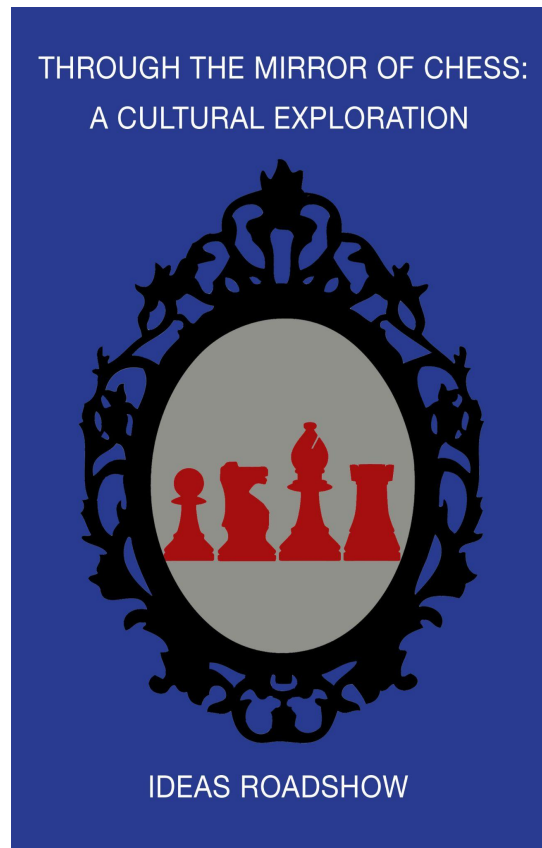


PUBLIC LIBRARY EVENT PROGRAM GUIDE

ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY THROUGH CHESS!



"Your film serves to motivate me and to use chess as a metaphor for how a game can be used as an agent for societal change while simultaneously providing a safe and cheap and fun escape from life's difficulties."— **Joseph Shemtov, Free Library of Philadelphia**

"...a fascinating stroll through the history of the game, pausing to examine its many cultural connections to the world at large." — **Chief Film Critic Chris Knight, National Post**

"...one of the deepest investigations and undertakings into chess ever done. Anyone passionate about the history, culture, and community around the game will be interested in watching this series." — **Lichess**

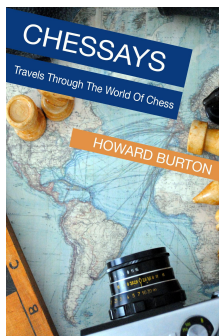
Dear Librarians,

We've put together a program guide for public libraries to create an engaging community event showcasing Ideas Roadshow's new 4-part docuseries, **THROUGH THE MIRROR OF CHESS: A CULTURAL EXPLORATION**. The films examine the remarkable impact of chess on culture, art, science, sport, personal empowerment and more. They offer an experience of cinematic storytelling at its best with an engaging narrative and exciting visuals.



The viewer will be taken on an exhilarating journey across a wide range of times and places touching on cultural history, art, literature, psychology, game theory, chess variants, gender issues, education, genius, personal empowerment, prison reform, and much more to comprehensively address the question of what makes the game so unique.

The documentary is now available in DVD format on Amazon and also via library distributors such as Midwest Tape and Library Bound. Information about Public Performance Rights can be found on our website, here: https://ideasroadshow.com/libraries_chess/. With the purchase of a PPR, we will provide you with the complete program guide - in the next pages you can see what it consists of.



The accompanying book, **CHESSAYS: TRAVELS THROUGH THE WORLD OF CHESS**, by physicist-turned-filmmaker Howard Burton consists of a collection of thought-provoking essays on a wide range of chess-related issues which Howard encountered while being a “tourist” in the chess world during the production of the 4-part docuseries.

