

Chapter 4 - Peeps and Cuts

Peeps and cuts are among the most common mechanisms by which weak stones arise.

The primary differences between a peep and a cut are:

- A peep's value is often almost fully realized at the moment it succeeds in forcing the opponent's connection, so that in many cases it may then profitably be (at least temporarily) "abandoned", to thereafter serve primarily as Aji.

- Most cuts result in the formation of a new (often weak) group, which thereafter must be watched and defended.

Although there is no single simplistic "rule of thumb" that can provide unerring guidance in deciding whether it's best to cut or peep in any given position, in general, and *considering only the local situation*:

**DON'T PEEP
IF A CUT SUCCEEDS**

The problem confronting the double digit Kyu player is that (s)he's typically uncertain of whether or not any given cut should succeed ! And considering that their own play is probably going to be less than perfect, in games in which the main objective is learning and improvement rather than just victory, the best strategy is to cut, and then learn from experience both how to correctly appraise that decision in advance and how to conduct the resulting fight once you're embroiled in it.

Peeps

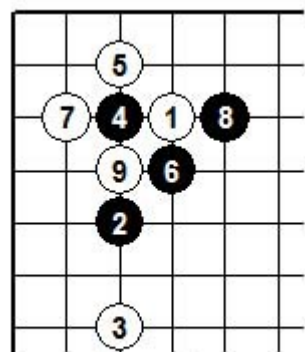


Diagram 1
Joseki

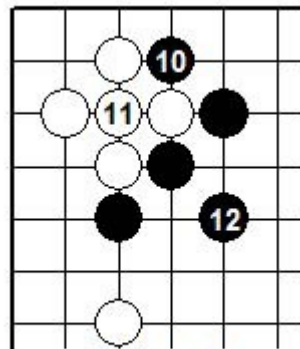


Diagram 2
Continuation

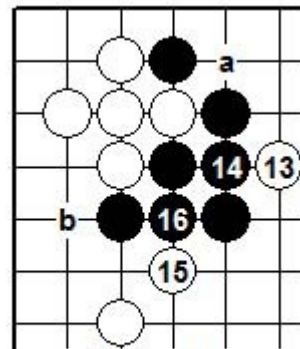


Diagram 3
White Peeps Twice

Dia 1 In this variation of a popular 3-4 point Joseki, Black plays for thickness while conceding the corner territory to White.

Dia 2 After the atari of B10, W11 connects, and then B12 makes a double “Tiger’s Mouth” virtual connection.

Dia 3 Next, the peep of W13 is a Kikashi which is answered by the connection of B14, and this is followed by the similar W15 peep, B16 connection exchange.

After this, the White corner has the miai of “a” and “b” for its life so it’s safe! And, in the absence of other nearby friendly stones to help, there is no reasonable attack that White can currently expect to successfully mount against Black’s solid enclosing wall.

So local action often ends for the moment, leaving this situation as is until later events make it clear what each side needs to do next locally.

IMPORTANT! Just because a peep has been played (and answered), it distinctly does not imply that direct use must be made of that peep stone either immediately or ever! That may in fact occur, but at least as often a peep stone will be used indirectly to attain some other desirable goal (most often as a ladder breaker), or may even simply be temporarily “abandoned” as Aji, for possible later use.

With that in mind, let’s now look again at the situation of Dia 3 and appraise the implications generated by the two peeps of W13 and 15

and their forced responses.

The first thing that we notice is that W13 is a completely isolated lone stone pressed against a solid Black position, and W15 is only a bit stronger because of its assist from W3. So both of these peep stones are, by definition, more or less weak!

In response to these peeps, we see that Black has not only been forced to add two stones of his own, but also has been forced into a position which, although thick, not only has absolutely no shape, but is also already partially enclosed and inhibited from expanding readily.

The overall assessment of the position in Dia 3 is therefore:

- On balance, Black is clearly the stronger on the outside.
- If White correctly views W13 and 15 as expendable potential sacrifices rather than as essential assets which must be maintained even at cost, for the moment White stands at least equal overall because of their presence.

Whether this Joseki integrates better into the global strategy of one side or the other depends on the position on the remainder of the board and is an issue beyond our present focus, so it will not be discussed here.

