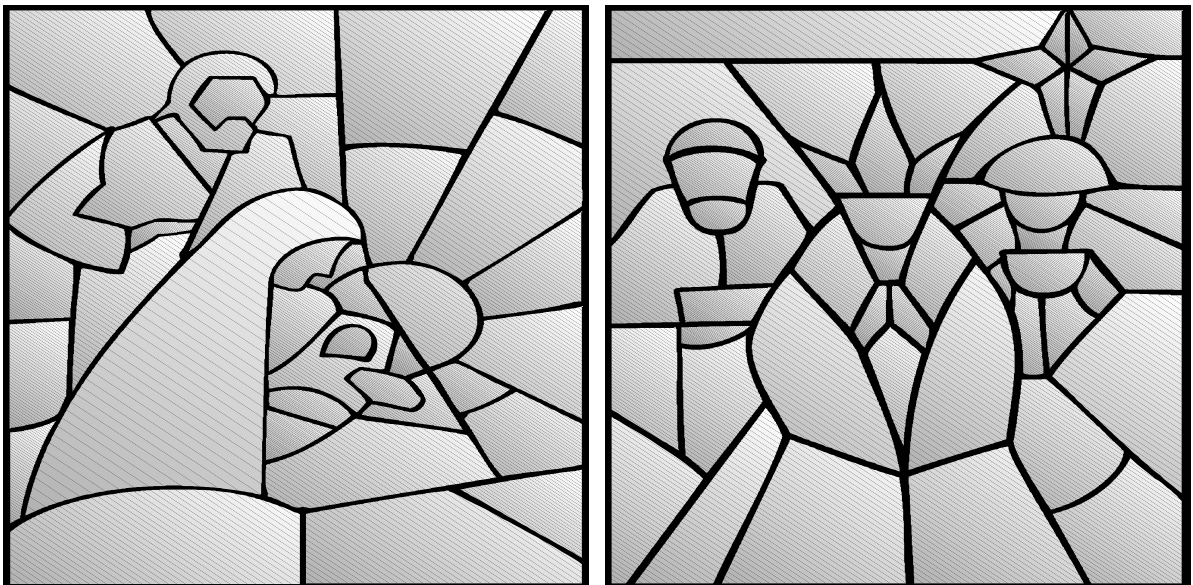


Christmas Themes for the Early Years

A resource book of ideas for Christmas craft, tree decorations, recipes, online activities and much more.



For ages 4-8

Written by Judy Gabrovec. Illustrated by Melinda Parker.

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Published by Ready-Ed Publications (2004) P.O. Box 276 Greenwood, W.A. 6024

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ISBN 1 86397 267 6

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Background Information

Christmas Symbols and Traditions

The Christmas Tree

In pre-Christian times in the northern hemisphere bonfires were lit to represent the hidden sun, which was often obscured by clouds during the northern winter season. The pine tree, which was originally covered in candles, and in modern times is decorated with sparkling lights, evolved from the bonfire tradition. The first tree decorated in Britain was supposedly created by Prince Albert.

Bells

The ringing of bells at Christmas time dates back to pagan midwinter celebrations, when evil spirits were driven away by the ringing of bells and other noise like singing and shouting. Today church bells ring throughout the world on Christmas Eve to welcome in the spirit of Christmas rather than to drive the evil spirits away.

Candles

The use of candles during Christmas time also originated in pagan mid-winter ceremonies where light was thought to drive away the forces of cold and darkness. In the Christian community, the lighting of candles symbolises Jesus as the light of the world.

Tinsel

One explanation of tinsel's origin is that spider webs spun during the night glistened like tinsel in the early morning dew. Children may observe this on trees in the school yard, although the effect is dependent on the climate.

Mistletoe and Holly

These hardy plants were used to decorate homes in the northern hemisphere winters when greenery was scarce. Mistletoe was sacred to ancient Druids as a symbol of eternal life but the Romans valued it as a symbol of peace. The custom of kissing under the mistletoe was also a Roman custom.

