Examples of standard openings and why they make sense

The Italian Game; many openings start by moving the “King’s pawn”

White Black
1.  e4 e5 White starts with the King’s pawn
2.  Nf3 Nc6
3.  Bc4

Comments on White’s moves:
Prepare for castling on the King’s side
Begin to threaten Black’s weak f7 pawn (only the King is protecting that pawn, and White’s bishop and knight can both threaten it).
White’s bishop hinders Black moving a pawn to d5
Black could continue with the Two Knights Defense, … Nf6, but that tends to make for a complicated game.
Instead, Black might want to play Bc5.
Then White may continue with c3, hoping to later move a pawn to d4, which would give White a big advantage, but the less aggressive move d3 is a safe thing to do, since the pawns protect one another and White’s bishop can easily move out.

Ruy Lopez; The Spanish Game

White Black
1.  e4 e5 This is a King’s pawn opening
2.  Nf3 Nc6
3.  Bb5 Nf6 Compared to the Italian game, here White moves the bishop further
4.  0-0 Nxe4
5.  d4 Nd6
6.  Bxc6 dxc6
7.  dxe5 Nf5
8.  Qxd8+ Kxd8 Trading queens
9.  Nc3 Bd7
10.  h3

Queen’s pawn opening

White Black
1.  d4 d5 White starts with the Queen’s pawn
2.  e3 Nf6
3.  Bd3 c5
4.  c3 Nbd7
5.  f4 g6
6.  Nf3 Bg7
7.  0-0 0-0 White and Black have castled.

This is a “closed” position—many pawns, not much room to move.

http://www.50chessgames.freeserve.co.uk/indexsmall.html – excellent for beginners. Click the buttons, see the pieces move, read the annotations, see the chess notation. Once it loads, in the navigation bar to the left, select games. There are 50 games, mostly (if not all) games that the authors played themselves. Click forward to move the pieces.

http://www.chessdoctor.com/chessdownloads/ has good advice, but no graphics

Google “annotated chess games” to find more! Also read http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess