



Introduction

Everyone loves looking at the light of a candle. There's something peaceful and reassuring about the way the flame burns steadily, giving off its light to displace the darkness. It's not surprising, therefore, that the Christingle is such a treasured part of our Advent, Christmas and Epiphany celebrations each year. However, this one-off lighting of a candle can be so much more. How can it become a flame of happiness and hope that is passed on to others every single day? This 2020 BRF Messy Church Christingle in partnership with The Children's Society offers a resource that focuses on helping us do just that.

In his teaching near the start of the sermon on the mount, Jesus compared his followers to a lit candle. But this was more than simply an image of private and personal devotion; it speaks rather of a dynamic influence that can transform households, cities and the world! To reflect this, some of the all-age activities suggested in this resource will explore ideas associated with sharing light, while others open up ways in which we can support The Children's Society in passing on God's light to those in need, in particular to vulnerable children and young people.

Mental health and well-being have been of particular concern for many over this last year, especially of course during the lockdown because of COVID-19 and in the ongoing aftermath to those months. And this has been no less true among those among whom The Children's Society works. Here loneliness, depression and hardship can put a good childhood out of reach for so many, if they are not offered practical expressions of compassion and support. The light of God's love is for sharing into exactly these situations. The flickering flame of a candle isn't just there to give us a warm glow and to make us feel good once a year. This would be like keeping the light to ourselves 'under a bowl', as Jesus warns us. Instead, The Children's Society Christingle light is for passing on, so that it can displace the darkness of unhappiness, fear and despair among children and young people all year long.

Bible story

[Jesus said,] **'You are the salt of the earth. But suppose the salt loses its saltiness. How can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything. It will be thrown out. People will walk all over it. You are the light of the world. A town built on a**

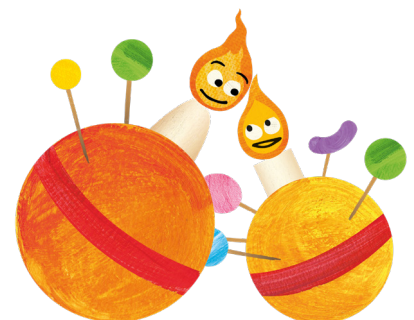
hill can't be hidden. Also, people do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand. Then it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine so others can see it. Then they will see the good things you do. And they will bring glory to your Father who is in heaven.'

Matthew 5:13–16 (NIRV)

Pointers

In chapters 5–7 of his gospel (the sermon on the mount), Matthew draws together some of the most memorable words of Jesus. From this sample, we have a taste of the attractiveness of his teaching, which was full of everyday images to which people could relate.

- Jesus is talking with his disciples about what it means to follow him. Using two simple images – salt that is used for seasoning and a lamp put on a stand – he sums up the effect their lives ought to have all those around them.
- Christians should be those who bring out a person's best potential (flavour) in every encounter and shine a spotlight on the best of God in every situation.
- But Jesus's words to the disciples, and to us, also warn that it is all too easy to lose our usefulness to others and to God, if we fail to pass on a taste of God's love and the hope of God's light. God has invested so much in us and amazingly has chosen to use us to transform the lives of the needy, the vulnerable and the poor, locally and globally.
- At Christmas, we remind ourselves how Jesus is the life that came into the world as 'a light for all people'. That light should now be shining through us among our neighbours and in our communities.
- Finally, Jesus challenges us not to be ashamed of the light God has given us. It should lead us to seek the good of others, which in turn will highlight how great God is.





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#discipleship: team

Messy health check

Take it in turns to encourage each other by saying how you see the light of Jesus shining in them and bringing glory to God.

Messy team theme

- Talk about how the light of Christ is being passed on in your community in the weeks (or longer) between your Messy Churches.
- Spend a few moments talking about the work of The Children's Society that you know about and making links to the activities you have planned for today.
- Vulnerable children and young people can sometimes go unnoticed. Talk about the families in your Messy Church and any that may be in particular need at this time, while observing the boundaries of confidentiality.

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

Jesus's words in today's Bible reading challenge us to live a life of faith that is practical and down to earth. He has already set the tone for this in the opening verses of this chapter, known as the beatitudes. They describe what the Christian life looks like in action, and there is certainly no room for pious individualism here. It's about reaching out to those in need – the poor, the sad, the downtrodden, the restless and all those who long for peace and who are in need of kindness and support. This is what being lit up by Jesus should lead us to.

