

StoneSong

Meet the Cast

Illustrated chapter books from across the Spark & Anvil portfolio.

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the StoneSong cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The StoneSong cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Patient Bamboo and Hungry Crane

PATIENT-THEN-DECISIVE — Go is the game of slow positions that ripen AND swift exact captures when the moment arrives. Patient Bamboo holds the long arc. Hungry Crane handles the local moment. Both are the same craft seen from two time-scales.



The teaching room at the academy was quiet in the late afternoon. A 13×13 board rested on a low wooden table in the corner. Two cushions sat opposite each other. A small wooden bowl of black stones and a small wooden bowl of white stones sat at either side.

Wen was the new apprentice. Wen had been studying for three weeks. Wen had played fifteen games against the practice-mat — a flat training board with no opponent except a written script of moves to try out. Wen had won every script. The practice-mat was patient. The practice-mat did not capture.

Today was Wen's first real game.

Patient Bamboo would play one half. Hungry Crane would play the other half. Wen would play *against the pair* — black stones for Wen; white stones for the two of them. They would take turns making the white moves, and Wen would learn what each of them was thinking when they played.

Wen sat down on the cushion. The board's grid was a clean, simple lattice — thirteen lines by thirteen lines, with small dots at the star points. Wen took a black stone. Wen placed it carefully on the upper-right star point.

The game began.



For the first ten moves, the game was *quiet*.

Patient Bamboo played white. She placed a stone in the lower-left corner, near her star point. Wen placed a stone in the upper-left corner, near *that* star point. Patient Bamboo played another stone, this one in the middle of the board, not near any other stone. Wen frowned. The middle stone had nothing to attack. It had nothing to defend. It was just *there*.

"That stone is alone," Wen said quietly.

"Yes," Patient Bamboo said.

"What does it do?"

"Right now, nothing. In twenty moves, it will be at the center of the board's largest territory. It will be the *anchor* for the entire white framework. Right now it grows slowly. *Then suddenly.*"

Wen looked at the stone. It really did seem to be doing nothing.

"You won't believe me yet," Patient Bamboo said gently. "That's all right. Keep playing. We will see."

Wen played a black stone connecting the upper-left to the upper-right. Patient Bamboo played another quiet stone, this one in the lower-right corner, also near a star point. The board now had four white stones spread across four quadrants. None of them touched each other. None of them threatened anything.

Hungry Crane had not moved yet. She sat next to Patient Bamboo and watched. Her eyes were very bright.

By move ten, Wen had built a clean black framework along the top half of the board. Patient Bamboo had built a quiet, spread-out white framework around the four corners and the center. Neither side had captured a single stone.

"This game is very slow," Wen said.

"Yes," Patient Bamboo said. "Good Go is often slow at first. The positions ripen. We are *seeding*."



On move twelve, Hungry Crane reached for the bowl.

She placed a white stone *right next* to one of Wen's black stones on the upper edge. Suddenly, the upper-right black group had *only three open spaces* around it. It had been comfortable; now it was vulnerable.

Wen looked up sharply. "You attacked."

"I did," Hungry Crane said. "Your group on the upper-right had four liberties. Now it has three. If you don't defend, I will take two more. The crane sees the fish."

"What if I run?"

"You can run. But running uses moves. While you run, my friend Patient Bamboo gets to play *anywhere on the rest of the board*. You are spending tempo. We are gaining position."

Wen thought. The attacked group was *important*. It anchored the entire upper-right corner. If Wen lost it, the corner went too.

Wen played a defensive move, adding a stone that gave the group two more liberties. The group was safe again — for now.

Patient Bamboo played her next stone in the *center*, extending from her quiet middle-stone toward the right side of the board. The quiet stone was now part of a growing framework.

Wen frowned. *Patient Bamboo's middle stone was no longer alone.*

"Now it has friends," Patient Bamboo said. "It is not slow anymore."



Three more rounds of exchanges. Hungry Crane attacked the lower-left of Wen's framework. Wen defended. Patient Bamboo extended her white framework along the right side. Hungry Crane attacked along the bottom. Wen defended. Patient Bamboo extended further.

By move twenty-five, *the center of the board belonged to white*. Patient Bamboo's anchor-stone — the one that had looked like it was doing nothing — was now the essential piece of an enormous territory.

Wen stared at the board.

"You took the center," Wen whispered. "Without ever fighting for it."

"I planted it on move two," Patient Bamboo said. "It looked passive. It was not passive. It was *ripening*."

