

A Master in the Making (1080L)

Step 1: Before Reading Poll (Write Your Answer)

A young boy learned to play chess and is now hoping to become one of the best chess players in the world. What do you think?

With enough hard work, you can do anything.

- Do you agree or disagree?

Step 2: Article (Read the Article)



Photo credit: AP/Russell Makofsky

Tani Adewumi's smile is as winning as his chess game. Here he is with his championship trophy, which is slightly taller than he is.

NEW YORK, New York (Achieve3000, April 2, 2019). It's not every day that an 8-year-old boy receives a personal invitation from a former U.S. president to drop by for a social visit, but Tanitoluwa Adewumi (Tah-nee-ta-LOO-ah Ah-deh-WOO-mee) isn't your typical 8-year-old boy.

Tani, as his friends and family affectionately call him, caught former President Bill Clinton's attention—and the media's—in March 2019, when he won the 52nd New York State Scholastic Championships chess tournament in his age group.

Tani defeated 73 other kindergarten-to-third-grade players. Some came from well-to-do families, attended expensive private schools, and even had personal chess coaches. But they were no match for Tani, who tore through the opposition like a rook mows down pawns on a chessboard, impressively winning the championship without a single defeat.

Part of the Tani buzz is that he accomplished this extraordinary achievement only a year or so after he learned how to play chess. That's hardly enough time to master anything of consequence, let alone a time-honored game that requires enormous skill and strategy.

But that's only half the story. The other half is the stuff that dreams are made of.

Tani, you see, was homeless when he won the title. In 2017, he, his parents, and his older brother fled the country of Nigeria in Africa because violence in the area made it a dangerous place for them to live. Like millions of immigrants before them, Tani and his family came to New York City in pursuit of a better life.

A better life, however, doesn't come easily for refugees in a new land.

A pastor directed Tani's parents to a homeless shelter, where the family settled in with their few possessions. Tani's dad found work as a driver and began studying for his real estate license. Tani's mom enrolled in a home health aide training program. And Tani and his brother began attending P.S. 116, the

local elementary school. Tani endured teasing from some of his classmates about being homeless but bravely carried on.

Then came chess.

When the school's part-time chess teacher, Russell Makofsky, taught Tani the game, it was love at first move. So Tani asked his mom to sign him up for the school's chess club. After she explained to Makofsky that she couldn't afford the chess club fees, he waived them, and Tani was good to go.

But don't think that Tani is like those child prodigies who paint masterpieces the first time they pick up a brush. When Tani started playing chess, he was the lowest-rated member of the club, and when he competed in his first tournament, he had the lowest rating of any of the participants.

Tani was determined to improve, and so he did, through sheer willpower, constant practice, and strategizing. To put his achievement into perspective, Tani's international chess rating was 105 in 2018. It's currently 1587. (In chess ratings, the higher the better.) Compare that to the 2845 rating of the world's reigning grown-up chess grandmaster, Magnus Carlsen, and you suddenly realize that Tani is more than half the way to greatness.

And now for the icing on the cake: Shortly after Tani's inspiring story made headlines, Makofsky started a fundraising campaign for the Adewumis on GoFundMe, an online platform where people pledge money to support causes. Nine days later, nearly 4,800 people contributed almost \$250,000!

The Adewumis now have a two-bedroom apartment. They plan to use some of the donated money to help other African immigrants in the U.S.

As for Tani, his focus, as ever, is on his chess game, but two important dates are on his mind. The first is in May 2019, when he will participate in the national chess championships. The second is in August, when an immigration judge will review the family's request for permanent asylum in the U.S.

Tani already feels like an American, but whether he becomes one remains to be seen. One thing that is certain, however, at least in Tani's mind, is that he's going to be the youngest chess grandmaster in the world. If you doubt it, just ask him.

The Associated Press and Voice of America contributed to this story.

Video Credit: Saint Louis Chess Club, Spectrum Studios

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Dictionary

perspective (*noun*) a view that shows the level of importance of something by showing it in relation to something else

prodigy (*noun*) someone who demonstrates amazing talent at a young age

waive (*verb*) to let something pass; to decide not to require something after all

Step 3: Activity (Answer the Questions)

Question 1

What is this Article mainly about?