Jesus is interested in much more than a Christmas Christingle light burning away on its own and just lighting up one small corner. It's the whole house and the whole world that needs to be filled with light. This is why Jesus came into the world as a baby, as the light to overcome the darkness on our behalf. And although it goes against our natural tendencies maybe, Jesus wants us to be hilltop Christians, not huddled away; and to be making a difference to the societies in which we live – rescuing the fallen, coming alongside the hurting and rebuilding the lives of the broken.

The Children's Society was founded to be a channel for this sort of light-sharing service among the young. As part of this Messy Christingle, we will encounter Jamie and read of his unhappy experiences at school. Jamie's story clearly demonstrates that the work of The Children's Society is needed as much as ever.

#discipleship: families

Mealtime card

- What do you like best about the light of the Christingle candle?
- How do you think people might see God's light burning in you?
- How can we be Christingle candles for God at home, at church or at work, throughout the year?
- What have you learned about the Christingle light-sharing work of The Children's Society?

Take-home idea

Talk together about where you will keep your Christingle candle when you go home, so it can be a daily reminder of Jesus's challenge to pass on the light of his love.

Take home some literature about The Children's Society and commit to saying a prayer for their work at least once a week. Perhaps you can put the Christingle candle on the table in front of you when you do so.

Question to start and end the session

So... if you were bullied, felt alone or in despair, how would you like people to be a light to you?

#discipleship:extra

As a household, find out more about The Children's Society by going online to: childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do.

Plan a special money-raising activity to support the work of The Children's Society through Messy Church this coming year. There are ideas online here: childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do/fundraising-events.

Important note

This Messy Christingle session was written before the guidelines around social distancing linked to the COVID-19 pandemic were known and in particular how that will affect church services in future. Nevertheless, all the activities are doable either by a household at home or within a carefully monitored small Messy Church group who are observing social distancing. However, some elements of the celebration will need to be adapted, particularly where it talks of sharing the Christingle light from person to person across a large Messy Church congregation. Please consider what will work for your context.



Activities

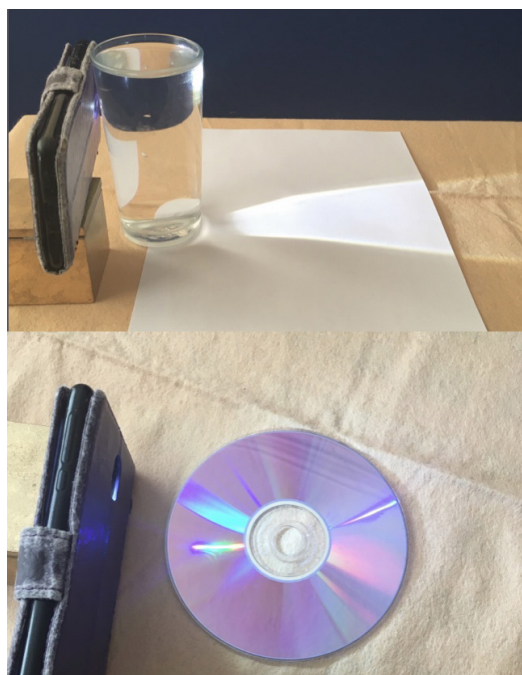
1. Making rainbows

You will need: a tall glass of water; a piece of white paper; a mobile phone with a light; CD or DVD discs

Place the glass of water on the long edge of the paper. Shine the light from your mobile phone through the water on to the paper. Move the light up the glass slowly. You should see the light refracted on to the paper into rainbow arcs. You can obtain a similar effect by shining the light on to a CD or DVD disc, shiny side up, creating multiple rainbows.

God's multicoloured light became the tiny light of a baby at Christmas so that Jesus could shine God's light into and through us, bringing to life a variety of gifts and fruits of the Spirit that can light up the world.

Talk about how light is made up of a spectrum of colours and how the Christingle light, when it shines through us, will bring out our God-given gifts and personalities so we can care for everyone in this world. What special colours of God's light can you bring to a world in need? And rainbows were of course a common sight in windows earlier this year in response to COVID-19. They are a sign of hope for all facing hard times.



2. Edible candles

You will need: mini rolls; fondant icing sugar; yellow food colouring; cups or bowls; spoons; knives; paper plates

Mix some fondant icing sugar with a little water in a cup. Keep back a small blob and then roll out the rest of the icing. Cover the mini roll and stand it up on the plate. Work yellow food colouring into the small blob of icing and shape it into a candle flame. Attach the 'flame' to the iced mini roll candle.

Talk about what you like about the Christingle candle and what it makes you think about. How can the light of the Christingle candle last forever?



