

OWARE

A living two-player strategy game associated in the reviewed sources with Ghana and Asante contexts.

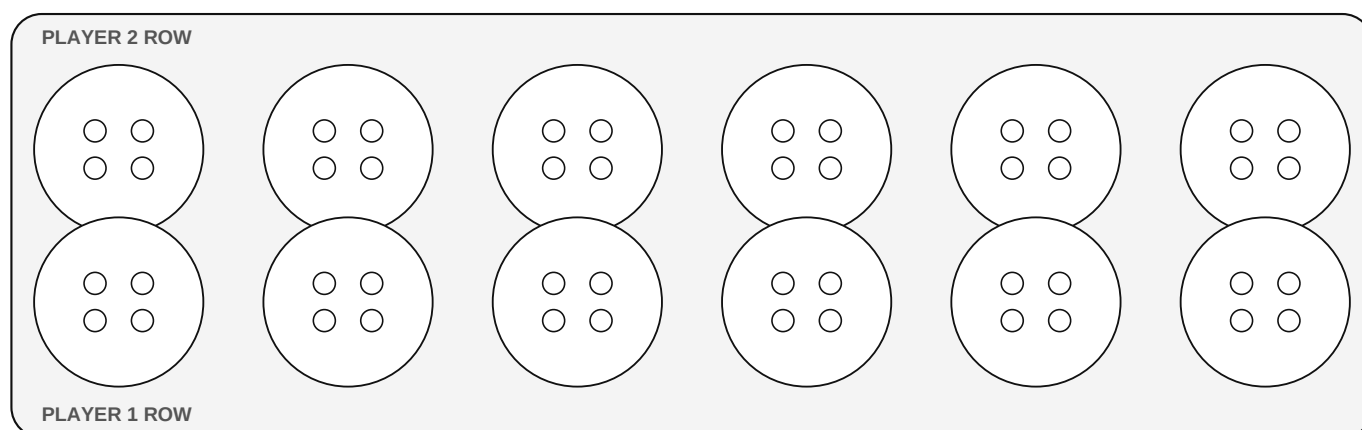
WHAT YOU NEED

- 2 players
- 12 cups, arranged in two rows of six
- 48 beans or counters
- 2 extra bowls for captured seeds, or simply keep two separate piles

Twelve cups give the best tactile game. Page 4 also supplies a paper board for coins, buttons or small beans.

SET UP IN ONE MINUTE

Place **four counters in every house**. Each player controls the row nearest them. Choose a first player. Keep captured counters outside the twelve-house circuit.



THE WHOLE MOVE: choose a non-empty house on your row, lift every counter from it, then sow them one by one into successive houses moving anticlockwise.

WHY IT STAYS INTERESTING

One handful changes every house it touches. Captures depend on the final landing, but taking everything can cancel the capture. Strong play balances scoring with keeping both sides in motion.

What we know

Oware is a living game. The surviving record gives us dated glimpses, not a single invention story or proof that one ruleset remained unchanged.

- 
- 1819** Thomas Bowdich, a British envoy, recorded a golden 'worra' board before the Asante king in Kumasi. He recorded the name but said he could not understand the game.
 - 1889** A Smithsonian record documents a board and seed counters collected at Elmina. The museum's later cultural attribution is marked uncertain, so the object does not prove an origin.
 - 2016** Ghanaian field research documented two people playing Oware face to face on a two-by-six board in the Drobo traditional area.
 - 2026** A Ghana-based Oware organisation advertised education, meetups and play in Accra, alongside online competition.

MANCALA IS NOT ONE GAME

Modern scholarship uses *mancala* for a broad grouping of hundreds of sowing games. Similar boards and movements do not establish one origin, one history or one universal ruleset. Oware is more interesting when treated as a particular named game, not flattened into the family label.

SOURCES USED FOR THIS SUMMARY

Alex de Voogt, *Misconceptions in the History of Mancala Games* (2021); Louise Crane, *African Games of Strategy* (1982); Thomas E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (1819); Smithsonian NMNH object record E151128-0; Charles K. Mariwah, KNUST MPhil thesis (2017); SBA Oware Society Ghana activity pages (2026).

How to play

These rules follow the documented Abapa line selected for Forgotten Games. Other Oware conventions and related sowing games may differ.

1 Choose

Choose any non-empty house on your own row. Lift all the counters from it.

2 Sow

Move anticlockwise, dropping one counter into each successive house. If you complete a lap, skip the house you started from. Do not pick up and relay the final house.

3 Check the landing

A capture is possible only when your final counter lands on the opponent's row and makes that house contain exactly two or three counters.

4 Capture backwards

Take those two or three counters. Continue backwards through consecutive opponent houses, taking each house that also contains exactly two or three. Stop at the first house that does not qualify.

5

Do not empty the whole row

If the complete capture chain would remove every counter from the opponent's row, the move still happens but the whole capture is cancelled. All counters stay in their houses.

6

Feed an empty opponent

If the opponent's row is empty at the start of your turn, you must choose a move that sows at least one counter into it whenever such a move exists.