Bon Bons or Crackers

These started as a wrapped gift of sugared almonds, given as a sign of peace. An Englishman later added messages, riddles and trinkets, and saltpetre strips to create the excitement of an explosion.

Candy Cane

Candy cane was made in the U.S.A. by a candy maker who used white to symbolise the Virgin Birth and the shape of the letter 'J' to represent Jesus' name.

Christmas Cards

The practice of sending Christmas cards to friends was started by Sir Henry Cole in England in 1843. The first commercial card was designed by J.C. Horsley and 1000 copies were sold in London. The idea of Christmas cards have spread all over the world with the themes of the cards being as varied as are Christmas customs around the world.

Mince Pies

Mince pies have been prepared as Christmas treats for as nearly as long as Christmas has existed. The pies represent the treasures that the Three Wise Men brought to Jesus in the stable. They are a symbol of wealth and greatness.

Christmas Cake

The Christmas cake is a relatively new Christmas tradition. Prince Albert (1819-1861) wanted a special treat for his children for Christmas dinner and he chose a plum cake which was decorated with white icing and snowmen, very much like our present day Christmas cake.

Poinsettias

Poinsettias are popular because of their red leaves. A Mexican legend tells the story of a young girl who had no gift to take to the crib on Christmas Eve. In the churchyard she found an angel carved of stone. The carving was overgrown with weeds and as the girl bent to clear them away she heard a voice that told her to take the weeds to Jesus. As she walked towards the crib, the tops of the weeds turned bright red like fire. Ever since, people have grown poinsettias for Christmas.

Christmas Stockings

The tradition of hanging Christmas stockings began with St Nicholas, who was a Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor in the 4th Century. St Nicholas tossed three sacks of gold down the chimney of a man who was so poor that he could not keep his three unmarried daughters. One of the bags fell into a stocking that was hanging by the fireplace.

Santa Dolls

Santa Sock Doll

Santa or Father Christmas is the most well known of the gift bringers at Christmas.

Materials

- ❖ stencil for feet and hands
- ❖ assortment of buttons
- ❖ lightweight red card
- ❖ needle and thread
- ❖ cotton wool balls
- ❖ beans or rice
- ❖ white ribbon
- ❖ a red sock
- ❖ scissors
- ❖ red felt
- ❖ glue
- ❖ pins

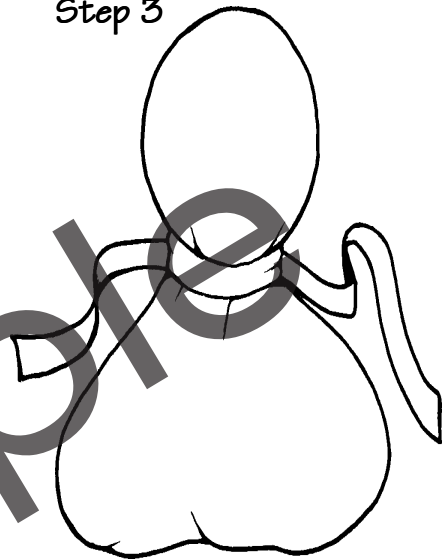
Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



How to make Santa from a sock

1. Cut the sock off at the heel.
2. Fill the sock with beans or rice and sew up the open edge.
3. Tie the white ribbon close to the toe end of the sock to make a neck.
4. Cut the feet and hands out of the red card using the stencil provided and glue or sew onto the body.
5. Use some red felt to make a hat and attach to Santa's head.
6. Use buttons for eyes and nose.
7. Decorate with cotton wool around the edge of the hat and cuffs and to make a beard.

Steps 5-7



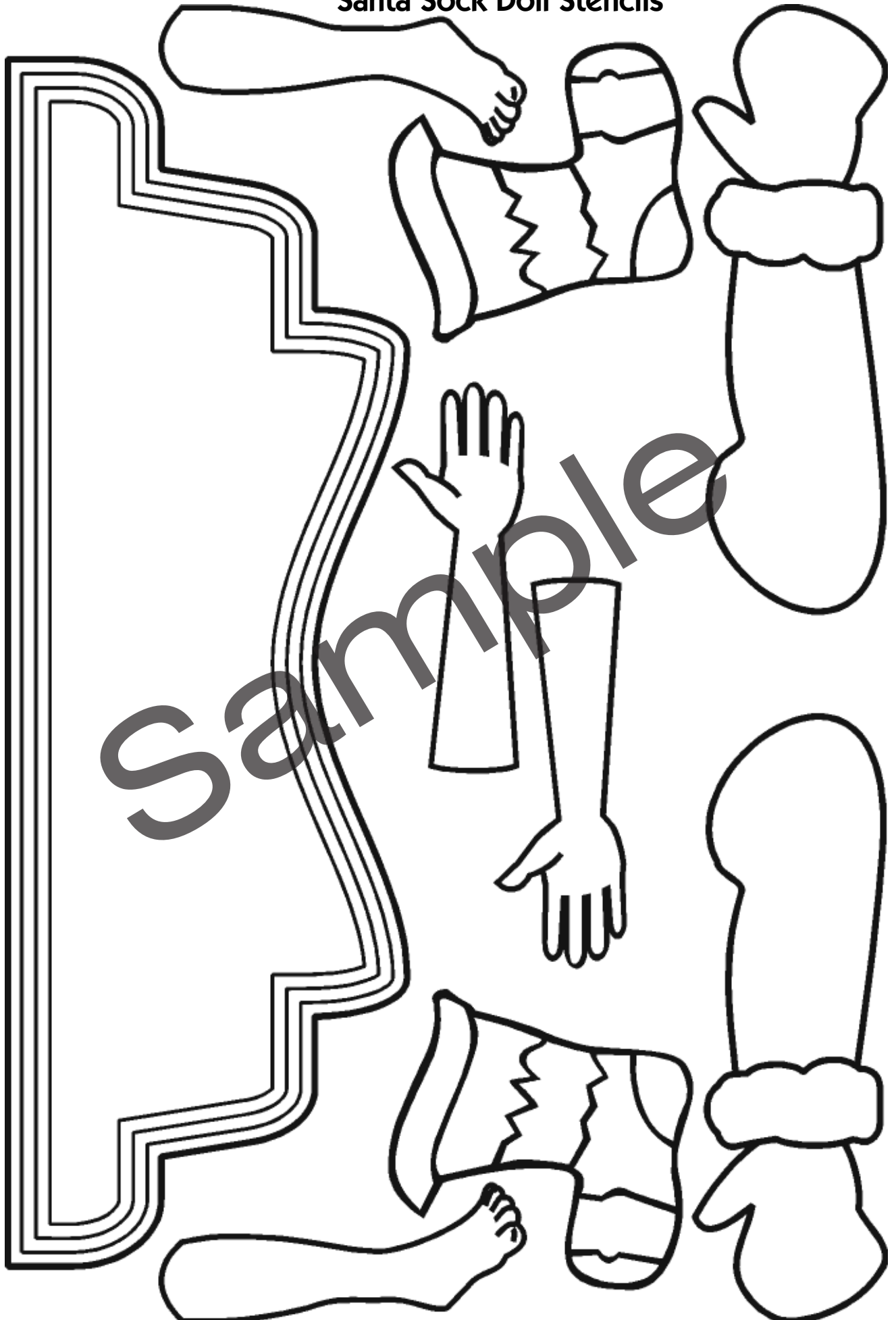
Other suggestions

Angels and other Christmas shapes can be also be made from old socks. Stencils for the parts needed for this are on the following page.

