

Topics: Holidays,
Decoration, Symbolism

Materials List

- ✓ Sticky-backed, star-shaped stencils
(Optional:
Substitute other shapes)
- ✓ Mylar
- ✓ Scissors
- ✓ Hole punch
- ✓ Ornament hooks

This activity can be used to support the teaching of:

- Traditions & culture
(National Curriculum for Social Studies: Theme 1, Culture)
- Seasonal night sky
(Next Generation Science Standards: Grade 5, Earth and Space Science 1-2)

Shiny, Stencil Ornaments

The Quickest, Prettiest Decorations this Side of the New Year



Students create quick and easy decorations from stencils for winter celebrations.

To Do and Notice

1. Bend the edge of the self-adhesive stencil to expose and peel off backing.
2. Press the stencil onto the mylar to adhere.
3. Cut off any excess or undesired areas of stencil.
4. Punch a hole at an appropriate location in the decoration and hang as desired.

The Content Behind the Activity

Cultures around the world and throughout time have used the star as a symbol of winter. Mysterious but never changing and predictable, the stars have often represented hope for the future. Tracking the planets (“wandering stars”) and predicting astronomical events (e.g. – solstices and eclipses) has been the job of learned people for millennia. It is no wonder that people have used star symbols to represent winter: Longer nights during winter make stars visible for more hours. The shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, the Winter Solstice, occurs December 21st or 22nd. Also of note, Stars visible in winter are some of the brightest in the sky (e.g. – Sirius, the brightest star; Orion, a constellation with many bright stars). And other winter objects such as snowflakes, appearing somewhat star-shaped, might also reinforce symbolism.

For Christians, the Star of Bethlehem has special symbolic meaning: prediction and identification of Jesus. There are several astronomical possibilities of what the Star of Bethlehem could have been:

- Supernova – Supernovas (explosions from dying stars) appear briefly (days or weeks) in the sky and leave remnants that can be seen with modern telescopes (e.g. - The Crab Nebula left over from a supernova appearing in 1054 a.d.).
- Comet - Large and impressive comets (Hale-Bopp, Hyukataki) can appear for weeks in the sky.
- Planets aligning (conjunction): Sometimes, paths of the planets in the night sky cross, briefly creating very bright “stars”.
- Stars in Pisces: The sun and planets pass through the Zodiac constellations. Because of Earth’s precession (“wobbling on its axis” once every 25,000 years), stars in the constellation Pisces (the fish) first appeared on the horizon at a given time of year about 2,000 years ago, beginning the age of Pisces.

Taking it Further

This method of decoration or ornament creation can be used with any stencils and any color of mylar or shiny backing. Apply NON self-adhesive stencils to backing with spray adhesive.

Web Resources - (Visit www.raft.net/raft-idea?isid=377 for more resources!)