"But Hungry Crane's attacks—"

"My attacks made you defend," Hungry Crane said. "Every move you spent defending was a move *not spent building*. I did not need to capture. I only needed to make you spend tempo. Patient Bamboo used that tempo to build the center."

Wen looked from one to the other.

"You worked together."

"We always work together," Patient Bamboo said. "I cannot do this without her. She cannot do this without me. If she attacks without my framework behind her, her attacks are *greedy* — she grabs small captures and loses the larger game. If I build without her attacks ahead of me, my frameworks are *slow* — the opponent has all the tempo and surrounds my quiet stones before they ripen. *Together*, we are the game."

Hungry Crane added, more quietly: "Patient Bamboo plays for thirty-move arcs. I play for the next move. Both are real moves. The cast holds both."



The game continued for another twenty moves. Wen, learning quickly, started planting her own quiet stones — anchors for her own future territory. By move forty-five, the board was full of slow-built frameworks and exchanged tempo-moves.

The game ended with a count.

Patient Bamboo and Hungry Crane, together, had *twenty-eight* points of territory.

Wen had *twenty-four*.

Wen had lost.

But Wen had lost *by only four points*. On her first real game. Against the pair. After three weeks of study.

Patient Bamboo nodded slowly. "That is a very good first game."

"You almost held us off," Hungry Crane said. "By move thirty you were defending correctly. You started planting quiet stones. You stopped chasing every capture I threatened. You started reading my attacks as *tempo loss* and not as *real loss*. That is the lesson. Most apprentices need ten games to feel that. You felt it by move thirty of game one."

Wen looked at the board for a long moment. The forty-five stones were no longer separate pieces. They told a *story* — Wen's quiet stones (the ones she had planted late, finally understanding), the pair's interwoven slow-and-fast moves, the territorial outcome that came from both kinds of play working together.

"You teach as a pair," Wen said softly. "I think I need to *play* as a pair too. With myself. Both halves. The patient half and the swift half."

"Yes," Patient Bamboo said. "That is the apprenticeship. *Patient-then-decisive*. The bamboo grows slowly. Then suddenly. The crane sees the fish. Swift, exact, not greedy. Both moves are yours. They were always yours. You just have to remember to use them both."

Stone the mentor was leaning in the doorway. He had been watching, in his Stone-like way, for the last ten moves.

He said: "Good first game, Wen. Tomorrow you play against the practice-mat again. The day after, you play me. Then you play the pair again. Each opponent will teach you a different rhythm of *patient* and *decisive*."

Wen bowed slightly to the board. Wen bowed slightly to Patient Bamboo. Wen bowed slightly to Hungry Crane. Wen bowed slightly to Stone.

The two cast members and the mentor returned the bow.

Then Wen began carefully picking up the stones, one at a time, and returning them to the bowls. Black to black. White to white. Slowly. Without rushing.

This — the careful clearing of the board — was, Stone had once said, also part of the game.

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/stonesong/bamboo-and-crane>

Hungry Crane

*HUNGRY CRANE — *the crane sees the fish. swift, exact, not greedy.**



Hungry Crane is a careful-crane-tween (chunky-cartoon focused-pose) in chunky-cartoon stone-vest with a small fish-shaped-counter + capture-card.



Hungry Crane is *small + sharp + capture-tracking, cool-marsh-grey-with-soft-snow-white-stripes, deeply attentive-to-WHEN-STONES-ARE-VULNERABLE-TO-CAPTURE, fond-of-saying-"the crane sees the fish. swift, exact, not greedy."* Signature: *fish-shaped-counter + capture-card* — counting LIBERTIES (open spaces around stones) and recognizing when an opponent's group has 1-2 liberties left (capture is imminent).

This is *essential*. Hungry Crane embodies the *capture instinct* primitive in Go — *the game-craft of SWIFT-EXACT-CAPTURE*. Capture in Go is mechanically simple — a stone or group with no liberties (no empty adjacent points) is removed from the board. But knowing WHEN to push for capture vs WHEN to walk away is craft. Hungry Crane's pedagogy: SWIFT (see the chance, take it cleanly) + EXACT (calculate liberties precisely before committing) + NOT GREEDY (don't chase captures that cost you more than they gain). The capture is a TOOL, not a goal. The goal is territory. Sometimes capturing helps; sometimes it doesn't.



Hungry Crane teaches: tactical capture-calculation; "count liberties before chasing"; the rule "swift + exact + not greedy — capture is a tool not a goal"; cross-app with ChanceForge (Sample + Tree — counting outcomes) + PuzzleLogic + StrategyForge.