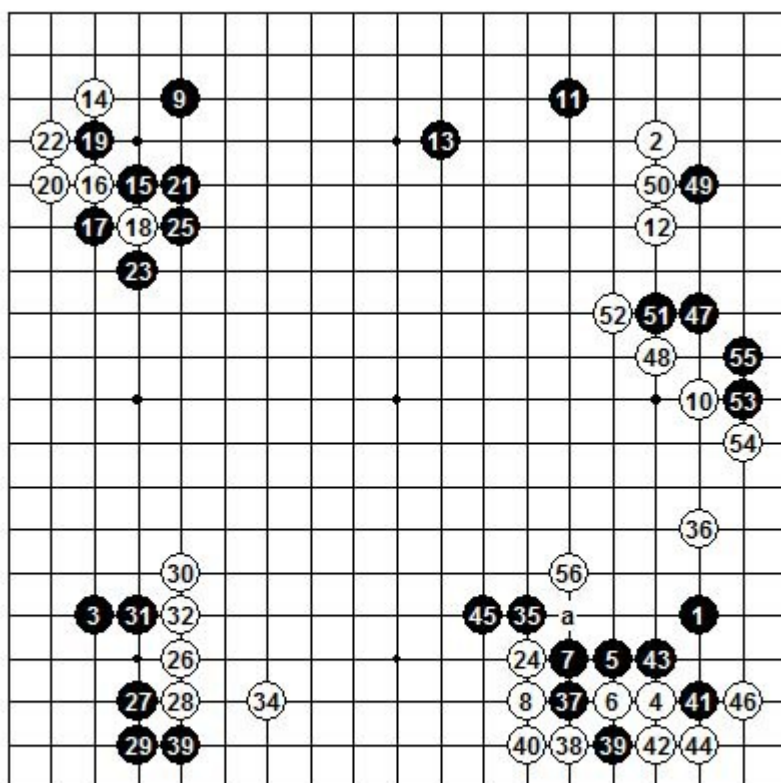


Figure 1
The Peep of W56 In Sente Is The Key To Strengthening White's Position Above,
So That He Can Then Fight Successfully
Against The Enclosed B47-55 Group On The Upper Right Edge!

Figure 1 In this early middle game between two 4D players, the key issue at the moment is the fight in the upper right that has just begun between the enclosed and still unsettled B47-55 group and the enclosing W10-54 stones, which are still lacking shape and which therefore must be strengthened before he can safely attack Black.

The solution to this dilemma that White conjured up was W56, peeping into the cutting point at "a" in Black's lower right group. Because the B1- 43 stones would be forced into a dangerous (and quite possibly disastrous) fight if cut off, that gave Black essentially no choice but to connect at "a".

Having thus helped stabilize his own weak stones in Sente, White was then able to turn his attention back to the desired attack on the weak Black group in the upper right corner. So in this position the peep was the perfect move!

Cuts

**The Typical Intention Of A Cut
Is To Permanently Separate
A Group Of Opposing Stones**

and that almost invariably means that the cutting stone(s) will subsequently have to be reinforced/supported as required.

A cut therefore typically initiates an important long term commitment.

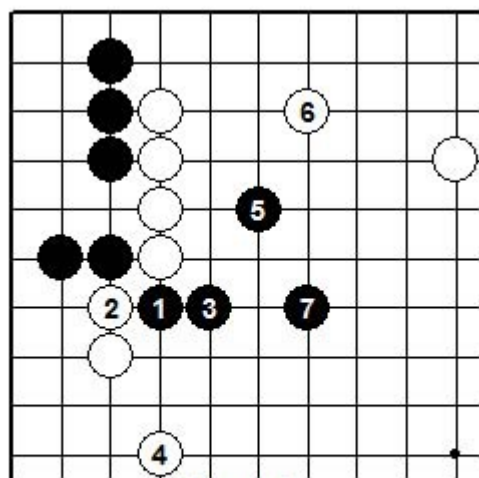


Diagram 4
The Cut Of B1 Begins A Fight
That Will Structure Much Of
The Remainder Of The Game

Diagram 4 In this position from a game between a 9D and a 7D, the hane of B1 is a typical continuation of the Joseki in the corner.

After the exchange of W2, B3, the necessary continuation thru B7 resulted in the creation of a weak Black group, in return for which White's thickness has been effectively neutralized.

Whether or not this turns out to have been good strategy by Black will depend on the followup by both sides.

