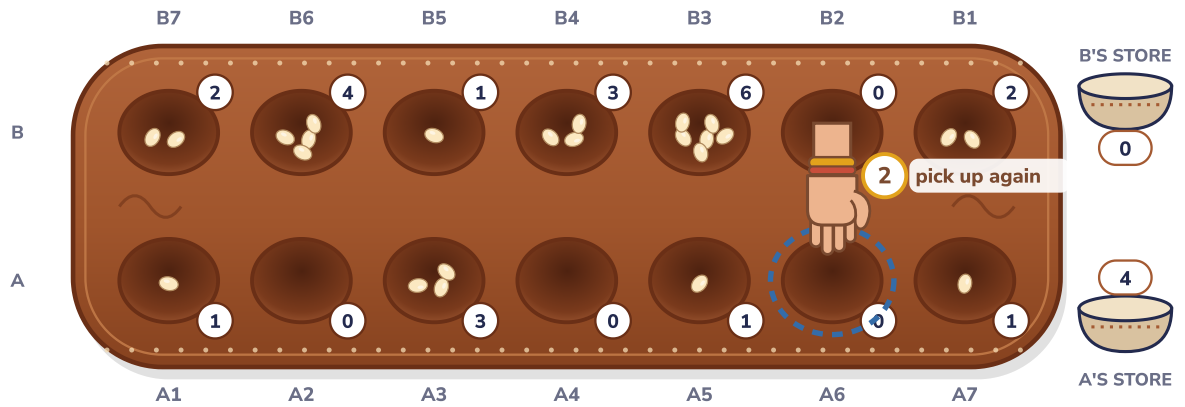


- 2 **Sow.** Drop one seed in each pit, anticlockwise: 1 in A3, 2 in A4, 3 in A5. The last seed falls in **A5**. **A4 now has exactly 4 seeds: pasu!** A4 is in A's row, so it goes to Player A's store.



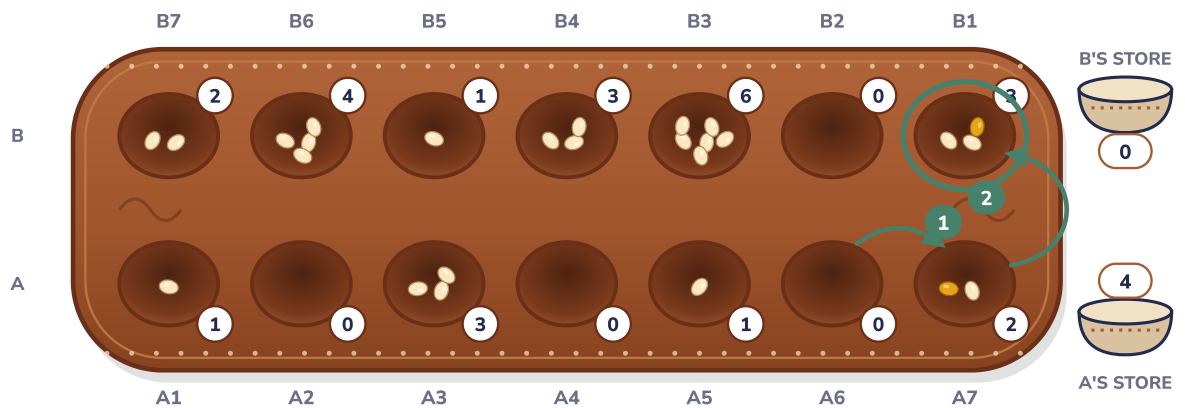
3

Keep going. The next pit, **A6**, has 2 seeds. Pick them all up and keep sowing.