7

When feeding is impossible

If the opponent's row is empty and no move can feed it, the game ends. In this selected version, the player whose turn it is adds the counters remaining on their own row to their captured tally.

8

Score

A player who captures at least 25 of the 48 counters wins. A 24-24 finish is a draw.

IF THE POSITION REPEATS

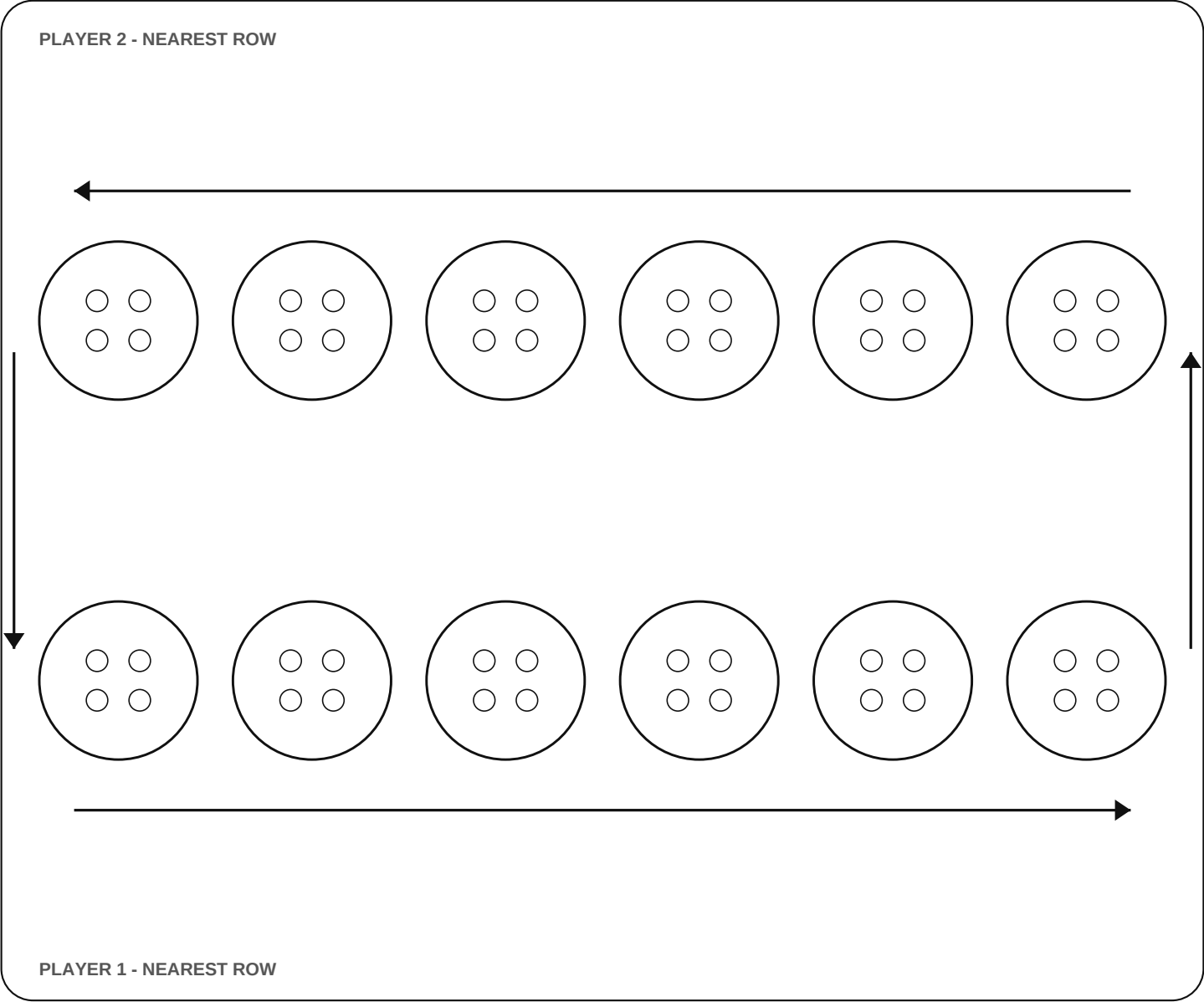
For physical play, if both players agree that the game is cycling without progress, each player takes the counters remaining on their own row and then compares totals. Forgotten Games automates this edge case by ending on the third occurrence of the same position.

FIRST-GAME TIP

Say the count in each house aloud while sowing. Before lifting a house, trace where the last counter will land. Oware becomes much clearer once you begin planning around that final landing rather than the first handful.

Printable Oware board

Place four counters in every house. Sit opposite one another; your row is the row nearest you. Sow anticlockwise, following the arrows.



PLAYER 1 CAPTURED
Keep these outside the sowing circuit.

PLAYER 2 CAPTURED
First to 25 wins; 24-24 is a draw.

For a sturdier game, replace this sheet with two rows of six cups and use two extra bowls for captured counters.