**Cuts Are Also Commonly Used
To Make Shape Or To Facilitate Escape**

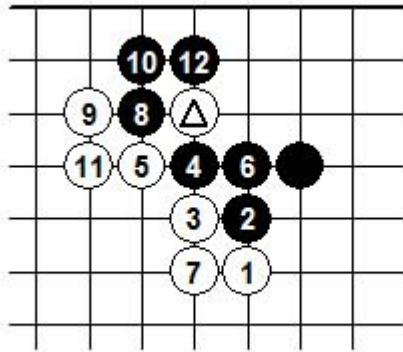


Diagram 5
Joseki

Diagram 5 The cut of B8 followed by the forced sequence thru B12 sets up the capture of the marked White stone, resulting in White's superb thickness in return for Black's securing a large corner.

Now let's look at a position in a game between two 5 D's in which making a judicious cut was the best way for a nearly trapped group to escape.

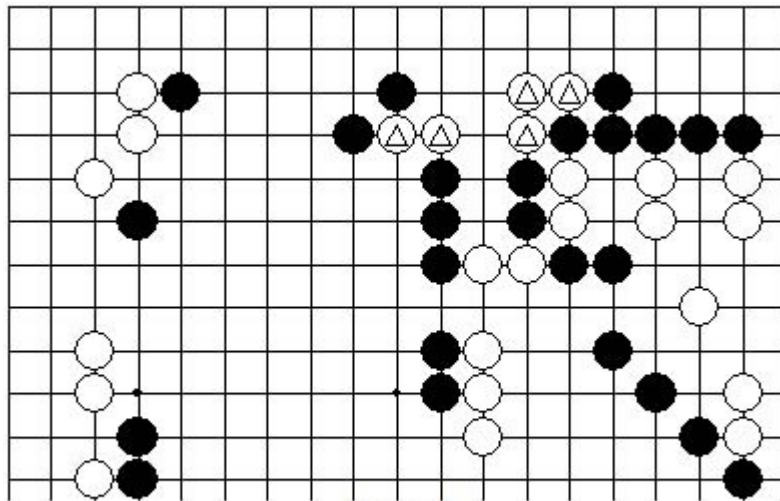


Diagram 6
How Can White Best Escape With The Marked Group?

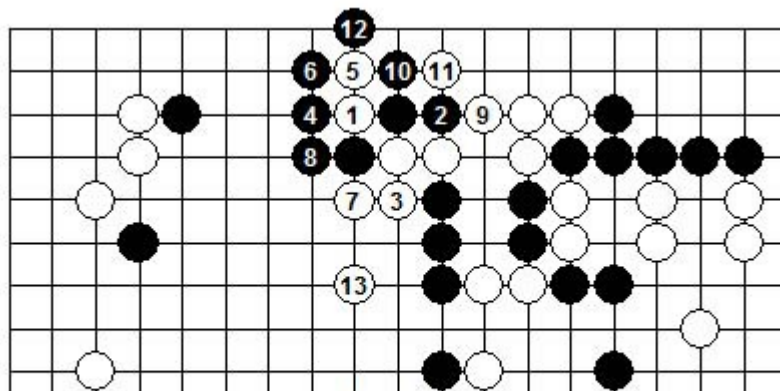


Diagram 7
Cutting And Then Sacrificing 2 Stones
Is The Best Way For The Beleaguered White Group To Escape

Diagram 7 Cutting with W1 is the way to begin.! That makes W3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 all forcing moves, sacrificing 2 stones (W1 and 5), and then moving smoothly out with W13., and leaving behind the potential for an almost certain eye at the top. Beginning instead with either W3 or W7 would allow either the connection of B1 or the extension of B10, and then White will have to flee eyeless!

The outcome of a cut will frequently not only be decisive (as in these examples), but sometimes unpredictable, at least among players at less than a very high level, with the result that:

