

# Life and Death Basics

Made by Soh Kai Xun on behalf of SPMS Weiqi

Updated on 13 March 2026

# Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- 1) Identify true and false eyes
- 2) Recognise common alive and dead shapes
- 3) Determine whether a group is alive or dead

# What is life and death?

In Weiqi, every group of stones must be able to survive independently. A group that cannot avoid being captured is considered *dead*. Understanding life and death helps you decide when to fight, when to run, and when a group is safe to leave alone. It is one of the most fundamental skills in Weiqi.

# Liberties and Eyes

**Liberty:**

An empty point directly adjacent to a stone or group.

**Eye:**

An empty point or enclosed region completely surrounded by your own stones that the opponent cannot legally fill

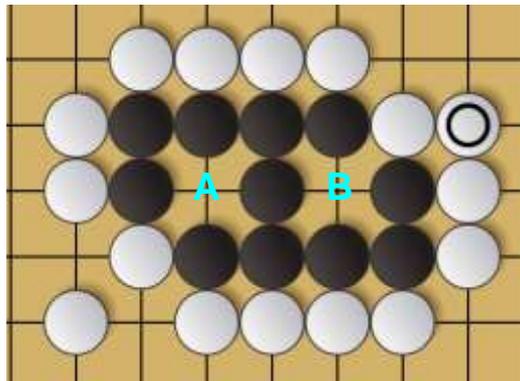
**True eye:**

An eye that the opponent can never fill, as doing so would immediately remove their own stone.

**False eye:**

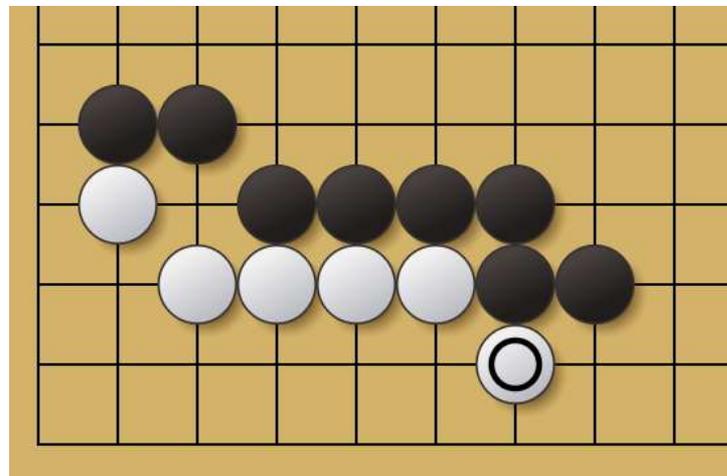
An eye that appears to be an eye but can be captured because of a cutting point.

# Two or more true eyes = Alive



The black stones above are **alive** as they have 2 true eyes (marked as A and B).

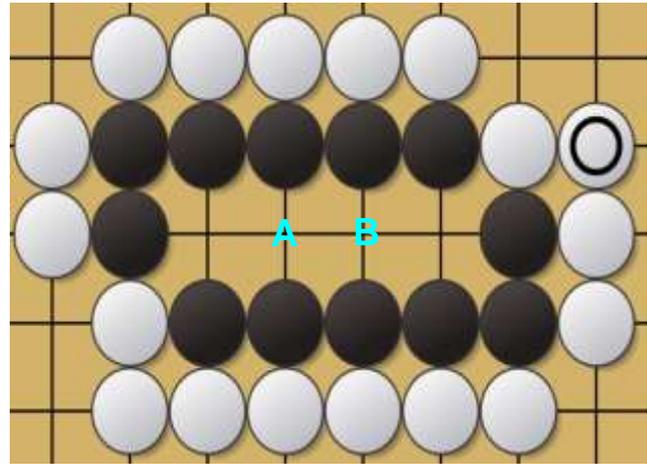
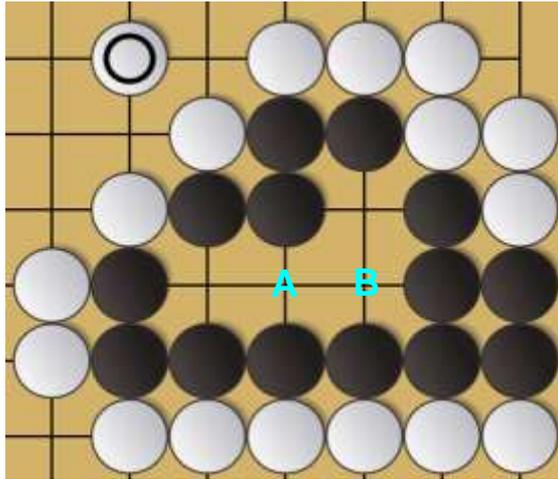
Groups of two separate true eyes are alive. The opponent cannot capture it because filling either eye would be suicide.



