

Lesson Plan: Introduction to American Mah Jongg

Audience: Beginning players

Prerequisites: None

Materials: American mah jongg set, current NMJL card, player reference materials, sample racks/tiles, instructional handouts

Instructional Approach: Explanation, demonstration, guided modeling, hands-on practice, questioning, and coached gameplay

Overall Learning Objective

By the end of the course, learners will be able to recognize the components used in American mah jongg, interpret the NMJL card, model hands using tiles, complete the Charleston and game setup, and participate in a game with an introductory understanding of core strategy.

1. Background

Objective: Establish a basic understanding of American mah jongg and the structure of the game.

Instruction: Introduce the game, its basic purpose, and the major components learners will encounter throughout the course. Establish terminology that will be used consistently during instruction.

Learner Engagement: Invite learners to share what they already know about mah jongg or any previous exposure they have had to the game.

Check for Understanding: Ask learners to describe, in their own words, what they expect to be able to do by the end of the course.

2. History

Objective: Give learners enough historical context to understand where American mah jongg fits within the broader mah jongg family.

Instruction: Provide a concise overview of the game's origins and development into the American style played today.

Learner Engagement: Encourage questions and briefly compare learners' prior perceptions of mah jongg with its actual history.



Check for Understanding: Ask learners to identify one characteristic that distinguishes American mah jongg from other styles they may have encountered.

3. Tile Symbolization

Objective: Learners will recognize the tiles and understand the symbols and terminology used to represent them.

Instruction: Introduce the suits, numbers, winds, dragons, flowers, and jokers. Connect physical tiles with the symbols and conventions learners will encounter on the card and in instructional materials.

Learner Activity: Learners sort or identify tiles by suit and type and practice interpreting tile symbols.

Check for Understanding: Display or call out symbols and have learners locate the corresponding tiles.

4. Block Modeling

Objective: Learners will recognize and construct the different groupings used to build hands.

Instruction: Demonstrate singles, pairs, pungs, kongs, and quints using physical tiles.

Learner Activity: Give learners tiles and ask them to construct specified blocks.

Check for Understanding: Call out a block type and have learners independently model an example.

5. Suit Modeling

Objective: Learners will understand how suit requirements affect the construction of hands.

Rather than treating this as one long lecture, each subsection becomes a short **demonstrate → model → check** cycle.

5-1. One Suit

Demonstrate how a hand or portion of a hand can be represented within one suit. Learners model examples using physical tiles and identify what must remain consistent.

5-2. Mixed Suits



Demonstrate patterns requiring more than one suit. Learners construct examples and compare them with one-suit models.

5-3. One Suit with Corresponding Dragons

Introduce the relationship between suits and their corresponding dragons. Learners select a suit and identify and model it with the appropriate dragon.

5-4. Mixed Suits with Opposite Dragons

Demonstrate the applicable suit-and-dragon relationships. Learners work through examples and explain why a particular dragon is required.

5-5. NEWS, Year, Singles, and Pairs

Demonstrate how these elements appear within hand structures and how their requirements differ from ordinary suit blocks.

Check for Understanding for Section 5: Give learners several modeled examples and ask them to identify the suit structure and explain what they see rather than simply naming the hand.

6. Player Reference

Objective: Learners will know how to use available reference materials rather than relying solely on memory.

Instruction: Introduce the player reference and demonstrate how it supports decision-making during play.

Learner Activity: Give learners several questions or scenarios and have them locate the applicable information using the reference.

Check for Understanding: Ask learners where they would look for help when they encounter an unfamiliar situation.

7. Category Modeling

Objective: Learners will begin connecting individual hand structures to categories on the NMJL card.

Instruction: Select representative hands from different categories and model how the printed combinations translate into physical tiles.

Learner Activity: Assign a category or hand and have learners build a legal representation with tiles.



Check for Understanding: Learners explain how they determined which tiles were required rather than simply showing the finished model.

8. Random Modeling

Objective: Learners will apply their modeling skills without being told in advance which structure they will encounter.

Learner Activity: Present randomly selected hands from the card for learners to model independently or in pairs.

Instructor Role: Observe the process, ask guiding questions, and correct misunderstandings without immediately supplying the answer.

Check for Understanding: Ask learners to explain their reasoning and identify any restrictions they had to consider.

9. Charleston

Objective: Learners will understand the sequence and purpose of the Charleston and be able to complete it correctly.

Instruction: Demonstrate the Charleston step by step before introducing strategic considerations.

Learner Activity: Conduct a practice Charleston using sample racks. Pause between passes to discuss decisions and answer questions.

Check for Understanding: Have learners complete another Charleston with progressively less instructor prompting.

10. Setup

Objective: Learners will be able to prepare for play and begin a game correctly.

Instruction: Demonstrate the physical setup and beginning procedures.

Learner Activity: Learners perform the setup themselves while the instructor observes.

Check for Understanding: Allow the group to complete setup without step-by-step prompting, intervening only when necessary.

11. Play with Coaching

Objective: Learners will integrate the skills introduced throughout the lesson into actual gameplay.



Instructional Approach: Learners play while the instructor observes and coaches through questions rather than making decisions for them.

Questions might include:

“What are you working toward?”

“What changed after that pick?”

“What does the card tell you?”

“What options do you have?”

“What information at the table might affect your decision?”

Pause when necessary to reinforce concepts that benefit the entire group.

Check for Understanding: As play progresses, reduce prompting and watch for learners to begin making and explaining decisions independently.

12. Core Strategy

Objective: Learners will leave with a manageable set of strategic principles they can begin applying independently.

Instruction: Use situations encountered during coached play to introduce foundational strategic concepts rather than presenting strategy only as abstract rules.

Learner Reflection: Ask each learner to identify one strategic concept they used successfully and one area they want to practice.

Final Check for Understanding: Present a simple game situation and ask learners what they would consider before making their next decision.

