

Vision Beautiful

Today we begin a five-week exploration of a collection of Jesus' sayings known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' radical vision of what God's reign on earth might look like is a vision of wholeness for all people. Paul reminds us that God's wisdom is different from worldly wisdom. Micah and the psalmist describe ways to live this vision beautiful.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

After Jesus' baptism, he calls a group of disciples. They travel throughout Galilee teaching and healing, sharing the good news that God's realm is breaking into the world. It is a message that the gospel writer's own community desperately needs to hear. Matthew is written to a group of new Christians after disaster has happened. The temple has been destroyed, the people scattered. Jesus is no longer present in the flesh. What laws will govern the community now? What will the new community look like? What is the good news for those trying to be faithful in a hostile world?

Of the four gospels, Matthew most wants to show that Jesus fulfills Israel's experience. In this gospel, Jesus is shown as the new Moses, teaching from the mountain as Moses did when he gave Israel the law. The gospel writer arranges Jesus' words in five blocks of teaching, reminding readers of the "five books of Moses." Chapters 5 to 7 – the Sermon on the Mount – form the first block.

The Beatitudes begin the Sermon on the Mount. They are a series of sentences beginning with the word *blessed*, or *happy* in some translations. Blessing is God's free gift to humankind, a sign of covenant relationship with God. Such blessing may look very different from the world's idea of happiness. In these sayings, Jesus turns human notions of happiness upside down. What kind of living brings God's blessing? Jesus teaches that the blessed ones are those who are humble of heart ("poor in spirit"), who are gentle, who show mercy, who hunger and thirst for God's ways. Those who mourn will be comforted; those who make peace will be called God's children. Those who are persecuted in the cause of justice will find themselves part of God's transforming reality.

There is urgency in Jesus' teaching. He uses the present tense – this is happening right now. In Jesus' coming, God's love is revealed and made manifest. This teaching is directed to the disciples, the Twelve and the larger group of men and women who accompany Jesus. The Beatitudes describe the way of life for those who commit themselves to follow. For Matthew's community, this vision beautiful is what life should be like.

Living in right relationship with God and neighbour brings blessing – calling out the best in us and others. The other readings spell out this vision of wholeness. **Micah 6:1–8** describes a dramatic confrontation, a lawsuit between God and Israel. What must Israel do to be in a right relationship with God? Verse 8 summarizes: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. **Psalm 15** gives a similar response. The psalmist asks who may come before God in the temple. It is those who do what is right, speak the truth, and do no evil to their neighbours.

In **1 Corinthians 1:18–31**, Paul echoes Matthew's theme of worldly values turned upside down. God's wisdom seems like foolishness to the present age. God overturns the established order. God chooses us to play our part in God's plan. In Christ we are strengthened to bring about God's reign of justice and peace.

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Our experience today is, in many ways, similar to that of Matthew's community. We may not be persecuted for our faith, but the ways of faith often seem foolish compared with the values of society. In what ways do the gospel values challenge contemporary views – turn them upside down? What challenges do you find in trying to live according to the standards expressed in today's readings?



January 30, 2011

Focus Scripture
Matthew 5:1–12

Additional Scriptures
Micah 6:1–8
Psalm 15
1 Corinthians 1:18–31

O God, you turn things upside down, calling the wise to embrace your folly. Help us to grow in acknowledging our need for you. Open us to the vision of your reign on earth, and strengthen us to do our part. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Today's children seem to be surrounded by violence and anger. Perhaps that has always been true for many children, but television programs, video games, and movies (whether appropriate for children or not) are common fare for many children, even those in your church school group. Jesus' teachings, known as the Beatitudes, seem so tame next to this everyday menu. Still, challenging what they see around them with another way to interpret and live one's life is our task.

The word "blessed" is not specifically defined for the children. Instead, the words "you are blessed and can be happy" are used

to give them a clue to how they might think about "blessed."

This session begins a group of five sessions that focus on a collection of Jesus' teachings about how to live as disciples. They are found in Matthew and known as the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes offer a kind of framework for these sessions. On February 27, the children will have opportunities to bring these teachings as recorded in Matthew together.

Pray that the children in your group will find living the Beatitudes a way to meet the challenges of their lives.