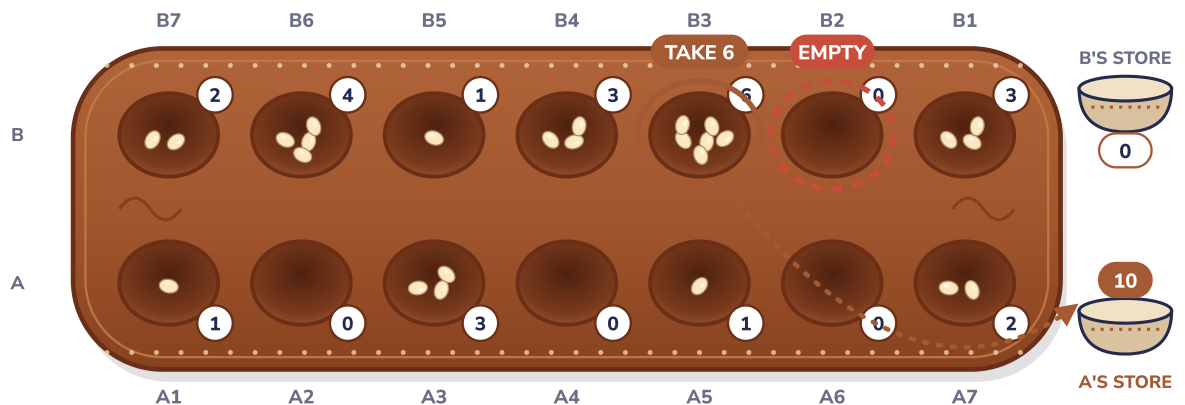
4

Sow. Drop one seed in each pit, anticlockwise: 1 in A7, 2 in B1. The last seed falls in **B1**.



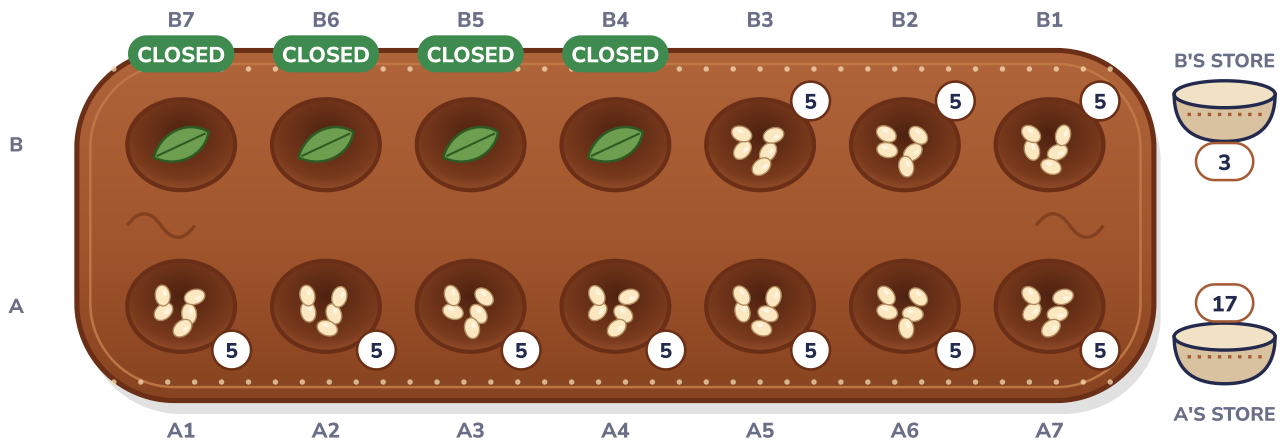
5

Jump the empty pit. The pit after the last seed, **B2**, is empty. Jump over it and take the **6** seeds in **B3**. The turn ends.

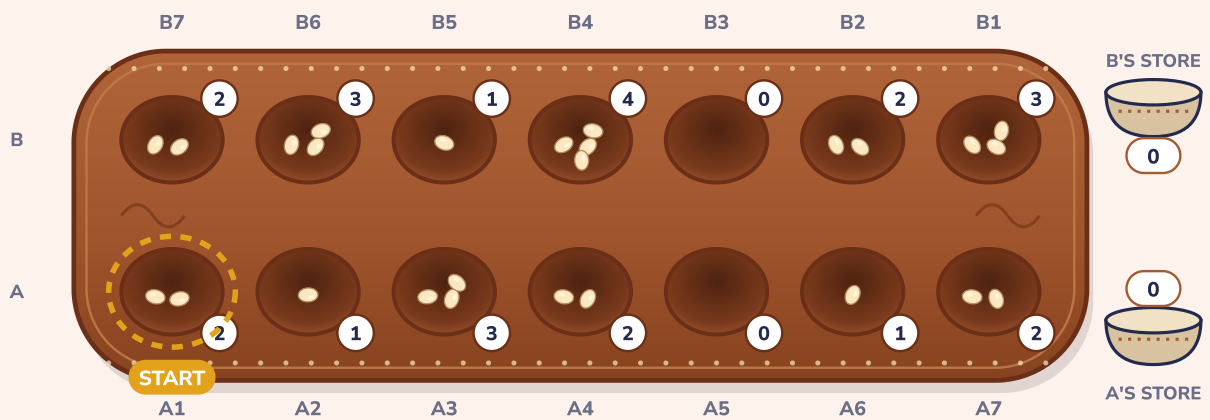


A new round with closed pits

At the end of round one, Player A has 52 seeds and Player B has 18. Player A fills all seven pits with 5 seeds (35) and keeps 17 in the store. Player B can fill only **3 pits** (15 seeds) and keeps 3. B's other four pits are closed with a leaf. Nobody sows into a closed pit.



