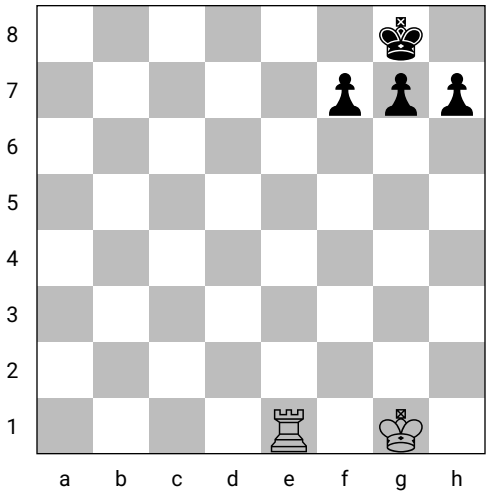
Back-Rank Checkmate

Recognize a trapped king and find its escape squares.



Demonstration position
White: King g1, rook e1.
Black: King g8; pawns f7, g7, h7.
White to move; all other squares empty.

Ask: "Where can the rook give check? Can Black escape?"

Solution: 1.Re8# is checkmate. The rook controls f8 and h8; Black's pawns block the other escape squares.

0-3 MIN

Introduce the back rank

Say: "Pawns can protect your king, but sometimes they block its escape." Explain the three ways to answer check: move the king to safety, capture the attacker, or block the attack when possible.

3-7 MIN

Prove the checkmate

Use the diagram above and play Re8#. Test all three defenses. The king has no safe square, cannot capture the distant rook, and has no piece that can block the check. Ask: "Why is this mate rather than just check?"

7-11 MIN

Change one detail

Return the rook to e1 and move Black's h7 pawn to h6. Ask whether Re8 is still mate. Answer: No. After 1.Re8+, Black can play 1...Kh7. Explain that an escape square must be safe, and pawn moves should respond to the position.

11-14 MIN

Partner challenge

Set up White: king g1; pawns f2, g2, h2. Black: king g8, rook c8. Black to move; all other squares empty. Answer: 1...Rc1#. Partners test each defense. Then move White's h2 pawn to h3: after ...Rc1+, White can escape with Kh2.

14-15 MIN

Take it into a game

Ask partners to explain how an escape square changes the puzzle. Playing challenge: When a rook or queen can reach a back rank, check whether the king has somewhere safe to go.