Santa Dolls

Christmas Craft

Santa Sock Doll Stencils



Advent Calendars

Pyramid Advent Calendar

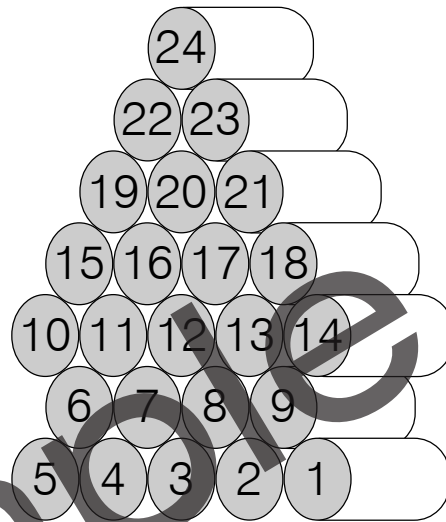
'Advent Calendars' are a special way of building the excitement of Christmas approaching. The countdown to Christmas is marked by small gifts or sweets.

Materials

- ❖ 24 cardboard cylinders
- ❖ small trinkets, toys or sweets
- ❖ coloured paper
- ❖ glue or elastic bands

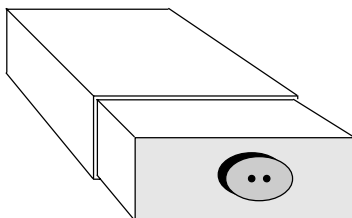
Making the Advent Calendar

1. A small trinket, toy or sweet is placed in each cylinder and covered with lightweight coloured paper.
2. The cylinders are glued together in the shape of a pyramid.
3. Each day one of the cylinders is opened to reveal a surprise.



Other suggestions

- ❖ A similar advent calendar could be made with a collection of matchboxes.
- ❖ Each box can be individually named so as each child has a turn they can choose a small gift that has been chosen individually to suit them.



1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24

Advent Calendars

Santa's Advent Calendar

Count down the days to Christmas by watching Santa's fluffy white beard grow or disappear.

Materials

- ❖ stencil of Santa (on following page)
- ❖ 24 cotton balls
- ❖ crayons or paints
- ❖ glue
- ❖ firm card

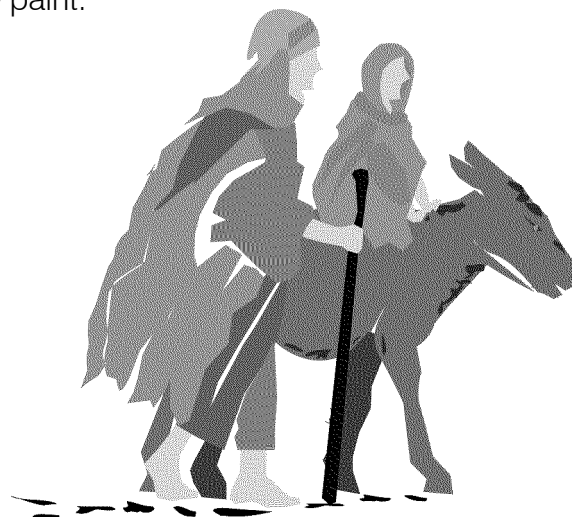


How to make Santa's Advent Calendar

1. Colour in the Santa stencil, glue on firm card and cut out.
2. From December 1st, glue one cotton ball on Santa's beard for every passing day until Christmas Day.

Other suggestions

- ❖ To enlarge the Santa stencil do an overhead projector copy. Using the overhead projector, project the stencil onto a large piece of white paper. Trace the picture of Santa onto the white paper. This could be used as a class Santa Advent Calendar.
- ❖ Instead of adding cotton wool balls, they could be already attached, to be removed and revealing a message to the child underneath. A quick and easy way to attach the cotton wool is with small pieces of velcro. This means that the Santa Advent Calendar can be used again.
- ❖ Another simple Advent calendar can be made by gluing 24 pegs to a piece of firm cardboard. Put a joke, puzzle or a message into 24 small envelopes. Peg each envelope onto the cardboard. The pegs, backboard and envelopes can be decorated or simply sprayed with gold spray paint.



Santa's Advent Calendar Stencil