A group does not need to have two eyes immediately – as long it has enough internal space (>5) to make two eyes when needed, it is considered alive.

In the picture above, white is surviving as it has enough internal space to create two eyes.

# Examples of alive groups (part 1)



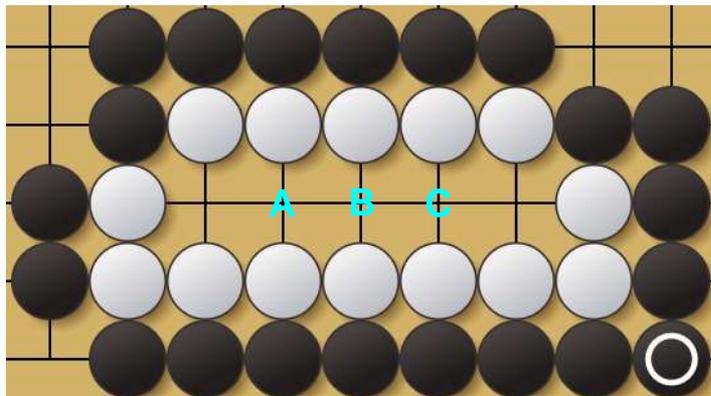
The Black stones above are **alive** as the shapes has enough internal liberties to form 2 separate eyes.

If White plays at A, Black plays at B.

If White plays at B, Black plays at A.

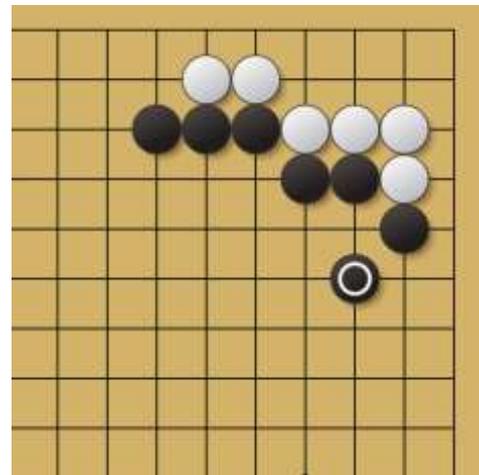
White cannot prevent Black from forming two eyes.

## Examples of alive groups (part 2)



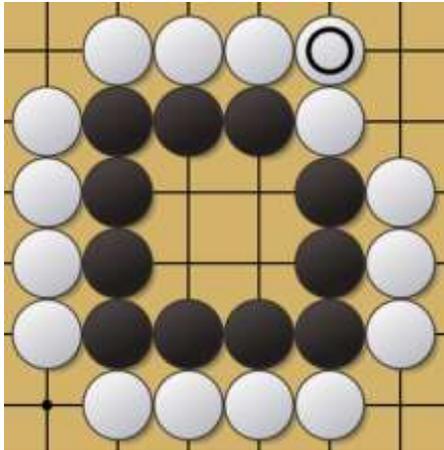
The White stones above are **alive** as the shape has enough internal liberties to form 2 separate eyes.

