Triangulated Polygons and Frieze Patterns

LA Math Circle [*]

October 27, 2019

1 Useful Patterns and Formulas

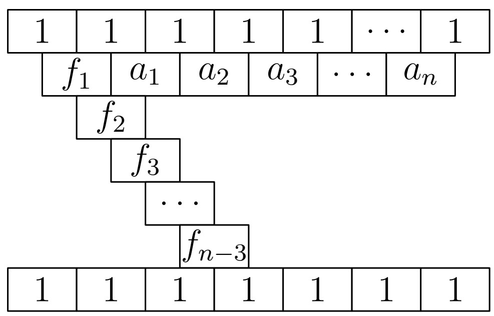

Figure 1: Selected elements of a frieze pattern of order n

Problem 8

(a) Say for now that $n = 8$.
In the above picture, say the diagonal is filled in, that is, $f_1, \dots, f_5$ are fixed. If we assume this can be extended to *some* frieze pattern, is the rest of the frieze pattern determined uniquely? Can you find formulas for $a_1, \dots, a_5$ in terms of $f_1, \dots, f_5$?

(b) In that same picture, say that $a_1, \dots, a_5$ are fixed. Is the rest of the frieze pattern determined uniquely? Can you find formulas for $f_1, \dots, f_5$ in terms of $a_1, \dots, a_5$?

Problem 9 Assume $n \geq 4$. Defining $a_1, \dots, a_n$ as above, prove that $a_r a_{r-1} > 1$.

Problem 10 We define the *period* of a frieze pattern to be the least positive integer p such that each row repeats every p numbers. In particular, in a pattern of period p, $a_k = a_{k+p}$. The period of a frieze pattern of order n has period p dividing n, and you should assume this for now, but we will not prove it yet.

(a) Determine the period of each frieze pattern in Figure 2.

(b) In Section 2.1, we saw that all frieze patterns of order 5 have either period 5 or period 1. Verify that in the examples from part (a), the period divides the order of the frieze pattern.

[*] Adapted by Aaron Anderson from Conway and Coxeter

Problem 11 For what values of n does the period of an order n frieze pattern have to be strictly less than n?

Problem 12 As we've shown, the second row of a frieze pattern of order n can be expressed in the form $a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_n, a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_n, \ldots$. Let the following rows be given by $b_1, b_2, \ldots,$ $c_1, c_2, \ldots,$ and so on. If the repeating sequence $a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_n$ is replaced with $1, a_1 + 1, a_2, \ldots, a_{n-1}, a_n + 1$, as in the following diagram, this frieze pattern can be turned into a frieze pattern of order $n + 1$. Solve for the ?s in that frieze pattern, and describe the changes that result. We call this new frieze pattern an *expansion* of the original.

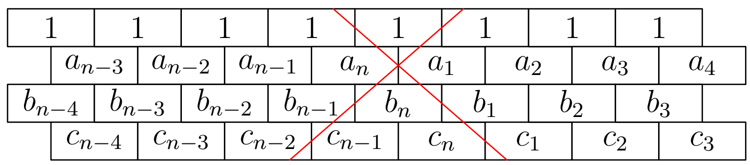

Figure 2: The first 4 rows of the original frieze pattern

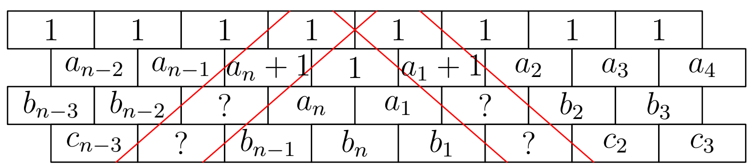

Figure 3: The first 4 rows of the expansion

2 Now with Integers: Quiddity Cycles

We now have several examples of unimodular frieze patterns of numbers, and you may have noticed that several consist entirely of positive natural numbers. We'd like to focus on these now.

We've already observed that in a frieze pattern of order n with only positive numbers, a sequence of n consecutive elements of the second row (immediately below the top row of 1s) determines the whole pattern uniquely. Conway and Coxeter call these numbers, $a_1, \ldots, a_n$, which we know repeat to form the entire second row, a *Quiddity*[1] *cycle*.