3. A pinhole camera

You will need: a savoury crisp tube (such as Pringles); sticky tape; scissors or breadknife; tracing or translucent paper; pins or knitting needles; nails; a hammer

Cut off the end of the tube neatly, about 6 cm from the base. Although you can use scissors for this, an adult using a breadknife can be very efficient! Dust out the tube. Cut a circular piece of translucent paper just a bit larger than the lid. Make a small hole in the base of the tube with a pin or knitting needle, and then make that a little larger by carefully hammering a nail part way in. Tape the tracing paper over the open end, making sure no light can get in. Use the section you cut off as a viewing shield at the end with the translucent paper and hold it up towards a source of light. Try and ignore the bright light through the pinhole, looking instead for the image of whatever you're pointing at, on the paper. The image will be upside down and back to front. Try looking at different objects around the space you're in.



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Talk about how light enables us to see God's world around us. Our eyes turn the image our brain receives back the right way up, but initially the light does turn things upside down. Jesus came with his light to turn our upside-down world the right way up. God's light through us is meant to do the same as we help put the world back together again.



4. Lights in the darkness

You will need: world template printed on pieces of card (see end of PDF); shoeboxes; some pins; battery-powered tea lights

Print off the sheet of paper with the world template and stick to some card. Fix this over the open shoebox once you have placed the tea light inside. Make sure the light cannot escape from the box with the card over it. Now remove the card and prick a small hole in Israel/Palestinian territories (the Middle East) to represent Jesus coming as the light of the world. Put the card back and see the effect of this one bright pinpoint of light in our world. Now remove the card again and add more pinpricks randomly among the continents. When you put this over the box, you should see how the light Jesus brought has now spread right across the world.

Talk about how Jesus came to one place at one point in history with God's light but now his followers are to be those lights right around the world, pushing back the darkness.



5. A Christingle that lasts

You will need: tangerines or oranges; red tape or ribbon; sticky tape; sharp knives; an apple corer; cocktail sticks; tin foil; small sweets or dried fruit; some sort of small Play-Doh sculpture of a human or other flat representation of a person

Make your own Christingle. Stick the red tape or ribbon around the tangerine or orange. Slice off a small section from the base so that the tangerine or orange stands up on its own. Using an apple corer, create a space where a candle could go into the top of the fruit. Put the four cocktail sticks into the orange or tangerine, each bearing some fruit or small sweets, etc. Sculpt your human figure from clay or Play-Doh.

Talk about the symbols of the Christingle: God's red ribbon of love around the world and God's good gifts in creation. But this Christingle is not complete. God sent Jesus not just for a one-off visit, but rather God planned by the Holy Spirit to pass on his light to each and every one of us in every place. The light of the Christingle candle can go on forever, if we become the candles! Add the human figure to your Christingle in the place the candle would normally go. We are to be the light now that brings God's love and healing to the world.





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6. Jamie's snakes and ladders

You will need: printed copies of Jamie's story (see end of PDF); a snakes and ladders template (see end of PDF); some dice and counters

The Children's Society puts happiness and hope into the lives of young people who are facing hardship and sadness. Jamie is one of hundreds of young people whom it has supported in recent years. Have some copies of Jamie's story printed off for people to read. This game includes some of the challenges that Jamie faced as a result of bullying and isolation at school (the snakes) but also the support given by The Children's Society (the ladders).

Talk about how Christians can support people like Jamie, as you play the game.

7. Light into darkness

You will need: a large piece of card painted black; craft sticks; jumbo craft sticks; rubber bands; newspaper; yellow poster paint

Before the session, make mini catapults – each one needs eight craft sticks, two jumbo craft sticks and three elastic bands. Instructions: [youtube.com/watch?v=XchdUB-ZnKc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XchdUB-ZnKc).

Tear up the newspaper and scrunch it into small pellets, then dip into the yellow poster paint. Invite people to catapult the pellets at the black card. By the end of this ongoing activity, the aim is to have the dark black turn as bright yellow as possible!

Talk about how God wants us to bring the light of Jesus into dark places and help people who have been affected by sadness, anxiety, bullying and loneliness which have overshadowed their lives.



8. Prayers for the light to shine

You will need: a large outline of a person, who represents the children and young people that The Children's Society supports; information about The Children's Society (find at childrenssociety.org.uk); card; glue sticks

Cut up the short paragraphs of information and stories from The Children's Society and mount them on cards. Invite adults and children to pick up a card and **Talk about** the work. Having read it, turn it into a prayer as they stick that on to the outline of the person.