YOUR TURN



Full game. Player A picks up the seeds in A1. Follow the seeds with your finger, pit by pit. Is there a pasu? How many seeds does A take at the end of the turn?

My answer _____



Counting and maths

- ◆ **Bigger numbers:** 70 seeds, stores of 30 or 40, totals across rounds.
- ◆ **Grouping in fives:** "I have 23 seeds. How many pits can I fill with 5 each? How many are left?" This is early division.
- ◆ **Long chains of counting** as one turn travels round the board many times.
- ◆ **Keeping score:** write each round's totals and find the difference.



Strategy and thinking



Count before you pick: where will this pit's seeds end, and what is after that?



Can you make a pasu land in *your* row and not your friend's?



Which of your pits would give your friend a big capture next turn?



Is it worth keeping one big pit for a long turn later?

Feelings and friendship

- ◆ **Winning kindly** and **losing calmly**: shake hands and say “good game”.
- ◆ **Patience**: a long turn can take a minute. Watch and count along with your friend.
- ◆ **Teaching others**: an older child teaches Game 1 to a younger one.
- ◆ **Across generations**: invite a grandparent to play and to share how they played as a child.

TEACHER AND PARENT ACTIVITY • GRANDPARENTS’ GAMES AFTERNOON

Invite grandparents to class, or ask children to play at home with an older relative. Children ask three questions: “Where did you play Pallankuzhi? What did you use for seeds? What rules did your family have?” Back in class, make a wall chart of all the different rules the families shared.

Easier and harder

AGES 6

Play one round only, with 4 seeds per pit. The player with more seeds at the end of the round wins.

AGES 7–8

Play as written, for up to three rounds.

OLDER CHILDREN AND GROWN-UPS

Play the full game to the end, and try family variations: 6 seeds per pit, or a pasu that goes to the player who made it.

Rules *at a glance*

1

Sowing Seeds

4 seeds per pit. Pick up a pit in your row, sow anticlockwise, one per pit. No winning. Count aloud.

2

Catch the Pasu

2 seeds per pit. Sow once. Any pit that you make exactly 4 is a pasu: take it. First to 3 pasu wins.

3

Jump the Empty Pit

4 seeds per pit. Sow once. If the next pit is empty, take the seeds in the pit after it. First to 10 wins.

4

Pallankuzhi: the Full Game

5 seeds per pit. Keep picking up the next pit and sowing. Next pit empty: take the pit beyond it, turn ends. Pasu goes to the row's owner. Play rounds, close pits you can't fill.

Your Turn *answers*

Game 1. A3 has 4 seeds. Sowing A4, A5, A6 and A7, the last seed falls in **A7**.

Game 2. Pick **B3**. The seeds make B4 and B5 reach 4, so B catches **2 pasu (8 seeds)**. Other pits: B1 catches none; B2 catches none; B4 catches 1; B5 catches 1; B7 catches 1.

Game 3. Pick **A7**: the last seed stops before the empty pit B2, so A takes the **5 seeds** in B3. Other pits: A1 wins 2; A2 wins 2; A3 wins 0; A5 wins 0; A6 wins 0.

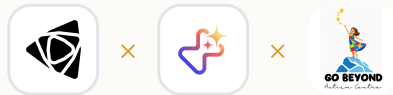
Game 4. Pick up 2 from A1 → sow to A3 (pasu in A3 for A) → pick up 2 from A4 → sow to A6 → pick up 2 from A7 → sow to B2 (pasu in B1 for B) → B3 is empty, take 4 from B4. Pasu: A3 goes to A and B1 goes to B. A takes **4 seeds** by jumping the empty pit; A's store ends with **8**, B's with **4**.



Play. Count. *Think. Share.*

Traditional games carry centuries of wisdom about how children learn: with their hands, with each other, and with joy. Sarvam Ekam brings these games back into kindergarten classrooms and homes, alongside teacher training and kindergarten audits rooted in Waldorf, Montessori and Reggio Emilia.

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All is one, and one is all.