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For questions, please contact irena@ideasroadshow.com

Website: <https://ideasroadshow.com/>

Libraries section: <https://ideasroadshow.com/libraries/>

Filmmaker's Introduction



As often happens, *Through the Mirror of Chess* turned out to be quite different from what I had envisioned at the outset. A good way of highlighting the difference between my initial expectations and the final result is through the evolution of the name of the series. The working title for the documentary was *The Story of Chess*, which seemed fitting enough for the detailed historical presentation of chess that I originally had in mind, from its 6th-century Indian origins to the present day.

But as time went on, I began to appreciate that the most fascinating aspect of the whole story was much broader: by focusing our attention on the unique cultural trajectory of one particular game, we could get a glimpse of to what extent our current society is both similar to, and distinct from, many other very different times and places.

And so the documentary series became *Through the Mirror of Chess: A Cultural Exploration*, emphatically referencing my determination to use chess as a tool to better understand who we are and where we are going.

The intended audience naturally changed too. While chess players will clearly be interested in learning more about the profound societal impact of their favorite pastime, the series is *explicitly aimed at anyone interested in a far wider range of subjects*, from art to psychology, medieval allegories to linguistics, politics to artificial intelligence. And through it all, the hope is that the non chess-player can be exposed, in a way that is rarely done, to concrete examples of chess' power to create beautiful patterns that have captivated its legions of passionate devotees over the centuries.

All of that, detailed in the first three films, makes for a truly compelling story. But what is perhaps even more intriguing still are the contemporary implications, showcased in part 4, when we turn our attention to how chess sheds light on many contemporary beliefs and values. From gender attitudes to sports commentary, prison reform to international development, educational practices to our modern sense of community, chess turns out to be a surprisingly insightful window on an exceptionally large number of many pressing societal concerns.

There is, it should be stressed, no single overriding conclusion I am driving towards here on chess or anything else: the goal is simply to stimulate people towards thinking about our world in a slightly different way than they might be used to doing. It is not that I don't have my own opinions (as anyone who reads my accompanying book, *Chessays: Travels Through the World of Chess*, will quickly discover), but that my aim as a filmmaker is to simply present, as truthfully and objectively as I can, a range of stimulating perspectives for public discussion and contemplation. Which is why I'm particularly excited to be partnering with public libraries to present *Through the Mirror of Chess* as part of a community event. For a filmmaker like me, there is no more fitting environment imaginable for my work.

Howard Burton, filmmaker and author

PART 1: UNIQUENESS (58 min.)

The first film begins by setting the context of the entire series, presenting the viewer with an array of reflections on the meaning and cultural implications of play from some of history's most celebrated thinkers.

We describe how chess, as a game with a particularly long and varied history, is ideally placed to serve as a test case to rigorously explore the link between play and culture, but in order to appreciate chess' unique advantages, it's important to first correct some widespread misconceptions that the unsuspecting non-chess player is continually bombarded with through film and TV (what we call "Hollywood Chess").

We then plunge back into a detailed investigation of what chess is and what distinguishes it from other games. Finally, we describe how "chess" actually incorporates a wide range of different games—such as xiangqi, shogi and makruk—that are actively played in many places in the world.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think the fact that other (non-human) animals play implies that we have customarily underestimated their intelligence and/or self-consciousness?
2. Does play necessarily involve a sense of competition? If not, to what extent is the "non-competitive" type of play the same sort of thing as the competitive type?
3. Why do you think Hollywood often gets chess so wrong? What implications, if any, do you think this might have for Hollywood's treatment of other topics?
4. How might chess' defining features of having different pieces with different movements and functions directly lead to a greater level of cultural impact than other games?
5. Are you surprised by the number of different "chess-like games" that exist? Do you feel more inclined after having watched this film to play some of these other games? Could exposure to different types of games lead to an increased level of tolerance towards other cultures?



PART 2: THE FIRST MILLENNIUM (54 min.)

The second film documents the history and widespread social and cultural impact of chess over its first thousand years, from roughly 500–1500 CE. Beginning in northern India, we follow the evolution of the game into the Sasanian Empire, its incorporation into the Islamic world through the Arab Conquest, and its eventual penetration into Medieval Europe.