White can play at A / B / C and 2 eyes are formed  
Black cannot prevent White from forming two eyes.

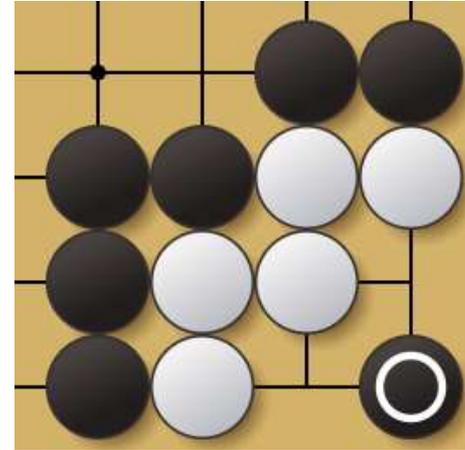


The White stones above are **alive** as the white has enough corner territory to form 2 separate eyes.

# Examples of dead groups (part 1)

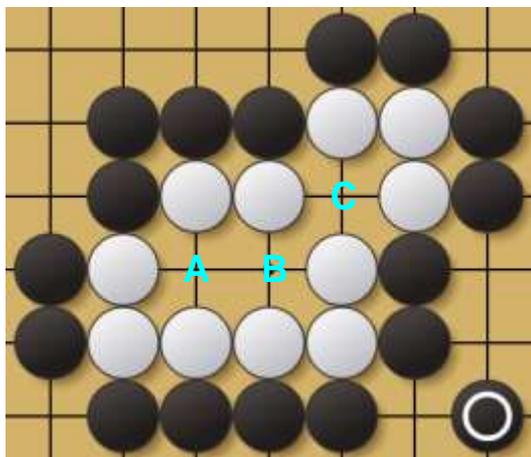


The Black stones above are **dead** as the shapes do not have enough internal liberties to form 2 separate eyes.  
White can play inside any empty point, preventing two eyes.



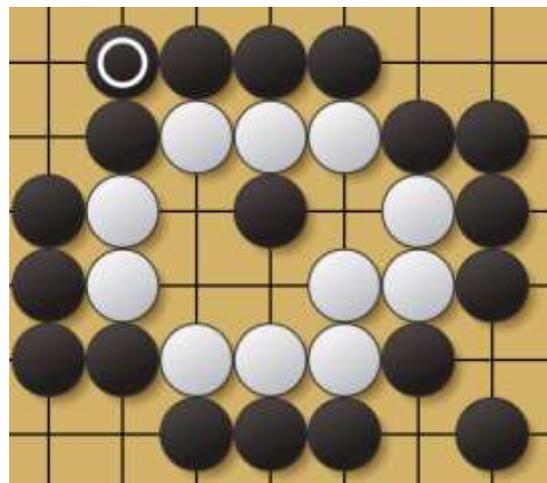
The White stones above are **dead** as the white do not have enough internal liberties to form 2 separate eyes.  
White has only one eye.

## Examples of dead groups (part 2)



The white stones above are **dead** as they only have 1 true eye (A and B together form **one** eye, not two separate eyes).

Note that C is not a true eye as black could play at C, surrounding the 3 stones and thus killing them.



The White stones above are **dead** as the white do not have enough internal liberties to form 2 separate eyes.

White has only one eye.

# Summary

1. It is important to make true eyes.
2. Only groups consisting of two or more true eyes are considered to be alive
3. Not all groups of 4 or 5 internal liberties can guarantee life
4. Groups consisting of 6 or more internal liberties are unconditionally alive

