

*A
Sage's
Journey*



*The Story
of
Tangrams*



John L. Lehet

Introduction

What do Lewis Carroll, Edgar Allan Poe, John Quincy Adams and Napoleon Bonaparte have in common? They were enthused and fascinated by tangrams! Tangrams is a puzzle game in which seven pieces or tans must be arranged to form a desired figure. The seven pieces are comprised of two large triangles, one medium triangle, two small triangles, a square and a parallelogram.

The origin of tangrams is unknown. However, it is known that tangrams was a popular recreation in China near the start of the nineteenth century. This was followed by a craze in America, Europe and Asia where it was one of the most popular games of the nineteenth century.

The earliest recorded reference to tangrams was in a Chinese book in 1813. The book was likely written during the reign of Emperor Chia Ching (1796-1820) when tangrams was at its height of popularity in China. The word tangram was first introduced officially in the 1864 Webster's Dictionary. However, the exact origin is unknown, but many plausible explanations exist. The most widely accepted can be found in modern dictionaries. It is speculated that the word tangram is derived from the combination of Tang from the Tang Dynasty and the suffix gram. Another possible explanation is that it may have been derived from the now obsolete word "trangram" meaning "puzzle". Finally, it may be derived from Tanka, the people of southern China and Hong Kong known for exportation. In addition, it is known that the Tanka also provided food, entertainment and labor for sailors. Peter Van Note, in his introduction to *"The Eighth Book of Tan, Part I"*, supplies more details to the above explanations.

The most entertaining explanations of the origin of the game of tangrams is by Sam Loyd, the author of the above mentioned book. In this book, he offers not only an origin to tangrams but uses tangrams to offer a theory on creation itself! It is a spoof, but well worth reading for those interested in tangrams.

The following story is my attempt to tell the origin of tangrams. I have often told the story using an overhead projector and a set of tangrams to illustrate the story. This technique captivates children. The changing of figures before their eyes seems magical and they quickly become mesmerized.

I hope that you enjoy the story and tangrams as well.

John L. Lehet



A

long, long
time ago, in
a far away land,
there lived a sage.
A sage is a very wise
man, and this sage was
among the wisest. He had
the cunning of a fox, the wisdom of
an owl, and the memory of an elephant!
Because of this, the King asked the sage
to perform a most difficult and challenging task. He
asked the sage to safely transport a pane of glass to the
royal palace. The sage knew that this would be a difficult
task. The palace was on the other side of the kingdom,

across the hottest of deserts,
over the widest of rivers and
on the other side of the tallest of mountains!

Tangram Challenge #7

With two small triangles,
medium triangle, square
and parallelogram ...



Can you make
a rectangle?



Can you make
a triangle?

Can you make
a parallelogram?



Can you make
a trapezoid?

Can you make
a square?