A careful investigation of chess pieces over the ages sheds highly revealing light on the artistic and courtly values of many different civilizations. At the same time a close examination of the many chess-related literary references, from epic Persian poems to medieval romances and political allegories, provides an additional array of unique insights into a tapestry of distinct yet overlapping traditions.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think the fact that chess has its historical roots in representing military conflict was essential, or incidental, to its ongoing popularity?
2. Do you find Deborah's theory for the specific form of the abstract king/queen and rook pieces convincing? If not, do you have one of your own?
3. How do you think modern chess would be affected by incorporating the "bare king" rule of Shatranj? Would you be interested in playing that sort of game?
4. Do you think Jacobus de Cessolis would still have written his political allegory had chess not been invented? If so, what might it have looked like?
5. What do you think a historian of the future would conclude about our societal values by studying our games? To what extent is the Netflix series, *The Queen's Gambit*, our modern equivalent of medieval chess-related literature?



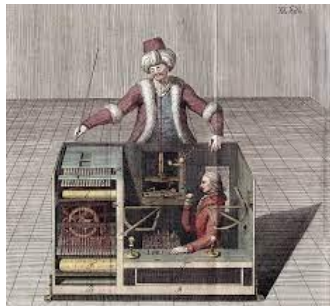
PART 3: ART, SCIENCE, SPORT (58 min.)

The third film picks up where the second film leaves off, offering a comprehensive exposition of the profound societal impact of chess since the transformative rule changes to the queen and bishop in the late 15th century that gave rise to the game we now play.

From Rabelais to Rousseau, Shakespeare to Adam Smith, Charles Babbage to Deep Blue, Samuel Beckett to *The Queen's Gambit*, we present a rapid chronological runthrough of the modern game's overwhelming influence on psychology, literature, computer science, linguistics, political theory and more, culminating in its current status as a globally dominant online phenomenon firmly within our contemporary sports and entertainment paradigm.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Are you surprised to learn that chess was criticized for requiring “too much study” as early as the 16th century? Do you think that this feature of the game is also somehow linked to its longstanding appeal?
2. Does true genius exist? In what ways, if at all, can chess be harnessed to address this question?
3. Is chess a game or a sport? Has that changed at all? Will it change in the future?
4. Do you think that chess will continue to have a strong presence in future books and films?
5. Would you prefer to watch two world-class humans play chess against each other over two (higher-ranked) computers? If so, why, exactly? If you would hear tomorrow that chess is “solved”—that a computer algorithm has been developed that would never lose—would that in any way influence your desire to play?



PART 4: CONTEMPORARY IMPACT (70 min.)

The fourth film is an in-depth investigation of chess' present cultural influence through an extensive array of expert accounts.

The film is divided into two main sections. The first section treats chess as a window on three overlapping current issues: our evolving notions of community in the internet age, the modern sports and entertainment complex and gender-related attitudes and experiences. Viewers will be exposed to a spectrum of first-hand accounts from top chess players and major participants in the international chess community.

The second section, meanwhile, profiles a number of contemporary applications of chess to education, prisons, social advancement and personal empowerment featuring renowned game changers such as Tom Dart (Sheriff of Cook County), Mikhail Korenman (Director of Cook County Jail Chess Program), Russel Makofsky (Founder of The Gift of Chess), Elizabeth Spiegel (Brooklyn Castle), and more.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think that the current “chess boom” is a fad, or will chess continue to have a very strong global online presence for decades to come?
2. Is there something about chess which makes it particularly suitable for investigating gender-related attitudes? If so, what do you think it is?
3. Would you encourage or discourage your child to play competitive chess? Has watching this documentary series in any way changed your views on this issue?
4. Should chess be a mandatory part of every school curriculum?
5. What was your favorite part of this documentary series? Least favorite part? What would you have liked to have seen more/less of?