January 30, 2011



Materials needed

Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 5:1–12, and biblical background material (p. 75). Which of these Beatitudes sticks in your mind today?
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see "This Season, So..." on p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 9* and *CD player*. *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from www.spiritseasons.com.
- ❑ Bring songs "I Am Becoming Peace" and "Cosmic Hymn of Praise" and (pp. 4 and 5 in *Music Section*; also #6 and #1 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *green cloth*, *large white pillar Christ candle*, *long fireplace matches*, *offering basket*, and *Bible*. Place *bookmark* at Matthew.

Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell the story on *today's resource sheet "Live with God in Love."*

- ❑ For the blessings game group, make sets of cards from *card stock* or *heavy paper* using *today's resource sheet "Blessings Game."* Bring *today's resource sheet "Live with God in Love."*
- ❑ For Jesus the teacher group, bring *copies of today's resource sheet "Jesus the Teacher," pencils, Bibles, and directions.*

Respond

- ❑ **Art zone:** *drinking straws, string or thread, construction paper, and copies of today's resource sheet "Blessings Game"*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *song "I Am Becoming Peace" (p. 4 in Music Section; also #6 on Seasons Music CD) and today's resource sheet "Live with God in Love"*
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *today's resource sheet "Live with God in Love"*
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *card stock/heavy paper (cut to 8 x 13 cm/3 x 5in) and directions*
- ❑ **Discipleship zone:** *poster "Christ in Cookham" and people figures (p. 124)*



Vision Beautiful

Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS To hear from Jesus about God's way of living.

GATHER

Welcome Greet the children as they arrive. Welcome children who have been absent or who are new. Introduce yourself to new children and them to the group.

Call to learning Point out the green cloth for the Sundays during the Season after the Epiphany. As you light it remind the children that the tall white candle is called the Christ candle and it reminds us of the light of Jesus Christ.

Sing the song "I Am Becoming Peace" (p. 4 in *Music Section*; also #6 on *Seasons Music CD*) together. During the song, have a child receive the offering.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:
 God of joy and hope,
 we are thankful for your love and
 that you are all around us. Amen.

Extinguish the candle as a sign that the opening ritual is over.

Connecting with the focus

Happiness Some Bibles translate "blessed" in the focus scripture as "happy." Both words are used in the paraphrase on today's resource sheet "Live with God in Love." Find out how the children think about happiness as a way to introduce them to the focus for this session. Ask:

■ **What makes you happy?**

You may want to probe their answers with additional questions to help them think past the acquisition of things. Then explain that in the story for this session, Jesus teaches about happiness that comes from God.

ENGAGE

Preparing for the story

Review Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. The story for the previous session was in Matthew, chapter 4. Have the child turn to chapter 4. Help the children review the story about the invitation to Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Jesus. Point out that the story for this session is also from Matthew, at the beginning of chapter 5.

The Bible story

Jesus teaches Remind the group that one reason the four fishers followed Jesus was because Jesus said he would teach them. Jesus began to teach them right away. Tell the story on today's resource sheet "Live with God in Love," based on Matthew 5:1–12. Following the story, ask:

■ **What was something Jesus taught the new followers?**

The children's answers to this question will give you clues to what they found most compelling in the Beatitudes.

Exploring the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

Blessings game This matching game will review some of the concepts in Jesus' teachings and provide a way to talk about them. Make sets of cards according to the directions on today's resource sheet "Blessings Game." To play the game, lay all the cards, upside down, in four rows. The children take turns picking up two cards, trying to make a match. When matches are made, those cards are removed. The cards provide some concepts at the beginning of Jesus' teachings. When a match is made, invite the child or the group to finish that line. For example, when sad is matched, the rest of the line is "God will comfort you." Play until all the cards are removed. Then review the line that goes with each card.

Jesus the teacher group Jesus taught in many ways, but the Beatitudes are some of Jesus' most

famous teachings. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "Jesus the Teacher," pencils, Bibles, and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of "Jesus the Teacher," a pencil, and a Bible.
- 2 Read and follow the directions on "Jesus the Teacher."
- 3 Together select two or three things to tell the group about Jesus and teaching.