Talk about how prayer is one way in which the light of the Christingle candle can go on burning through the whole year.

9. Strike for a good childhood

You will need: a set of wooden or plastic skittles (alternatively, make a set by stuffing newspaper into old socks with a few drinks coasters at the bottom so the skittles stand up vertically); three small soft balls; labels for the skittles – anxiety, sadness, fear, loneliness, bullying, isolation, depression, anger, no safe space, and no listening adults

Set up an area as a mini bowling alley. Each player has three balls to try and knock down all the skittles which represent the dark forces that make for mental health problems among many young people. Knocking down the skittles represents helping to set up the conditions for a positive life experience for children and young people.

Talk about the different negative forces that are being knocked down and what in everyday life would be the positive ways that would help overcome them. How can the light of the Christingle candle in us make a difference this year?





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10. Over to you

You will need: copies of the ‘over to you’ evaluation sheets (see end of PDF) for this Messy Church Christingle; felt-tip pens; crayons

Fill in the forms in intergenerational groups.

Talk about this Messy Church Christingle session. Encourage your groups to find out more about The Children’s Society and about how they could get involved. Collect these and use them to feed comments and ideas back to The Children’s Society.

Celebration

Gather your Messy Christingle congregation using the music of one of the suggested songs to draw everyone together for this part of Messy Church.

Celebrate the different activities people have been involved in, exploring how many are linked to light and in particular how light is shared and the difference it makes. Also link the activities to how The Children’s Society is busy sharing the Christingle light throughout the whole year as they offer support for children and young people like Jamie, who face sadness and anxiety from the bullying behaviours of others.

Focus on the activity of making the Christingle itself, which however is not complete. What is missing? As you do this, recap on the different parts of the Christingle – the roundness of the fruit representing the world, the tape or ribbon representing God’s love and the fruit on the cocktail sticks representing God’s good gifts in creation.

Of course, we need candles for our oranges/tangerines! Now where can the candles be? (*Hunt around, picking up on suggestions from the adults and children as to where you might find them. On the focus table? Under the chair? In a cupboard? In a carrier bag? Eventually find them in an unlikely place such as under a pile of papers in a corner or around the back of the piano.*)

That’s a silly place to keep them, especially if we need to find them in a hurry when there’s an emergency. Lights need to be kept in a sensible place!

(Now hand out the candles (for the oranges) or birthday candles (for tangerines) so everyone has one.)

Wonderful! But hang on a minute – now there’s something else missing. We need a light! Maybe matches or a lighter? Now where can they be? (*Again, look around the places you’ve looked before, only eventually to find them this time... in your pocket!*)

All this looking around for candles and a light reminds me of what Jesus said about the light of a lamp in today’s Bible story. It’s no good keeping the candles, matches or the lighter hidden away and difficult to find. Light needs to be easily available and quickly seen! Jesus used this idea to encourage us to be lights, which are easily found and seen by everyone... lighting up the whole room, the whole house, the whole of the city or town where we live and the whole world. Jesus is the light of the world, but it’s a light that he wants to give away to us so that we become lights for other people and to all who are messed up by the darkness of anxiety, loneliness, fear, bullying and hatred. This is the sort of darkness that The Children’s Society helps chase away.

(Include a song at this point (see suggestions below) during which The Children’s Society collection envelopes can be handed over or a collection taken.)

(Hold up your candle and lighter.)

A candle can’t light itself; it has to receive light. In the same way, each one of us needs to receive the light of Jesus for ourselves.

(Light your Christingle, as the celebration leader, and encourage everyone to look at the flame beginning to burn brighter and brighter.)

The problem is that this light will eventually burn down if we do nothing more than light this one candle. The light of the candle needs to be passed on. Jesus wants his light to be passed on in the same way.

(Light the Christingles of four or five responsible adults who come up to stand near you.)

Notice that when I share my candlelight with this group at the front, my light does not lose any of its brightness; instead, the brightness grows between all the candles that are now lit. When we pass on God’s light, we don’t lose it. This is what is so special about the light of Jesus.

But there’s still a problem. Even these flames will eventually die out if we do nothing more than just light these four or five



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Christingles. We need to go on sharing the light again and again and again. The more we give away the light, the more light there is.

(Those at the front with Christingles should now go over to household groups and light the candles there, so they in turn can pass on the light between themselves.)

Look around now and see how much light has come from the light of Jesus. And notice how everybody's flame is exactly the same, whether you are older or younger, taller or shorter, nearer to the front or far at the back. We can all be God's light wherever we are.