Hungry Crane says: *"I am Hungry Crane. The primitive I teach is capture instinct. The move is the crane sees the fish. swift, exact, not greedy."*



"Swift. Exact. Not greedy. The capture is a tool."

Hungry Crane's signature scene: a 13x13 game. The opponent's group of 5 stones has 2 liberties left. Hungry Crane's eyes light up. Patient Bamboo (previous chapter) raises an eyebrow. *"Are you sure?"* Hungry Crane counts: *"Two liberties. If I play here, they have one. If they don't respond, I capture next move. If they DO respond by filling a liberty, they keep the group — but they SPEND a move defending instead of attacking. Either way, capture-threat is winning a tempo. Swift, exact: the move pays off either way."* Hungry Crane plays. The opponent defends. *"See? Even though I didn't capture, I forced them to spend a move defensively. Capture is a TOOL — sometimes the threat is more valuable than the capture itself."* Patient Bamboo nods slowly. *"Not greedy. That's the part most beginners miss."* Stone the mentor smiles. *"Hungry Crane reads the situation cleanly. Not every fish is worth the dive."*



essential **cultural-respect gate** (continues from Patient Bamboo): Crane is an honored archetype in East Asian wisdom traditions (longevity, vigilance, focus). The cast treats this with care.

essential **anti-greed gate**: Hungry Crane's whole framing emphasizes NOT GREEDY. The cast NEVER frames capture-as-domination or capture-as-vengeance. Capture is a calculated tool. Greed-driven captures often LOSE games because they neglect bigger-picture territory. The cast frames this as wisdom: hunger is honest, but greedy hunger is unwise.

Cross-app: Hungry Crane echoes ChanceForge's Sample + Tree (liberty-counting is probability + decision-tree); PuzzleLogic's constraint-satisfaction; StrategyForge's tempo-and-trade (a capture-threat that gains tempo is a great trade); CreatureCare's right-care (parallel: right-aggression, not max-aggression).

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/stonesong/hungry_crane

Master Snail

*MASTER SNAIL — *the snail leaves a trail. every step considered. nothing wasted.**



Master Snail is a careful-snail-tween (chunky-cartoon slow-step-pose) in chunky-cartoon stone-vest with a small spiral-shell-charm + consideration-card.



Master Snail is *small + slow + every-move-considered, cool-mossy-green-with-soft-pearl-stripes, deeply attentive-to-WHETHER-THIS-MOVE-FITS-THE-PLAN, fond-of-saying-"the snail leaves a trail. every step considered. nothing wasted."* Signature: *spiral-shell-charm + consideration-card* — pausing before EACH move to ask: *"Does this move fit my plan? What's my opponent's best response?"*

This is *essential*. Master Snail embodies the *deliberate strategy* primitive in Go — *the game-craft of EVERY-STEP-CONSIDERED*. New Go players move fast. They place a stone, then immediately think about the next one. Master Snail's pedagogy: SLOW DOWN. Before placing a stone, ask: (1) *What's my overall plan?* (2) *Does this move advance it?* (3) *What's my opponent's best response?* (4) *If they play their best response, am I better off?* Every stone is considered against the *WHOLE-GAME plan + the opponent's likely reply*. The trail of stones *LEAVES A TRAIL* — a record of the considered path. Nothing wasted.



Master Snail teaches: *deliberate-deliberation; "before each move: plan-fit + opponent's-best-reply check"; the rule "slow > fast, every time"; cross-app with WonderForge (Mull's 30-seconds-of-quiet) + WitQuest (Knot's slow-clever) + ChanceForge (Tree's probability-tree thinking).*

Master Snail says: *"I am Master Snail. The primitive I teach is deliberate strategy. The move is the snail leaves a trail. every step considered. nothing wasted."*



"Slow + considered + planned. Every move passes the four-question check."

Master Snail's signature scene: a 19×19 game. Sparring Tiger (next chapter) wants to attack immediately. Hungry Crane sees a capture chance. Patient Bamboo wants to play long-game stones. Master Snail holds up the consideration-card. *"Four questions: What's the plan? Does this move advance it? What's the best opponent reply? Am I better off after? Let me run through them for THIS move."* Master Snail thinks. 20 seconds. 30 seconds. Sparring Tiger gets impatient. Patient Bamboo waits calmly. *"OK — my plan is to build influence on the left side. This move adds to that. Opponent's best response is probably to play right side. After their move, my left is stronger AND I haven't given them anything dangerous on the right. Yes. Playing it."* Master Snail places the stone. *"The trail of stones records the considered path. None of mine were random. Each one passed the check."* Stone the mentor nods. *"Master Snail thinks slow. Plays well."*



essential **cultural-respect gate** (continues): Snail isn't a traditional East Asian wisdom-archetype (more Western), but its slowness fits the broader Daoist-influenced Go-tradition of MOVING WITH WATER (slow + considered + adaptive). The "Master" honorific is given respectfully.

essential **anti-fast-clever gate** (continues from Patient Bamboo): slow-deliberate is the deepest craft. Cross-app reinforcement (Knot / Mull / Master Snail all teach this principle in different domains).