The Bible story and us

Play the song "Cosmic Hymn of Praise" (p. 5 in *Music Section*; also #1 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather together. The blessings game group can show the cards for the game and tell about one or two. Invite the Jesus the teacher group to tell their information. Ask:

■ **Why do you think the writers of Matthew saved these teachings of Jesus?**

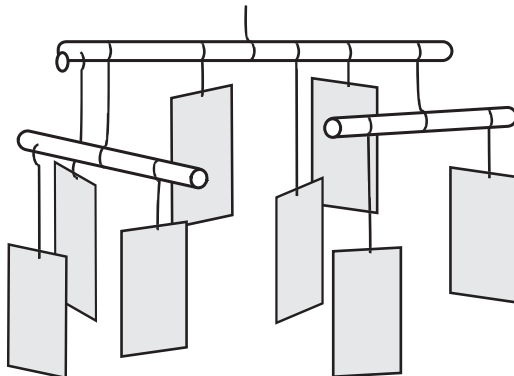
This question has no right answer, but will encourage the children to begin thinking on their various levels about Jesus' teachings and how the Bible has come to us.

3

RESPOND

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: Mobile** This mobile is a way of capturing the teachings of Jesus known as the Beatitudes in a simple format. The children will make small mobiles to take home. Each child will need two drinking straws, construction paper, and today's resource sheet "Blessings Game." Go over the illustrations and words on "Blessings Game." Have the children glue the resource sheet to construction paper. Then cut out the rectangles, adding any glue necessary to adhere the illustration securely to the backing. Tape varying lengths of thread or string to the back of each piece. Cut one straw in two. Tie the smaller pieces of straw to the longer straw. Tie a length of string to the middle of the longer straw for a hanger. Then tie the illustrations to any of the three pieces of straw. Hold the mobile by the string hanger to work out the balance. Children will find that working in pairs is helpful when it comes to putting the mobile together.



- **Music zone: Song of commitment** The song "I Am Becoming Peace" (p. 4 in *Music Section*; also #6 on *Seasons Music CD*) represents the emotions and actions that are named throughout the Beatitudes and in living God's way. During these seasons the children have heard and sung "I Am Becoming Peace." In Advent they learned motions to go with the Advent themes (p. 10). Sing the song with the motions as you did in Advent. Then read each of the teachings of Jesus on today's resource sheet "Live with God in Love" and invite the children to name how they might see what is described happening in the world and signs of God's love in those situations.

- **Outreach zone: Acts of kindness** Another way to think about the Beatitudes and living in God's love is through doing simple acts of kindness, as noted in Matthew 5:7, usually translated as showing mercy. Read from today's resource sheet "Live with God in Love": "You are blessed and can be happy when you are kind to others. You will receive kindness." Be prepared to tell of times when someone, perhaps a stranger, acted kindly to you. Then ask:



■ **When do you remember someone being kind to you?**

After some stories from the children, ask:

■ **When were you kind to someone?**

With the children, revise this Beatitude to name acts of kindness. For example, if a child has described helping a younger sibling learn to play a game, the new wording could be: You are blessed and can be happy when you help someone learn to play a new game. You will receive kindness.

- **Quiet zone: Meditation cards** Jesus' teachings are words to consider deeply throughout our lives. The children can begin this kind of deep thinking with meditation cards, reminders of the Beatitudes. Provide cards (see Prepare), markers, and these directions:

- 1 Jesus taught the disciples seven ways to live in God's love in the story from Matthew 5. They can be remembered in seven words or phrases: 1 Depend on God, 2 Sad – comfort, 3 Gentle, 4 Obey God, 5 Kind, 6 Hearts that see God, and 7 Peacemakers.
- 2 Take seven cards. Write each one on a card. Decorate the card with symbols of that way to live God's love.
- 3 In a quiet time, take one card. Look at it and think about how you can live that teaching in your life.



- **Discipleship zone: Joining the disciples** This group will entertain the idea of being part of those following Jesus as they explore the poster *Christ in Cookham*. Display the poster so everyone can see it. Some of the children may remember looking at it, even working with it, in the previous session. Invite them to notice the types of people in the picture. Select a group and ask:

■ **What do you know about these people from the way the artist painted them?**

■ **If you wanted to paint yourself into this painting, where would you place yourself?**

After they have thought about where, give the children people figures (see p. 124) to colour and attach to the edge of the poster adjoining the group they chose.



4

BLESS

Gather Play "Cosmic Hymn of Praise" (p. 5 in *Music Section*; also #1 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather in a circle around the worship table.

Sing "I Am Becoming Peace" (p. 4 in *Music Section*; also #6 on *Seasons Music CD*) with the motions.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

God, we are so happy that you sent Jesus to teach the world about you. Amen.

Blessing To a child next to you, say, "(Child's name), you are blessed." That child says it to the next child, and on around the circle.



After working with the Beatitudes, how do you think the children understand the word "blessed"?

How did this session help them gain understanding of living in God's way of peace, justice, and love?

When in this session did you see children being especially kind? How might you show appreciation to those children?



Live with God in Love

based on Matthew 5:1–12

When everyone is quiet and looking at you, gaze just for a moment at them before you begin the story.

Jesus' days were filled with teaching and healing. More people came from all over to see Jesus every day. All kinds of people came: rich people, poor people, religious leaders, Roman soldiers. With so many people around, there was little time for Jesus to be alone with Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

On this day, Jesus tried to get away from the crowds by going up the side of a mountain. When Jesus sat down, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, and perhaps a few others, came to him. He began to teach them. This is what Jesus said:

God has given us blessings and goodness around us, in good times and in bad times.

You are blessed and can be happy when you depend on God. You are a child of God.

You are blessed and can be happy even when you are sad and grieving. God will comfort you.

You are blessed and can be happy when you are gentle and humble. The whole Earth is yours.

You are blessed and can be happy when you obey God's ways. God hears your prayers.

You are blessed and can be happy when you are kind to others. You will receive kindness.

You are blessed and can be happy when your hearts are pure. You will know about God.

You are blessed and can be happy when you make peace. You will be called God's peacemakers.


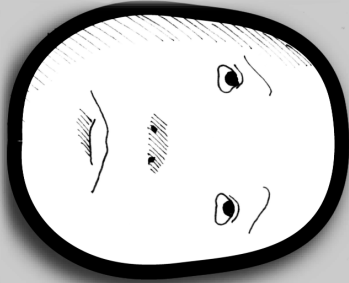
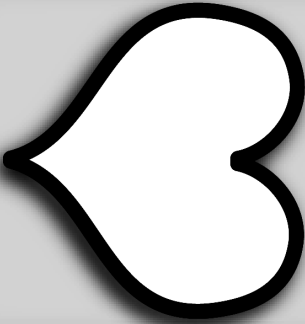
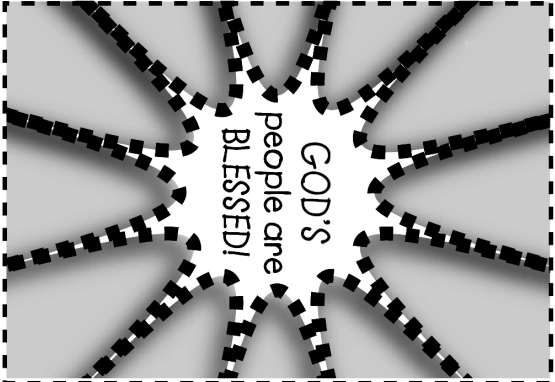
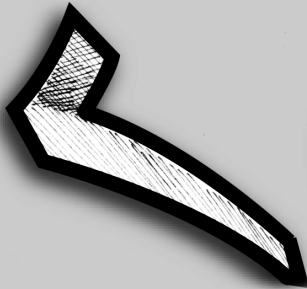
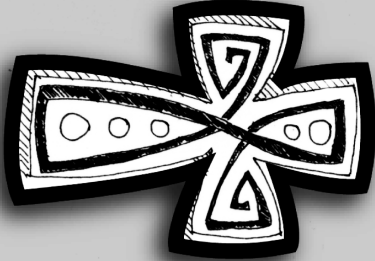
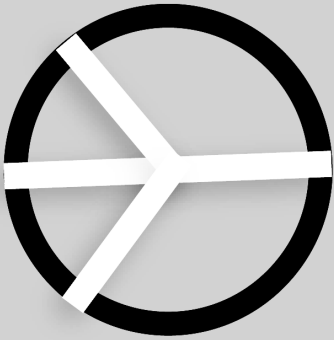
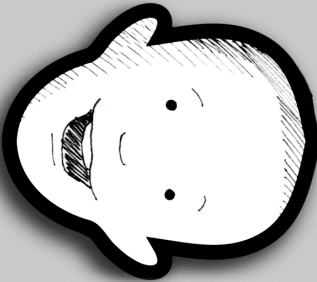
You are blessed when you live God's ways of peace, justice, and love.

Even when people treat you badly, be full of joy because God is with you.



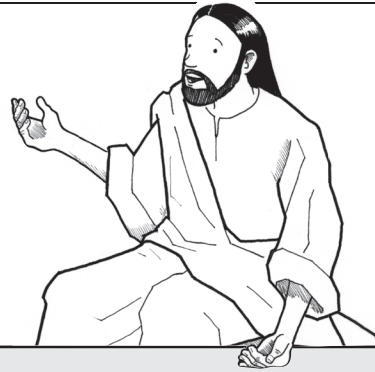
Blessings Game

Instructions: Make two copies on heavy paper or card stock. Cut cards apart to make a set of 16 cards, consisting of 8 pairs of matching symbols. If you have a large group, you may wish to make two sets of cards.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Gentle</p>  | <p>Sad</p>  |
| <p>Hearts that see God</p>  | <p>GOD'S people are BLESSED!</p>  |
| <p>Obey God</p>  | <p>Depend on God</p>  |
| <p>PEACEMAKERS</p>  | <p>KIND</p>  |



JESUS THE TEACHER



At the beginning of the story, what was the clue for the followers to come to Jesus?
Read Matthew 5:1.

When Jesus sat down, the disciples could assume that Jesus wanted to teach them. Teachers in Jesus' day sat to teach their students. There are other places where Jesus sat to teach. Find them in your Bible: Matthew 13:1-2 and Matthew 24:3.

Where did Jesus teach?
Read Matthew 4:23.

Jesus went to the synagogue in the village or town. A synagogue is a place of worship and learning. Jews gathered in the synagogue to talk about the Scriptures. But Jesus taught in the outdoors, too. Read Matthew 5:1 and Matthew 13:2.

Take a copy of "Live with God in Love." Read the teachings of Jesus in the special type. These teachings are found in Matthew 5:3-12. The words on "Live with God in Love" are called a paraphrase. That means someone has read Matthew 5:3-12 and put them in simpler, easy-to-understand words. This teaching of Jesus is called the Beatitudes. Find them in your Bible and see how they are different from the paraphrase. Which is easier for you to understand?



Advent at Home

Celebrate Advent at home with this Advent candle-lighting litany. We will use a similar litany each week in church school. Make a simple circle of greens with four blue candles or three purple and one rose candle (whichever your congregation uses). Place it where it can stay throughout Advent, perhaps in a corner of the family room or on the table for family meals. On each Advent Sunday, light the candle(s) and say the litany for that week. If you have a rose candle, light it on week three. Pray together for concerns and joys of your family.



Week One

We light one Advent candle to welcome God's hope
(motion for hope)
as we wait for the birth of Jesus.



Hope

Week Two

We light two Advent candles to welcome God's hope
(motion for hope)
and God's peace *(motion for peace)*
as we wait for the birth of Jesus.



Peace

Week Three

We light three Advent candles to welcome God's hope
(motion for hope),
God's peace
(motion for peace),
and God's joy
(motion for joy)
as we wait for the birth of Jesus.



Joy

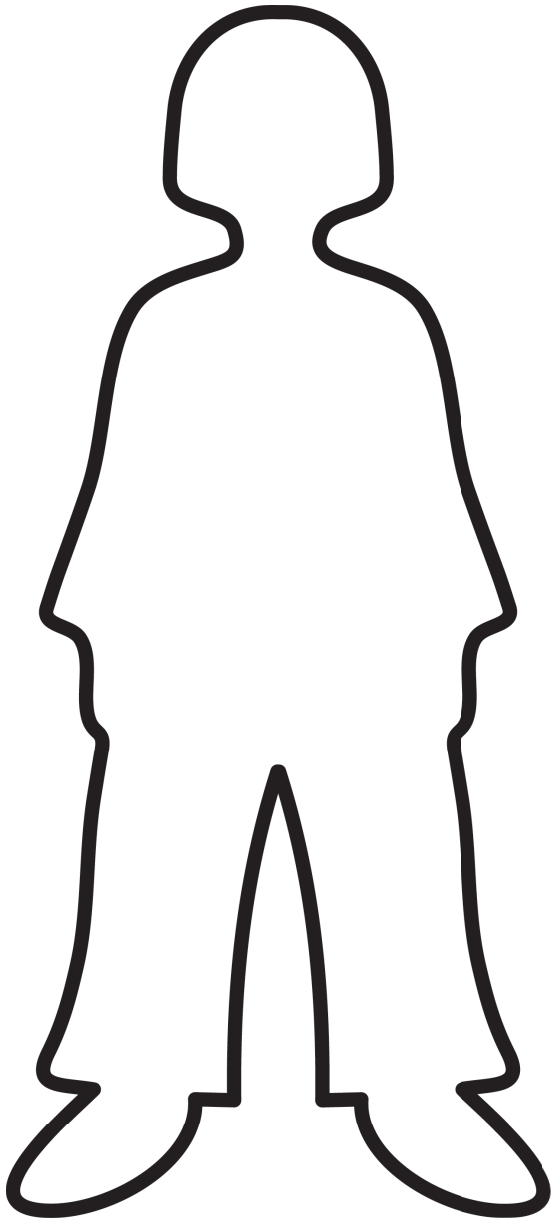
Week Four

We light four Advent candles to welcome God's hope *(motion for hope)*,
God's peace *(motion for peace)*,
God's joy *(motion for joy)*,
and God's love *(motion for love)*
as we wait for the birth of Jesus.