**Making A Judicious Cut
Is Often The Most Powerful Way To Play,
And Sometimes
The Only Possible Route To Victory**

But

**Cutting Can Be
Fraught With Danger**

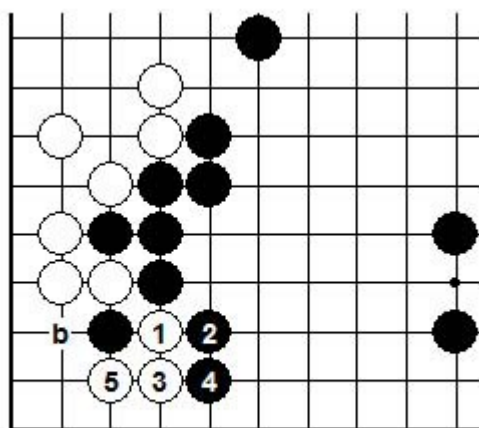


Diagram 9
What White Hopes For

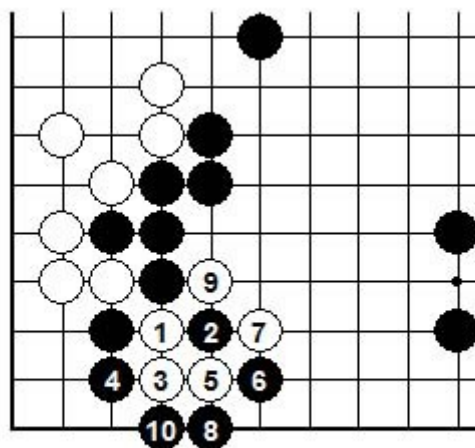


Diagram 10
What An Alert Black Will Play

Dia 9 If W1 cuts, expecting (or hoping for) this submissive B4 in response to W3, he may be in for a big surprise because ...

Dia 10 After this B4 instead, if White foolishly continues as shown here, Black has this forcing sequence (a “squeeze”) with which to ruin White’s shape. Then ...

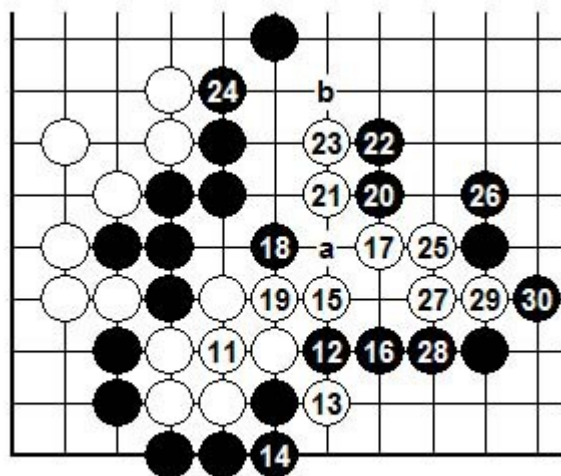


Diagram 11
One Plausible Continuation
"a" and "b" Are Miai For White's Capture

Diagram 11 After the atari of B10 forces the connection of W11 (with simply awful shape), the exchange of W13 for B14 is necessary to allow W15 to be an atari, which then forces B16 and gives White time for W17 to move out.

This diagram shows one continuation after the plausible diagonal move of W17. Unfortunately for White, it fails. But there are lots of chances for Black to go wrong in the resulting fight, so White may well live instead if Black plays weakly.

White's problem is that even if he escapes after W15, the outside strength that Black will build up while attacking his ever growing weak group should doom his overall game prospects! On the other hand, if Black isn't a particularly strong fighter, or if this sequence is used by White as ko Aji, it might still be very dangerous for Black.

So on balance, unless White is a particularly strong fighter or believes that Black is an especially weak one, W1 at "b" in Dia 9 instead of the cut is objectively the better way for White to play. The problem is that in most global situations that move won't be Sente, so it must be timed correctly!

Cuts And Ladders

Cuts frequently give rise to a ladder. In those cases, wherever feasible the “rule” is

