ME—bring name tags, a Sharpie, Kleenex, my water, handouts, pens, and rules.

Offer my own name, for Pete’s sake!!

**“Please sign in with your address if missing, email AND phone #. If you have email but don’t check it every few days, just give me your ph #. This is in case I need to notify you of anything related to class.**

**Cellphones off or in silent mode please. If you HAVE to have it on for an important expected call, we won’t wait while you do.**

**Please be quiet, no chit-chatting.**

**Please raise your hand to ask a question of ME. Don’t ask one another.**

**Does anyone own a set already?**

**How many here have played the game of Rummy, RummyCube or Canasta? This is similar in the play.”**

LESSON ONE

“**We’ll have 4 people sit in place with any extras sitting next to someone, 2 players acting as 1 player. You can take turns being ‘in the hot seat’”. (I will teach no fewer than 3 nor more than 8 students).**

**“The first thing I want to do is give you a very brief history on Mah Jongg. (read T.S.’s brief history)**

**I want to tell you how most of us pronounce Mah Jongg! ‘Mah’ seems pretty obvious but you will hear various ways of saying ‘Jongg’. I believe the correct way is with the ‘J’ said like the ‘z’ in ‘azure’ and the ending ‘-ongg’ spoken like it is in ‘song’”. (However, I believe the Chinese use the hard ‘J’ sound).**

Have “The Big Square” in place & talk about it: 152 tiles, the 3 suit names, that there are 4 identical numbers, one thru nine, (the 1 Bams), Dragons, Winds (‘honor’ tiles), Jokers and Flowers (ignore any #s/names on those)

While still in the ‘Square’, explain about

Pungs: any 3 **identical** tiles

Kongs: any 4 **identical** tiles

Quints: any 5 **identical** tiles (ask what might be needed and why**? “Can anyone tell me?”**)

When I think everyone is comfortable with this part, we’ll shuffle them up, face up. Hand out racks.

Tile identification: Ask each student to pick up any tile I name and place it in front of her until all have 13.

Introduce sorting: Talk about placing the racked tiles in order by suit and in ascending order L-R, flowers and jokers to the left, winds and dragons to the right. (Or whatever method you choose to teach).

The play: **“Play goes to the right, contrary to everything else we have ever learned to play, esp. cards. ☺ However, also similar to Rummy, we *do* draw and discard the tiles during our turn.”**

Have them play a round (drawing and discarding) and try to build a hand of 4 pungs of anything and a pair of anything first **(mention the pair rule**!), then 3 kongs and a pair of anything (makes 14 tiles when completed). Explain the rules of play while they play, including ‘same’, racking,‘calling’ a discard, (with ‘take’ or ‘call’) or ‘wait’,(in order to think about it if unsure). If there’s time for another round, have them choose to do one or the other type themselves…most prefer the pung hand ☺

Hand out copies of my rules and a card for the current year (The Senior Center where I teach provides both for me) and ask them to please study them during the week and jot down any questions they might have for the class.

Offer my ph.# and email address for anyone who wants it. They are free to address any questions to me.

LESSON TWO (some review)

Upon their arrival, have them place the racks and dump the tiles and shuffle them up.

**Introduce the walls:**

Explain first about building the walls. (19 tiles long, 2 tall, in front of each player). “This is a good way to make sure that all 152 tiles needed to play are included with the game.”

**Introduce the dice**:

Explain about rolling the dice for East; East rolling again for the ‘break’ in the wall (head/tail); dealing and pushing the walls out. Explain how the wall coming out is the only thing that happens to the left (clockwise); everything else about the game (rolling for East, dealing, drawing, the taking of turns), happens to the right (counter-clcockwise). I make my class repeat this ‘rule’: “Everything goes to the right except the wall!”

Teach East how to deal the tiles, 4 at a time till all have 13 tiles, then 1 & 3 for her (& why-14); one more each to everyone else (13)\*; everyone then placing the tiles face up on **top** of the racks, sorting them. Mention that many groups let the players take their own tiles instead of the dealer doing it. Either way is fine, just so all agree. (Table rule). \*This is how all in our group do it and so I teach it that way.

**Introduce the Charleston**.

**“This is, perhaps, the 2nd most difficult thing to learn, this passing ‘dance’, because you’ll have to decide which 3 tiles to pass each time. This amounts to passing 3 tiles, each of 3 times. The first Charleston is mandatory (Right,Over,Left=ROL) (mention ‘blind’ pass or stealing on the ‘First Left’) with 4 players but that the Charleston is NOT done with 3 players unless house rules come into play. In a later session I teach how, with 3 players, we set up a ‘dummy’ hand.**

ME: Examine the hands and talk about going (or NOT going) thru the 2nd Charleston [**LOR** **(& blind pass on the Last Right’)**] which is optional. **(“Commonly we say, if you have 3 tiles to trade, go with the 2nd Charleston”)**; however, any one person may call “Stop!” before this 2nd Charleston with no explanation needed. Jokers CANNOT be passed. **(“Why would you?”)**

Finally, the **Courtesy** pass is always done (zero to 3 tiles with the opposite player).

**Learning how to select a hand from the card** **is** **probably THE most difficult part to learn.** Stress the fact that colors on the card do NOT dictate a suit. Explain with examples. Also that, in consecutive runs or like numbers, for example, a printed number does not necessarily dictate the number you could play. Again, explain with examples and emphasize where EXACT numbers *are* needed. Mention the parentheticals. (…in *this* particular hand the parenthetical explains that….) **Mention the correlation between a suit and its dragons** (red dragons w/craks; white dragons w/dots, etc.as stated on the back of the card, 2nd paragraph) **and** that white dragons are also used as ‘zeros’ regardless of the suit they are with (see ‘year’ hands). This is stated at the top of the front of the card and on the back of the card.