- (A) The attention that a young chess champion received from a former president of the United States
- (B) A young boy's difficulties adjusting to a new school and a new country after his family fled violence in Nigeria
- (C) A young boy's achievements in chess, in spite of the fact that he was new to the game and his family struggled with homelessness
- (D) The goals that a young chess champion set for himself after winning a tournament in New York

Question 2

According to the Article, what is one reason why Tani was able to become a champion chess player?

- (A) Tani got to meet grandmaster Magnus Carlsen and learn his strategies.
- (B) Tani had an incredible amount of natural talent, to the point where he was immediately rated highly and called a "prodigy."
- (C) Tani's parents devoted most of their funds to his training so that he was able to have the same advantages as his classmates.
- (D) Tani was determined to improve in the game, so he practiced a lot to better his skills.

Question 3

Which of these had **not** yet happened when this Article was written?

This question asks about when events happened. It does not ask where in the Article the events appear. Look back at the Article for clues, such as dates.

- (A) Tani and his family moved into a two-bedroom apartment.
- (B) Tani competed in the national chess championships.
- (C) Tani competed in the 52nd New York State Scholastic Championships chess tournament.
- (D) Tani and his family arrived in the United States after fleeing violence in Nigeria.

Question 4

Which is the closest **synonym** for the word *prodigy*, as it is used in the Article?

- (A) Competitor
- (B) Advocate
- (C) Genius
- (D) Enthusiast

Question 5

Which of these is a statement of fact?

- (A) It's not surprising that nearly 4,800 people donated almost \$250,000 to help support the Adewumi family.
- (B) Tani defeated 73 other players in his age group during the New York State Scholastic Championships chess tournament.
- (C) Without Russell Makofsky, Tani would not have been able to advance as a chess champion in his lifetime.
- (D) It won't be long before Tani earns an international chess rating that is higher than grandmaster Magnus Carlsen's rating of 2845.

Question 6

Which passage from the Article best supports the idea that Tani is a quick learner?

- Ⓐ Tani endured teasing from some of his classmates about being homeless but bravely carried on.
- Ⓑ Tani's dad found work as a driver and began studying for his real estate license. Tani's mom enrolled in a home health aide training program. And Tani and his brother began attending P.S. 116, the local elementary school.
- Ⓒ But they were no match for Tani, who tore through the opposition like a rook mows down pawns on a chessboard, impressively winning the championship without a single defeat. Part of the Tani buzz is that he accomplished this extraordinary achievement only a year or so after he learned how to play chess.
- Ⓓ So Tani asked his mom to sign him up for the school's chess club.

Question 7

The reader can infer from the Article that _____.

- Ⓐ Now that Tani and his family have received a great deal of money, they will be moving back to their home in Nigeria.
- Ⓑ It's unlikely that Tani will continue to win chess tournaments as he gets older and plays against more experienced players.
- Ⓒ Chess teacher Russell Makofsky placed a higher importance on Tani's desire to play the game than on the chess club's fee requirements.
- Ⓓ Tani's advancement from a low-ranked player to a tournament champion took place at a pace that is fairly typical in school chess clubs.

Question 8

The Article states:

Tani defeated 73 other kindergarten to third-grade players. Some came from well-to-do families, attended expensive private schools, and even had personal chess coaches. But they were no match for Tani, who tore through the opposition like a rook mows down pawns on a chessboard, impressively winning the championship without a single defeat. Part of the Tani buzz is that he accomplished this *extraordinary* achievement only a year or so after he learned how to play chess.

Which would be the closest **synonym** for the word *extraordinary*, as it is used above?

- Ⓐ Exceptional
- Ⓑ Routine
- Ⓒ Humorous
- Ⓓ Awkward

Step 4: After Reading Poll (Did you change your mind?)

Now that you have read the article, indicate whether you agree or disagree with this statement.

With enough hard work, you can do anything.

- Agree
- Disagree

Step 5: Thought Question (Write Your Response)

Identify the main idea of the Article, along with at least three supporting details. How did these details help you to better understand the main idea? Include facts and details from the Article in your response.