**Capture Any Cutting Stone(s)
As Soon As Possible**

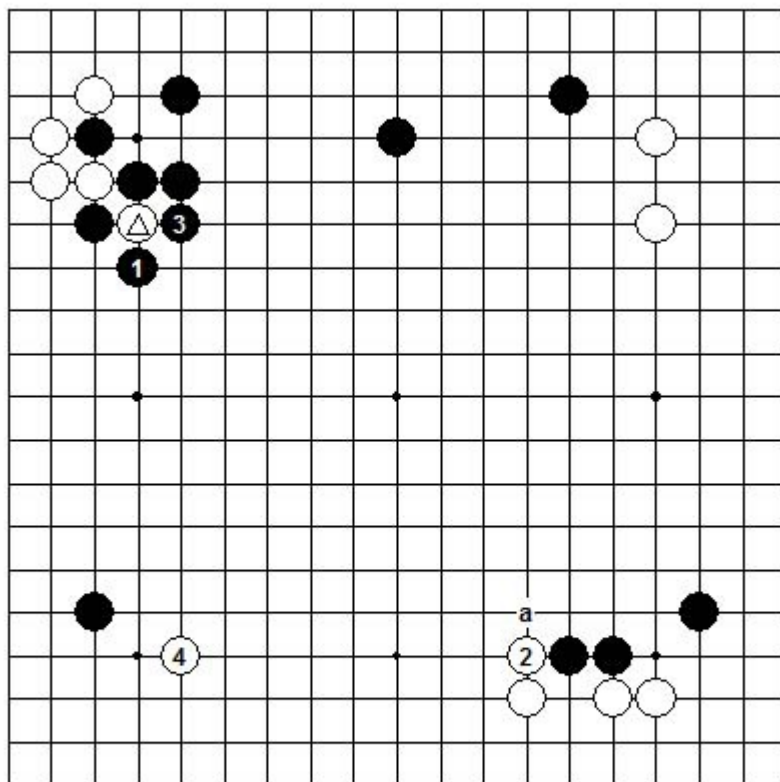


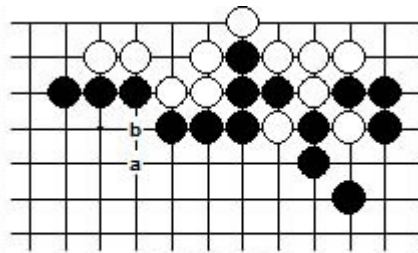
Diagram 12
Best Is For B3 To Capture The Cutting Stone Immediately!

Diagram 12 When B1 ataris the marked White cutting stone, it sets up a ladder which favors Black because it runs into the Black stones in the lower right corner.

Then W2 is a ladder breaker! But instead of playing the natural appearing B“a”, which would reinstate the ladder, Black’s best response is to immediately capture the White stone with B3, removing its dangerous Aji, perfecting his thickness, and thereby strengthening his now nearly complete moyo on the upper side.

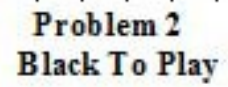
That this allows the excellent W4 is regrettable, but unavoidable.

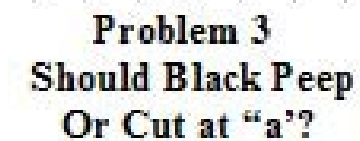
Chapter 4 Problems



Problem 1
Should White Peep? Or Cut?

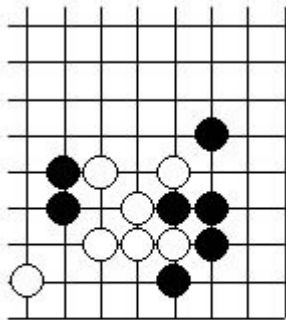
Problem 1 In this position the key question is: Should White peep at “a”, cut at “b”, or neither?





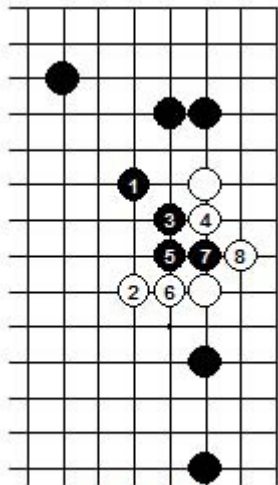
Problem 4 In this position from a 3 stone handicap game between a 6D and a 3D, W1 has just been played to secure his bottom territory.

Problem 4



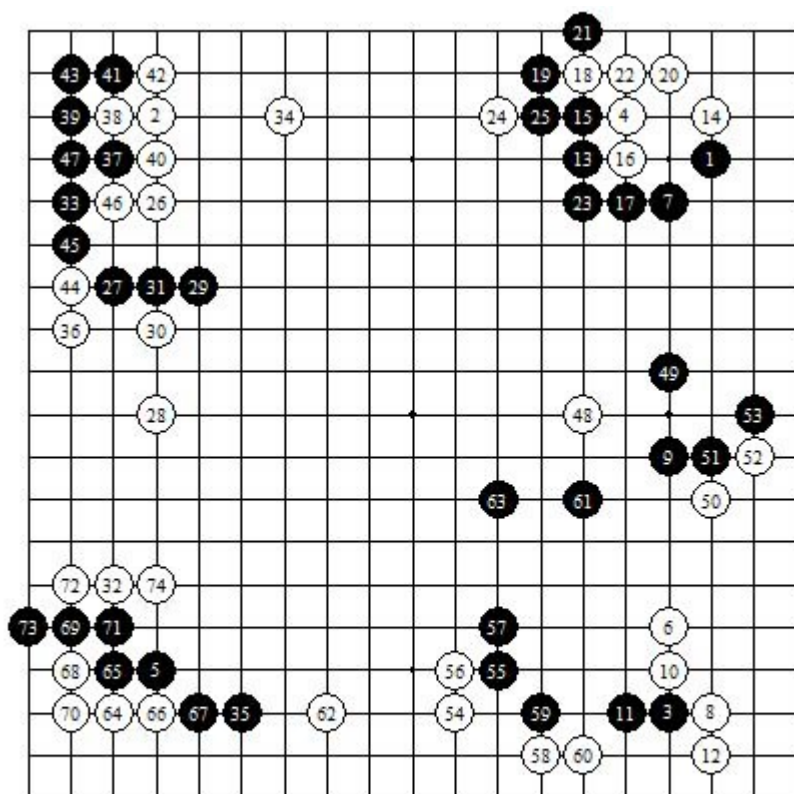
Problem 5
White To Play.