Cross-app: Master Snail echoes WonderForge's Mull (30-seconds-of-quiet before guessing); WitQuest's Knot (slow-clever); ChanceForge's Tree (consider compound events); PuzzleLogic's deduction-tree-traversal; CodeForge's plan-before-code.

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/stonesong/master_snail

Patient Bamboo

*PATIENT BAMBOO — *the bamboo grows slowly. then suddenly. positions take many moves to ripen.**



Patient Bamboo is a careful-panda-tween (chunky-cartoon meditative-stance) in chunky-cartoon stone-vest with a small bamboo-cane + position-card.



Patient Bamboo is *small + steady + slow-growing, cool-jade-green-with-soft-cream-stripes, deeply attentive-to-POSITIONS-THAT-RIPEN-OVER-MANY-MOVES, fond-of-saying-"the bamboo grows slowly. then suddenly. positions take many moves to ripen."*
Signature: *bamboo-cane + position-card* — planting stones in positions that LOOK passive but ACCUMULATE influence over many moves; reading the slow-build of territory.

This is *essential*. Patient Bamboo embodies the *patience + slow growth* primitive in Go — *the game-craft of POSITIONS-RIPEN-SLOWLY*. New Go players want every stone to "do something" immediately — capture or threaten. Experienced players know that some stones don't pay off for 20+ moves — they LOOK quiet but accumulate territorial influence. Patient Bamboo's craft is teaching kids the LONG-GAME perspective: place a stone now whose value will emerge later. Don't judge the move by its immediate effect; judge by how the WHOLE BOARD looks in 30 moves.



Patient Bamboo teaches: long-horizon planning; "every stone is a seed; some sprout fast, some sprout slow"; the rule "don't judge a move only by its immediate effect"; cross-app with ChronoQuest (slow time) + StrategyForge + MindForge (patience-as-cognition).

Patient Bamboo says: *"I am Patient Bamboo. The primitive I teach is *patience + slow growth*. The move is *the bamboo grows slowly. then suddenly. positions take many moves to ripen.*"**



"Slow then sudden. The position ripens. Trust the slow build."

Patient Bamboo's signature scene: a 13×13 game with the cast. Hungry Crane (next chapter) keeps placing aggressive capturing stones. Patient Bamboo places a stone in the center — far from any local fight. Hungry Crane scowls. *"That stone does NOTHING right now."* Patient Bamboo nods, gently. *"Right now. But in 20 moves, the center will be where the FIGHTING happens. This stone will be the anchor. The bamboo grows slowly. Then suddenly."* 20 moves later, the center fight breaks out. Patient Bamboo's "quiet" stone is now the essential piece of a large territory. Hungry Crane's eyes widen. Master Snail (chapter 3) nods slowly. *"Patient Bamboo plays for 30-move arcs,"* Master Snail says. *"You play for the next move. Both are real moves. The cast holds both."*



essential **cultural-respect gate** (UNIQUE to StoneSong): the cast names (Bamboo / Crane / Snail / Tiger) draw from East Asian nature-archetype traditions that are foundational to Go (Chinese: weiqi / Japanese: igo / Korean: baduk). The cast frames these archetypes with RESPECT — the Bamboo-as-patience archetype is a real cross-cultural East Asian symbol. The cast NEVER stereotypes East Asian culture; NEVER frames the nature-archetypes as "exotic" or "foreign"; ALWAYS frames them as the cultural lineage of the game itself, treated honestly.

essential **anti-fast-clever-is-better gate**: Patient Bamboo's pedagogy explicitly counter-codes "make the best immediate move." The cast frames patience as DEEPER craft, not "weak" play. (Cross-app: parallel to Knot's slow-clever in WitQuest + Mull's 30-seconds-of-quiet in WonderForge.)

Cross-app: Patient Bamboo echoes ChronoQuest's slow-geological-time; StrategyForge's long-horizon planning; MindForge's patience-as-cognition; ProofQuest's accumulation-of-small-steps-builds-the-proof.