Talk about the ‘C’ for Concealed and ‘X’ for eXposed and the difference between them. Mention the fact that the groups I play with do not play for money or points, just for the Mah Jongg! Talk about each section starting with “year” hands. Do a demonstration with the tiles by assigning each player a hand of the card and have them try to build it. (tiles face up on top of rack). **Forego the Singles and Pairs hands as beginners.**

LESSON THREE

Play a complete game with the tiles on top of the rack. Any exposures can be placed in front of the pusher…..

In choosing a hand to make, some of the things to consider:

(On the card, point to possible families for each of these scenarios):

Do I have any pairs? Do I have more odd numbers? (13579 family/ 369 family); or more even numbers? (2468 family)?; Do I have a lot of jokers? (Quint family); Do I have a lot of tiles in consecutive order? (Consecutive family); Do I have a lot of one *suit* over any others? (top of most families!) Do I have a lot of the same #, different suits? (‘Like’ numbers). Go around the table and offer suggestions if needed (or let them make suggestions!)

**“After you have sorted your hands, I’ll come around and suggest you try making a hand from a specific section of the card unless *you* feel like you know of one. Then we’ll play to see what tiles work with what hands for each person.”**

**“Remember, the point here is to learn, not necessarily to win.”**

**“Next, a ‘normal’ game, with the tiles concealed, will be played.**

As the game is played, explain finer points of the rules (& answer questions **re rules** as they arise.)

When all the tiles have been drawn & discarded and no one wins, it is called a ‘wall’ game.

When Mah Jongg is called, all attention should be on the winner’s hand, verifying that she does, (or does not)

have Mah Jongg! If she doesn’t, she’s ‘dead’ and the game continues. If she does, offer kudos, then if you want to kvetch about your hand, go ahead. ☺

Develop a ‘poker face’ while playing. Expert players can read a lot into facial expressions and sighs, as well as watching what you pass, discard, ‘almost’ call, expose, and some experts can even discern things by how your tiles are split on your rack…..isn’t that scary? ☺ (Lesson here: keep your tiles together!)

Make sure players understand that they are learning the official (National) Mah Jongg rules. **“You will find, however, that there might be ‘table rules’ and you will have to adapt to different groups. Some tables can be so far ‘out there’ & away from the rules that you have been taught, you may find that you are uncomfortable playing with them. Or you might find some of the players to be impatient and/or unkind. Find another group!”** (example: Wheat Ridge Senior Center people play different rules at different tables! Ask what the table rules are (somewhere other than Clements anyway because ***we*** all play the same rules!)

**“There are 3 stages of play: Develop (making your hand come together), Attack (being attentive to what’s being played and called for and why), and Defend (if your hand isn’t shaping up near the end of the game you might decide to ‘dog’ the game……), or maybe taking a chance with a ‘hot’ tile if you only need one more tile yourself.” (A ‘hot’ tile is one that you *suspect* an opponent needs in order to Mah-Jongg or one that hasn’t been played previously) (A tile that’s considered ‘safe’ is one that has been thrown previously and was not called for, but even THAT is not a SURE thing as it’s a good idea to not claim a discard if it’s the first one out! ☺). “Don’t worry about winning: just get comfortable at the table. With experienced players, it’s more important to avoid disruption of the game than it is to win. Go with the flow. Relax, be patient, and the winning will come in time! Skill and winning come with practice so be patient with yourself.”**

**Hand out True/False Test #1 about 10 minutes before end of class and discuss answers. (I find this sparks questions a lot!)**

**Tom Sloper says (and I quote):**

**“The biggest mistake most novice players make is to value winning over just keeping up. When you are not yet an experienced player, remember: *It is more important to avoid disruption of the game than it is to win*. If you want to be invited back to play again, you need to keep the game moving. It can’t all be about you, right from day one. The other players want to enjoy the game, too….and they outnumber you!”**

**LESSON FOUR**

**“We will be playing some complete, normal games with more questions and answers and some strategy ideas.” (I hand out some sheets with strategy hints on them)**

**Hand out True/False Test #2 about 10 minutes before end of class and discuss answers.**

**FINALLY:**

**“If you are feeling good about playing, I would strongly encourage you to join one or both of our groups**

**at Clements (on Monday 12:00-4:00) and Denny’s (on 6th & Union) (Thursdays 12:00 lunch, 1:00 play till whenever, sometimes some of us stay till 5:00!). We play by the rules but we are really very kind and friendly! We don’t ‘get on the case’ of beginning players.”** **(e.g., maybe you exposed 3 tiles when you meant to expose 4 or vice versa).”**

**Learning to play is easy. Learning to win, however, is the tough part. There is only one way to learn to win:**

**PLAY, PLAY AGAIN AND THEN PLAY SOME MORE!**

**Here are some terrific websites to check out (hand out slips of paper):**

Tom Sloper’s website: <http://www.sloperama.com/mjfaq.html> Best site of all

National Mah Jongg League: <http://www.nationalmahjonggleague.org/>

American Mah Jongg Association: <http://www.amja.net/>

Where The Winds Blow: <http://www.wherethewindsblow.com/>

Mah Jongg game….tile matching: <http://www.mah-jongg.ch/mahjongg/mahjongg.html>. This can help with quickness in recognizing tiles on the table.

A note: I’ve tried to put important reminders to myself in red and the things I want to vocalize in blue.