Problem 5 What's White's big play here?



Problem 6
Black To Play

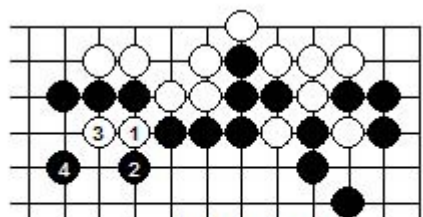
Problem 6 How can Black best exploit the cutting points in White's position?



Problem 7
 Motoki Noguchi 7D - Fan Hui 2P
 What's Black's essential Play Here?

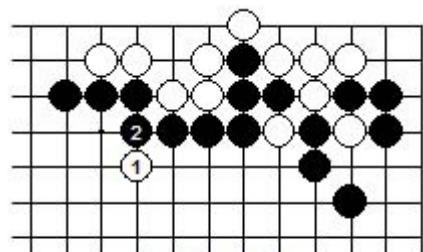
Chapter 4 Problems – Solution

Problem 1



Solution 1A
Cutting Would Be A Major Mistake

Solution 1A Cutting would be a major mistake that would only increase Black's thickness, because the cutting stones would be easily caught in Geta as shown.



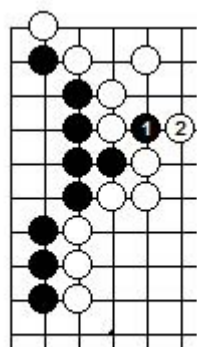
Solution 1B
White Should Peep

Solution 1B Correct is for W1 to peep into Black's cutting point, forcing B2 to connect.

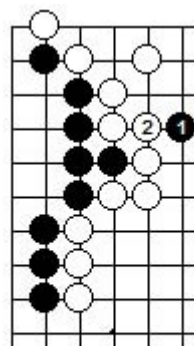
After this, W1 may later turn out to be a useful aid to any weak White group below, while B2 has only trivially added to an already strong Black formation.

In some situations, it's best to leave the decision to cut or peep for later when circumstances might make it clearer which course of action is preferable. But in the game in which this position arose, as is frequently true, getting W1 on the board in Sente immediately was highly desirable.

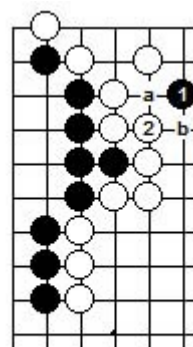
Problem 2



Solution 2A
Cut Infeasible



Solution 2B
Inferior Peep



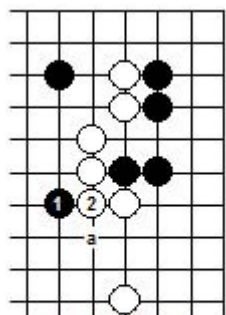
Solution 2C
Best Peep

Solution 2A The cut is clearly infeasible, because W2 easily captures.

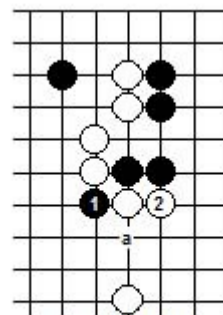
Solution 2B This peep is inferior, because after W2 connects White has good shape, while B1 has only 3 liberties and no good followup.

Solution 2C This is the best peep, because when W2 connects B1 is not only on White's shape point but also still has all 4 of its liberties, and this can make the difference between winning and losing any later fight involving this Black stone. Of course if White should mistakenly answer at "a" instead of 2, then B"b" is available as a big Ko threat to force W2 after all, and that's worse for White than this diagram. If W"b" in response to B1 it may be feasible and/or best to simply tenuki, leaving B1 behind as Aji, or it may be productive to reinforce it. But in any event, it was still ideally placed.