# Seki (Mutual Life)

Made by Soh Kai Xun on behalf of SPMS Weiqi

Updated on 25 February 2026

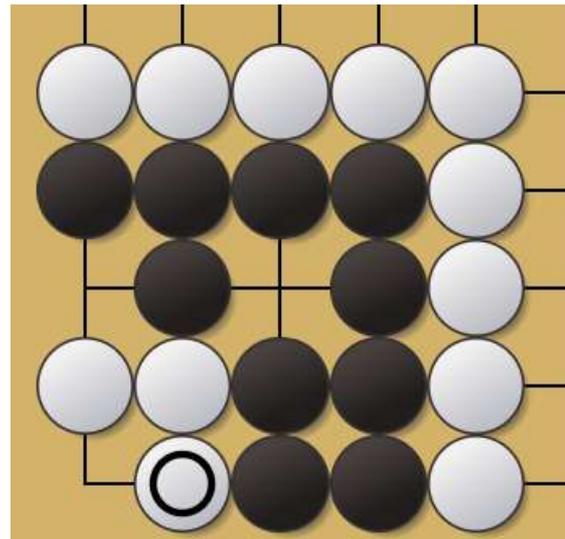
# Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- 1) Recognise a seki position
- 2) Understand why neither player can attack in a seki
- 3) Distinguish between a seki and a fully alive group

# What is Seki?

Seki, also known as mutual life, is a position where two opposing groups share liberties in a way that neither side can attack the other without destroying themselves. Both groups are considered alive despite neither having two eyes.

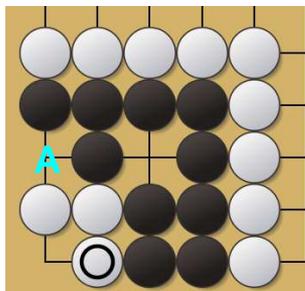


An example of a seki position

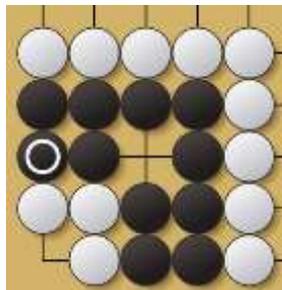
# Why Can't Either Side Attack?

In a seki position, the two groups share the same liberties.

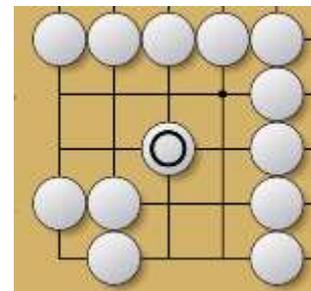
If either player tries to fill them, they end up **losing their own last liberties** instead, resulting in their own stones being captured.



Original:  
Black and White are in a seki  
position.  
The shared liberty is marked as "A"



Black tries to remove White's three  
stones in the bottom left.  
However, black is left with only one  
liberty, allowing White to capture  
Black's stones in the next turn.