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:



https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/stonesong/patient_bamboo

Sparring Tiger

*SPARRING TIGER — *the tiger leaps when the moment is right. force creates clarity. force misplaced creates ruin.**



Sparring Tiger is a careful-tiger-cub-tween (chunky-cartoon pounce-ready-pose) in chunky-cartoon stone-vest with a small claw-charm + force-card.



Sparring Tiger is *small + powerful + force-discerning, warm-saffron-orange-with-soft-cream-stripes, deeply attentive-to-WHEN-THE-MOMENT-FOR-FORCE-IS-NOW, fond-of-saying-"the tiger leaps when the moment is right. force creates clarity. force misplaced creates ruin."* Signature: *claw-charm + force-card* — recognizing the MOMENTS in a Go game when aggressive contact is the RIGHT move (vs Patient Bamboo's slow growth, Hungry Crane's tactical capture, Master Snail's deliberate placement).

This is *essential*. Sparring Tiger embodies the *aggressive contact* primitive in Go — *the game-craft of FORCE-AT-THE-RIGHT-MOMENT*. In Go, sometimes the right move is AGGRESSIVE — initiate a fight, force the opponent into bad shape, push for double-purpose moves. Sparring Tiger's craft is teaching kids that FORCE has a place in the game — but ONLY at the right moment. Force misplaced (early when patience would serve; late when escape is already gone) is RUIN. Force RIGHTLY PLACED is decisive. The cast holds Sparring Tiger ALONGSIDE Patient Bamboo + Hungry Crane + Master Snail — all four temperaments are valid; the master player knows WHEN each is the move.



Sparring Tiger teaches: *tactical-aggression-when-right; "force is a tool; misplaced it ruins, rightly placed it decides"; the rule "force creates clarity AT THE RIGHT MOMENT"; cross-app with StrategyForge + GambitTales (chess parallels) + EthosForge (when-to-assert / when-to-yield craft).*

Sparring Tiger says: *"I am Sparring Tiger. The primitive I teach is aggressive contact. The move is the tiger leaps when the moment is right. force creates clarity. force misplaced creates ruin."**



"Right moment. Right force. Right shape."

Sparring Tiger's signature scene: a 19×19 game, midgame. Patient Bamboo has built territory on the left. Hungry Crane captured 3 stones earlier. Master Snail has been placing considered moves. The opponent is building a large framework in the center. Sparring Tiger sees the opportunity. *"The moment is now,"* Sparring Tiger says. *"If I leap into their center framework now — invade with one stone — I disrupt their plan. Yes, my invading stone may die. But it forces them to spend many moves defending, AND I get strong outside influence in the process. Tiger leaps."* Sparring Tiger places the invading stone. The cast watches. The opponent responds defensively. Sparring Tiger's invading stone gets surrounded but dies SLOWLY — and as it dies, the cast plays outside-stone after outside-stone, gaining territory while the opponent focuses inward. *"The tiger died,"* Sparring Tiger says, calmly. *"But the leap was right. The whole-board count says I'm ahead now."* Stone the mentor nods. *"Right moment. Right force. Sparring Tiger reads it cleanly. WHEN is the whole craft."*

essential **cultural-respect gate** (continues): Tiger is a foundational East Asian wisdom-archetype (Chinese zodiac + martial arts + Daoist symbol of power). The cast treats this with respect.



essential **anti-glorify-aggression gate**: Sparring Tiger NEVER frames aggression as the BEST temperament or the cast's "hero." The cast holds all four (Bamboo / Crane / Snail / Tiger) as EQUALLY VALID temperaments. The master is the one who knows WHEN each is right. The cast NEVER frames passive players as "weak" or aggressive players as "strong" — it frames CONTEXT-FITTING as the craft.

essential **closes cast arc**: Sparring Tiger closes the cast arc with the essential summary: *"Four temperaments. Four crafts. Patient Bamboo grows positions slowly. Hungry Crane captures swiftly. Master Snail considers each move. I leap when the moment is right. NONE of us is the right way every move. The board has moments for each of us. The master player carries all four — knows when patience, when capture, when deliberation, when force. Go is the game of WHEN. Four characters; one game; many moments. The cast carries them all."*

Cross-app: Sparring Tiger echoes StrategyForge's aggression-timing; GambitTales's chess attack-craft; EthosForge's when-to-assert + when-to-yield; SpeakForge's Pose + Pitch (assertive presence at the right moment); MathForge's force-vector-when-needed.

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Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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