Problem 3



Solution 3A
Terrible For Black

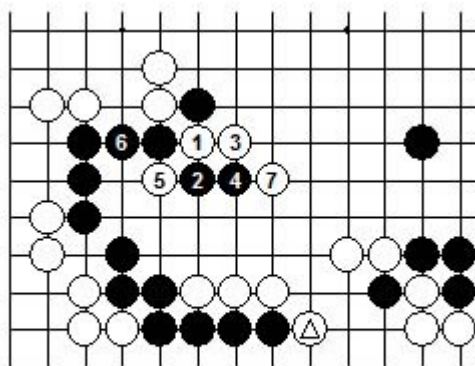


Solution 3B
The Cut Is Correct!

Solution 3A Peeping with B1 here or at "a" would be simply awful for Black, because the connected White stones are then very strong, while B1 becomes an almost worthless stone plastered against a strong opposing formation. Such moves mainly help the opponent, and so are called "thank you" moves!

Solution 3B Correct is to cut with B1, provided Black has assessed that it will have good prospects in any resulting fight! W2 or W "a" to follow is almost mandatory, but in either case White is separated. What will develop next will depend on other nearby stones of both colors, the full board position, the strength of the players, and their strategy.

Problem 4

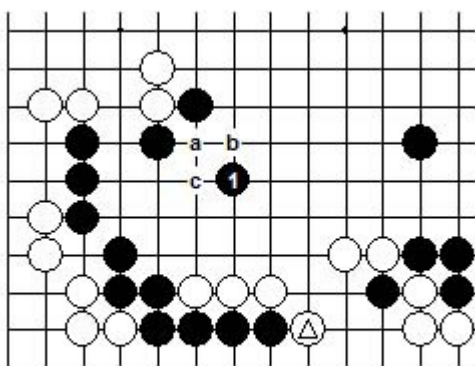


Solution 4A

The Cut of W1 Would Put Black In Trouble

Solution 4A The threat of the cut of W1 here is extremely dangerous for Black, and cannot be permitted!

If this cut is allowed, after the sequence thru W7 Black's entire position here would be in serious trouble! So ...



Solution 4B

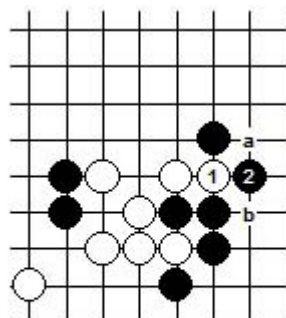
B1 Is The Best Way To Prevent The Cut

Solution 4B Black must play immediately to prevent that dangerous cut!.

The solid connection of B“a” obviously works, but is inferior not only because it doesn't extend Black's position, but because it also lacks eyeshape. And making a “Tiger's Mouth” at either “b” or “c” is also not best because it would only serve to induce a White peep on the complementary point, with (slight) advantage to White. So B1 here is the ideal answer, both extending and defending.

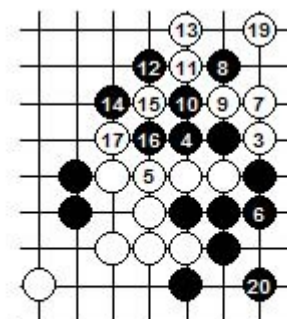
After this, if W“a” cuts, B“b” will capture the cutting stone.

Problem 5



Solution 5A
W! Sets Up
Twin Cutting Points

Solution 5A Beginning with the push of W1 is correct! The only conceivable response is the block of B2, but that leaves Black with the two dangerous cutting points at “a” and “b”!



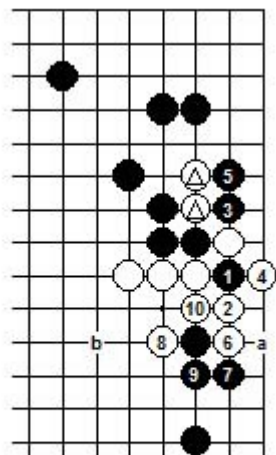
Solution 5B
Continuation
(B18 Connects @ 15)

Solution 5B In the game from which this position was taken White’s choice (based on the global position) was to cut with W3 at “a”.

If Black then gives atari to W3 via B7, that would allow the counter atari of W6, followed by losing the corner to White. So Black played B6, allowing W7 as shown.

Then with the second cut of W11 followed by the sequence thru W19, White makes a nice profit, while Black has to go back to secure his life in the corner with B20 while leaving his 7 outside stones with bad shape and uncertain prospects. So White stands much the better here.