Problem 13

(a) Does every quiddity cycle include at least one 1?

(b) Show that every frieze pattern of integers an expansion of another frieze pattern of integers.

(c) If $a_1, \ldots, a_{n+1}$ is a quiddity cycle coming from the second row of frieze pattern A, and A is the expansion of frieze pattern B which has quiddity cycle $b_1, \ldots, b_n$, solve for $b_1, \ldots, b_n$ in terms of $a_1, \ldots, a_{n+1}$ and vice versa. We call $a_1, \ldots, a_{n+1}$ the expansion of $b_1, \ldots, b_n$.

[1]Quiddity means something like "essence," this sequence is the essence of the frieze pattern.

Problem 14 Starting with the quiddity cycle $1, 1, 1$ of order 3, repeatedly calculate the expansion of that cycle a few times to create some possible quiddity cycles of orders 4 and 5. How many different quiddity cycles can you and the people at your table find? (We consider two quiddity cycles the same if they are mirror images of one another, or if the infinite sequence they make when repeated is the same. For instance, $1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3$ is basically the same as $2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1$ or $3, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1$.)

2.1 Triangulated Polygons

A *triangulated n-gon* is an n-gon which has been partitioned into triangles by drawing $n-2$ nonintersecting diagonals.

Problem 15

(a) Draw and count all triangulations of a triangle, a square, and a pentagon (up to rotations and reflections). Do the numbers of triangulations this bear any similarity to your answers from Problem 12, part (b)?

(b) Can you find a correspondence between the quiddity cycles of order n and the triangulations of n-gons?

3 Challenge Problems

Problem 16 Can you find the triangulated polygon corresponding to each of the frieze patterns of integers so far mentioned in the worksheet?

Problem 17 We will now extend the formulas for Problem 8 from that frieze pattern of order 8 to a frieze pattern of order n. For any index i, let g_i be the entry immediately above and to the right of f_i, and use the notation $g_{-1} = -1$ and $f_{-1} = g_0 = 0$, and $f_0 = 1$. Similarly let $f_{n-1} = g_n = 0$ and $f_n = g_{n+1} = -1$. Note that assigning these values would satisfy the unimodular rule.

(a) Define $(r, s) = f_r g_s - f_s g_r$. Prove the following identities:

$$(r, r) = 0$$

$$(r, s) + (s, r) = 0$$

$$(r, s)(t, u) + (r, t)(u, s) + (r, u)(s, t) = 0$$

$$(-1, s) = f_s, (0, s) = g_s$$

(b) Show that the following frieze pattern is unimodular:

$(0,1)$	$(1,2)$	$(2,3)$	$(3,4)$	$(4,5)$	
$(-1,1)$	$(0,2)$	$(1,3)$	$(2,4)$	$(3,5)$	$(4,6)$
$(-1,2)$	$(0,3)$	$(1,4)$	$(2,5)$	$(3,6)$	
$(-1,3)$	$(0,4)$	$(1,5)$	$(2,6)$	$(4,7)$	
$\cdots$	$\cdots$	$\cdots$	$\cdots$		

(c) Use part (b) to write an equation for a_s in terms of $f_1, \ldots, f_{n-2}$.

(d) Find a recurrence relation for $f_1, \dots, f_{n-2}$ given $a_1, \dots, a_n$. If you know the word *determinant*, use it to find a closed-form expression for f_s given $a_1, \dots, a_n$.

(e: EXTRA CHALLENGE) Using the identities that we have for the expression (r, s), prove that $(r, s) = (r + n, s + n)$, and thus that an order n frieze pattern is periodic with period dividing n.

Problem 18

(a) For which n does there exist a frieze pattern of order n that only contains Fibonacci numbers?

(b) If a frieze pattern of integers does not consist only of Fibonacci numbers, must it contain a 4?

Problem 19 What equation relates $a_0, a_1, \dots, a_{n-3}$, where $a_0 = f_1$?