

On your marks

The following activity is simple to set up and could be a useful introduction into talking about the story of Christmas with a children's group. It would work well as an icebreaker to begin a midweek session or as an end-of-term story-game either for your Sunday group or in the classroom.

Get set

You will need a set of tangrams - one for each child or one for a group who decides to work together. A tangram is an ancient Chinese puzzle game that has presented endless challenges to children and adults alike over thousands of years. A tangram is a perfect square that is divided up into the following seven shapes:

- two large right-angle triangles (which create half the square together)
- one smaller right-angle triangle (half the size of the first two)
- two even smaller right-angle triangles (which are each half the size again of the previous single triangle)
- a small square (whose sides are the length of the sides of the last mentioned triangle (n.b. not the hypotenuse of this triangle)
- a small parallelogram (whose longer side is the length of the hypotenuse of the last mentioned triangles!)

Go!

Cut up the tangram squares into its seven pieces and give a set to each child or small group.

The challenge is to put these shapes (known as 'tans') together in such a way that a key image for the Christmas story is created. All seven pieces should be used for each image and the pieces should not overlap but should at the very least touch each other at some point. It is possible in fact to create 1600 outlines with these basic seven tans, so the children will no doubt come up with all sorts of further possibilities.

Here are the ones to aim for initially to help you tell the Christmas story:

star; manger; angel; woman kneeling; shepherd running; wise man bowing; donkey; camel; sheep; crown; candle burning.

Maybe each group or individual could be set one image to work on. When the images have been completed, they could be stuck down onto card and then all brought together for your storytelling or for a display. Using differently coloured tangram sets would add to the effect.

Have fun!