Problem 6

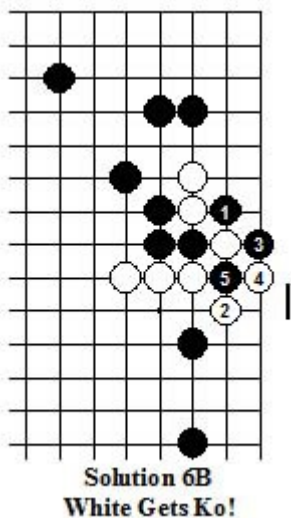


Solution 6A
White Is Only
Minimally Damaged

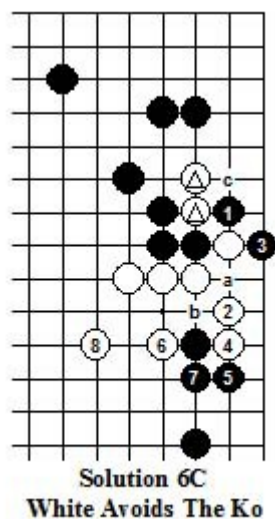
Solution 6 A There are twin cutting points on the second line available for Black to exploit.

If B1 here, then the atari of W2 on the outside is to be expected. After the counter atari of B3, the capture of the sacrifice B1 by W4 is natural and necessary.

Then B5 virtually assures the capture of the two marked Whites. After that, with the sequence thru W10 the bulk of White's force is essentially safe because White not only has free access to the open center, but "a" or "b" are miai to secure two eyes.



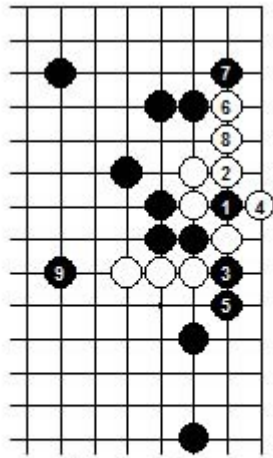
Solution 6 B Since that variation takes profit but doesn't apply much pressure to White, Black will undoubtedly prefer to cut on the other side with this B1 instead.>br>Next, if W2 here, the atari of B3 is to be expected if Black has enough favorable Aji elsewhere on the board. Then W4 will induce the capture of B5 to create a big Ko.



Solution 6 C But White need not become involved in that Ko fight if he prefers not to! Instead, with the sequence thru W8 shown here, he can move smoothly out into the open center with good shape, with the miai of "a" and "b" left behind to assure his connectivity to W2 and 4.

And if and when the connection of W"a" gets played, B"c" will be necessary to assure that the two marked Whites remain Black's captives.

On balance, this would seem to be the preferred way for White to play, but...

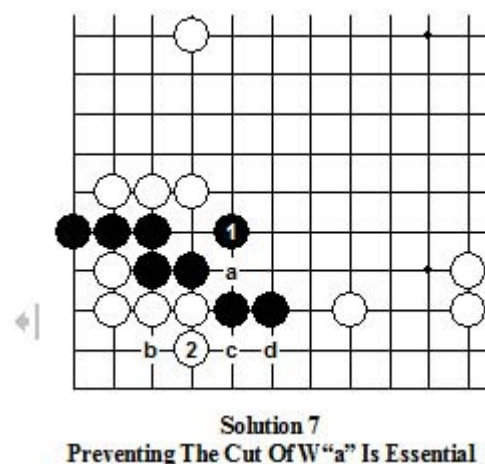


Solution 6D
Actual Game
Continuation

Solution 6 D In the actual game in which this position arose, White followed this variation instead, opting for the profit his live group took, and leaving for later the problem of what to do with his now classically weak 3 stone string after B9 capped it!

Although B9 was both big and very threatening, the likely outcome of the center fight that will follow if White plays to save the 3 stones isn't clear, so it's hard to accurately evaluate which alternative Solution would ultimately have been globally best for both sides.

Problem 7



Solution 7 W48 was a Ladder Breaker! Consequently, preventing the cut of W “a” became absolutely essential, and B1 is a much safer way to do that than via a Geta move, and much better shape than a hard connection!

And it's not Gote, because once B1 makes Black safely connected and strong, the White corner is vulnerable!

Then if Black is allowed to continue with B2, W“b”, B“c”, the corner is dead! So White must defend immediately.

White could expand his corner slightly via W^c, B^d, W2, but although that would nominally be Sente it was nevertheless unpalatable because B^d would then have undercut the not too strong White formation to its right.

So White instead prudently chose to live in the corner in Gote via W2.