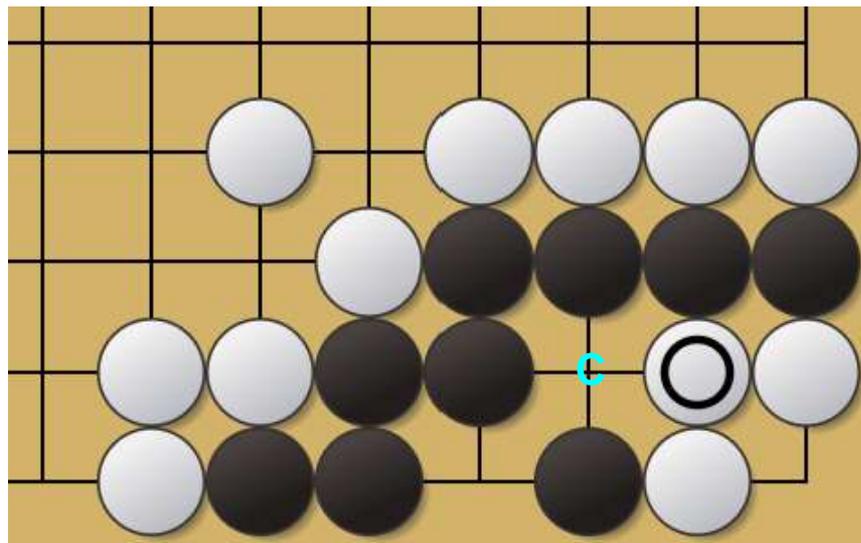
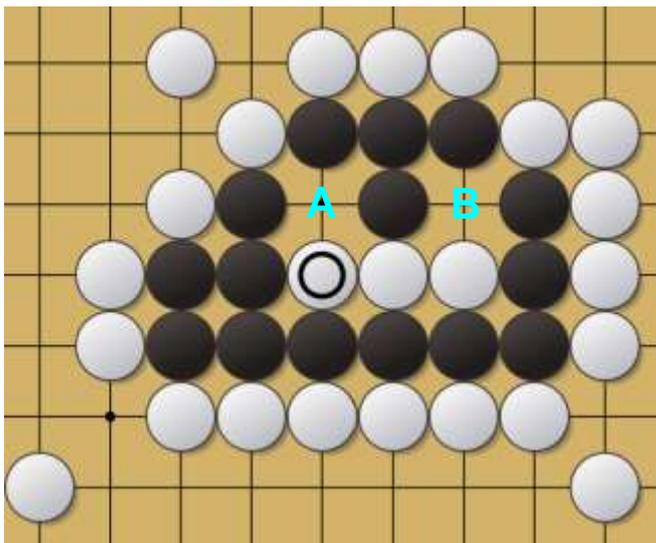
Black is captured  
The same happens if white  
plays at "A".

# Seki Vs Alive Group

While both a seki group and a fully alive group (a group consisting of at least two eyes) cannot be captured, they are not the same. A fully alive group has two true eyes and is safe. A seki group does not have two or more eyes – instead, it survives only because the opponent is equally unable to attack.

**In most cases, the first player to move in a seki position will end up at a disadvantage.**

# Some examples of Seki (mutual life)



A, B, and C are shared liberties

# Summary

1. Seki is a position where two groups share liberties and neither side can attack
2. A seki group survives without having two true eyes
3. In most cases, the first player to move in a seki position will end up at a disadvantage

# Ko Fights

Made by Soh Kai Xun on behalf of SPMS Weiqi

Updated on 25 February 2026

# Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

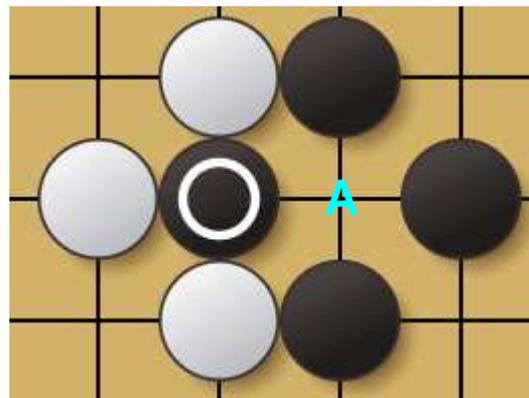
- 1) Understand the Ko rule and why it exists
- 2) Recognise a Ko position on the board
- 3) identify what a Ko fight is and how it arises

# Ko Rule

In Weiqi, a player may not make a move that recreates the exact board position from the previous turn. This rule prevents the game from going on forever.

In the example on the bottom right, White is unable to play at “A” since Black has just captured White’s stone at A. White must first play elsewhere to be able to recapture the black stone due to Ko rule.

As such, this is a Ko position



# What is a Ko Fight?

When a Ko position arises, the player who cannot immediately recapture must play elsewhere on the board first — this is called making a Ko threat. If the opponent responds to the threat, the player can then go back and recapture the Ko stone. This back-and-forth exchange is known as a Ko fight.

# Summary

1. The Ko rule prevents a player from recreating the exact board position from the previous turn
2. A Ko position arises when a single stone can be captured but cannot be immediately recaptured
3. In a Ko fight, a player must make a Ko threat elsewhere before recapturing the Ko stone