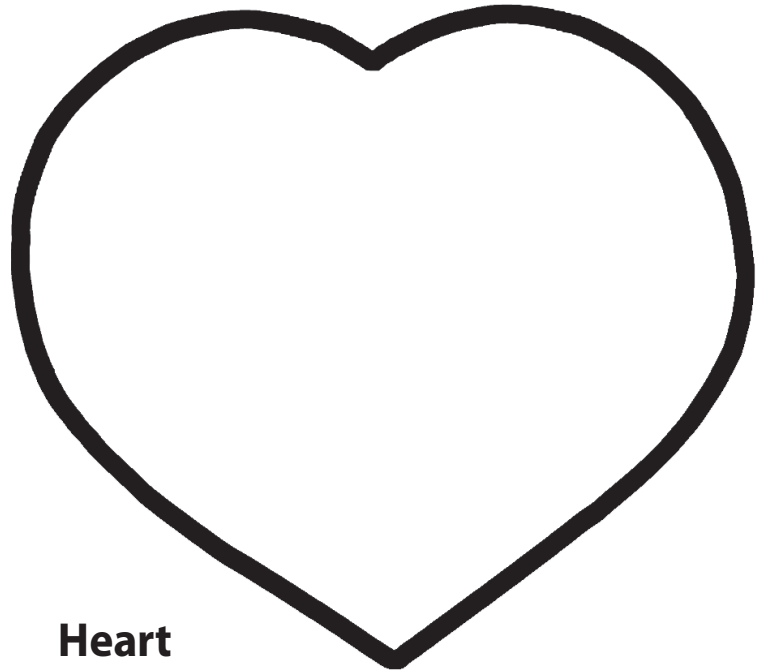


Love

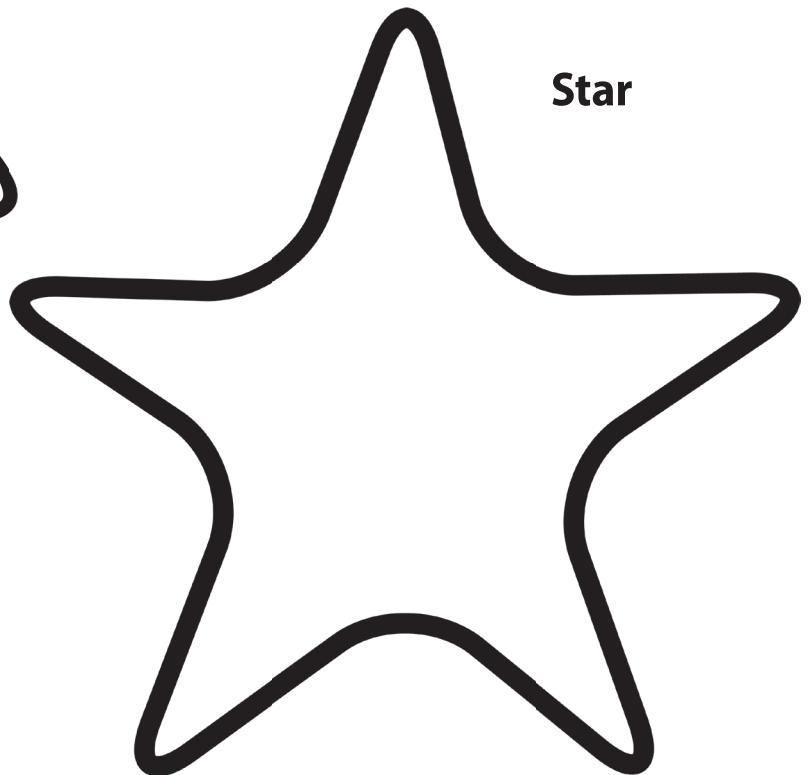
patterns



People



Heart



Star

