



SeedSong

Big Ideas on the Board

A SPARK & ANVIL STRATEGY BOOK

SeedSong – Big Ideas on the Board

A Spark & Anvil companion book – free to download and share.

Ages 9-14. Game: mancala (sowing games).

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This volume teaches strategy through the app's cast – 6 big ideas, one per chapter.

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*Mancala is a game of counting and planning – every move is a small piece of arithmetic. The other SeedSong books teach the rules; this one teaches how to **play well**, through the cast you know. One big idea per chapter. Nana, the sowing elder, tells it.*

Chapter 1 – Land in Your Store

Store-Keeper Kito guards the **store** – the big pit at your end where the seeds you bank count toward winning. And there is one golden rule Kito loves best: if the **last seed** you drop lands in your own store, you **go again** – a free extra turn.

"A move that ends in my store," said Store-Keeper Kito, "is a move I get to follow with another."

This is the first thing strong players look for every single turn: is there a pit I can sow whose last seed lands exactly in my store? Chaining two, three, even four extra turns in a row can bank a pile of seeds while the opponent just watches. Counting for the go-again is the beating heart of mancala.

Say it out loud: *Land the last seed in my store – and go again.*

Your turn: The "Go Again" workbook pages show your row of pits. Find the pit whose last seed lands exactly in your store.

Spotting go-again moves is the first skill, and it is pure counting. The more you look, the more free turns you find.

Chapter 2 – Count Before You Sow

Subitize Sisi does the arithmetic **before** touching a pit. Count Kesi can read how many seeds a pit holds at a glance. Together they teach the habit that separates strong players from lucky ones: **look ahead**. Before you sow, count where the last seed will land – because that landing pit decides everything (a go-again, a capture, or nothing).

"Never sow and hope," said Subitize Sisi. "Count the pit, count the seeds, and *know* where the last one lands."

A pit with three seeds sows three pits forward. A pit with eight might loop most of the way around. Counting the landing pit turns a guess into a plan – and lets you spot a capture or a go-again two moves before it happens.

Say it out loud: *Count the seeds and the landing pit – before I sow.*

Your turn: The "Count Ahead" pages show a pit with some seeds. Where does the last one land? Is that a good place?

Counting every move is slower at first. It is the single habit that turns mancala from luck into skill.

Chapter 3 – Set Up the Capture

Capture Koro knows the rule that wins seeds: when your last seed lands in an **empty pit on your own side**, and the pit directly across from it holds enemy seeds, you **capture** both – sweeping the enemy pile into your store. (In some sowing games the capture happens when the last seed makes a pit two or three – the idea is the same: the *landing* matters.)

Pitkeeper Pemba plays the setup: **load a pit** so that, a turn or two later, its last seed lands exactly in the empty pit across from a fat enemy pile.

"I do not capture by accident," said Capture Koro. "Pemba builds the pit; I land the seed."

Say it out loud: *Empty pit on my side, seeds across – set it up, then land there.*

Your turn: The "Set the Trap" pages show an enemy pit full of seeds. Find the move that lands your last seed in the empty pit across from it.

Planning a capture two moves ahead feels clever because it is. It is the leap from single moves to real plans.

Chapter 4 – The Capture Chain

Reap Rafiki reads the board **backward**. Sometimes the opponent's pits are lined up so that a single well-counted sow triggers a whole **chain** – capturing pit after pit in one turn, sweeping a run of seeds into your store.

"Read the run from the far end back," said Reap Rafiki, "and you'll see the whole harvest before you sow a single seed."

The chain reward comes from noticing a row of enemy pits each about to become capturable, and finding the one sow that sets them all off. It is the multi-capture of mancala – a single move that changes the whole game.

Say it out loud: *Read the row backward – one sow can reap the whole run.*

Your turn: The "Harvest" pages show a row of enemy pits. Find the sow that captures the longest chain.

Multi-captures hide until you learn to read backward. Once you do, you start finding harvests everywhere.

Chapter 5 – The Must-Feed Rule

Starve-Guard Nne knows a rule that turns defence into strategy: if your opponent has **no seeds** on their side and cannot move, you **must** make a move that gives them some – you cannot simply starve them out for free. And if *you* cannot feed them, the remaining seeds may go to you.

"You cannot leave them with nothing on purpose," said Starve-Guard Nne, "so plan for the day their side runs dry."

Strong players use this both ways: they avoid being forced to hand the opponent a big feeding move at a bad moment, and they steer the game so that when a side empties out, the leftover seeds fall to *them*. It is a quiet, deep piece of endgame planning.

Say it out loud: *You must feed an empty side – plan for who gets the leftovers.*

Your turn: The "Feed" pages show a side about to empty. Find the move that keeps the leftover seeds on your side.

The must-feed rule surprises new players. Learning to plan around it is a real endgame skill.

Chapter 6 – Count Out the Endgame

Endgame Enzi plays the finish, when only a few seeds remain. Now it is pure counting: force the last seeds into your store, watch the parity (who runs out of moves first), and bank the win. Seedling Sanaa set it all up with a good opening; Enzi closes it.

"The last handful of seeds decides a close game," said Endgame Enzi.

"Count them out – do not leave a single one for them."

The player who counts the endgame carefully – grabbing the last go-agains, sweeping the final captures, and making sure the leftover seeds fall to their side – turns a close game into a win.

Say it out loud: *Count the last seeds into my store – leave none behind.*

Everything in this book meets here: chase go-agains (Chapter 1), count every sow (Chapter 2), set up captures (Chapter 3), read the chains (Chapter 4), plan around the feed rule (Chapter 5) – and count the last seeds home.

Your turn: The "Endgame" pages show a near-empty board. Find the counting sequence that banks the most seeds.

Counting a whole endgame out is patient, careful work. Getting it exactly right is what getting good at mancala feels like.

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