In our Bible story, Jesus said this light should be held up high to bring light to as many as possible. This light should help all who are hurting or vulnerable or in need.

(Invite everyone to lift up their candles carefully in front of them so the light shines even brighter.)

Finally, notice what is happening at the heart of the flame on your candle. Can you see the black wick in the middle and can you see some of the wax dribbling down the side? At the heart of the light there is a dying, as the wax melts and the wick is used up.

The light Jesus gives us comes because he had to die before rising again to pass on the light that now burns in us.

Prayer

Turn the main lighting down in your celebration space.

Teach a simple response to each of the following prayers, namely:

We are the light of Christ for the world.

Thank you, Jesus, that you are the light of the world and that you have passed on that light to us through your cross and resurrection.

We are the light of Christ for the world.

Thank you, Jesus, that your light is stronger than darkness and you have passed on the power of that light to us by your Holy Spirit.

We are the light of Christ for the world.

Thank you, Jesus, that your light is shining through the work of The Children's Society, bringing hope and happiness to children and young people in dark times.

We are the light of Christ for the world.

Thank you, Jesus, that as we pass on your light in the care we give to others, your light never dies but continues to give light to the whole world.

We are the light of Christ for the world.

In this Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season, may your light shine brighter and brighter as we celebrate your light in us and through us for your glory

We are the light of Christ for the world.

Amen

Make sure the Christingle candles are extinguished carefully and put down safely before ending with the actions for the messy Grace together (messychurch.org.uk/messygrace), followed by a prayer before your meal.

Song suggestions

- 'Like a candle flame' – Graham Kendrick
- 'This little light of mine' – Traditional
- 'Here I am to worship (Light of the world)' – Tim Hughes
- 'My lighthouse' – Rend Collective
- 'Light of the world' – Chris Tomlin
- 'Christ, be our light' – Bernadette Farrell
- 'The Spirit lives to set us free (Walk, walk in the light)' – Damian Lundy
- 'Shine, Jesus, shine' – Graham Kendrick

Meal suggestion

Organise a *light* meal with a range of *light* bites: snack foods, *light* desserts and *light* drinks (e.g. Coke lite). Include your edible candles from the activities!





Activity 4

World template



Image by Clker-Free-Vector-Images from Pixabay



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Activity 6

Snakes and ladders

31	Jamie has mood swings and gets angry easily	32	33	34	Jamie feels very alone	35	36	
30	29	28	27	26	Jamie is given responsibility and helps others	25	24	
19	20	Jamie gains confidence and becomes a spokesperson for The Children's Society	21	22	23	24	24	
18	Jamie makes some new friends	17	16	Jamie is bullied at school	15	Jamie finds a safe space to talk about his feelings	14	13
7	Jamie skips classes at school	8	9	Jamie suffers from anxiety and depression	10	11	12	
6	5	Jamie attends a drop-in centre run by The Children's Society	4	3	2	1	1	



Activity 6

Jamie's story

Jamie was bullied throughout school, leaving him feeling isolated and alone. At college, he struggled to talk about how he was feeling and began having anxiety. Today, thanks to help and support from a mental health drop-in service ran by The Children's Society, he is a passionate speaker and advocate for mental health awareness.

At school, Jamie faced bullying from his classmates who would often take his money and force him to buy things for them, 'I was just doing it to keep them off my back and when I joined their school football team they didn't want me in the team. That made me feel really left out. School wasn't a happy place for me.'

Jamie's mental health declined further at college when he began to struggle with anxiety. 'My life circumstances were not great. I kept on leaving classes. I feel like I didn't want to live at that time.'

Jamie was referred to CAMHS, where he began receiving treatment, but he still struggled as between these appointments, as he had no one he could rely on or talk to. It was only when he was signposted to The Children's Society by his college tutor that he received the support he needed.

At the easy-access drop in service for under 25's run by The Children's Society, trained mental health practitioners provide immediate mental and emotional health support for young people, families, and professionals seven days a week.

'Looking back at it, I am glad I got help, because my life was a downward spiral.

'When I first came to The Children's Society, I was nervous, because it was a new experience for me. When I'm having a difficult time and I come in and have a chat

with someone and I feel better. My favourite thing about the service is talking to other people. I feel like my life would be rubbish if it wasn't there, because there'd be no one to talk to. Young people would be thinking, "Where are we going to go because there's not many organisations out there. They close down all the time"'

At the service, Jamie was given a safe space where he was able to talk about his emotions and how he was feeling with someone he could trust. He was also given practical support and methods that he could use at home to help him manage his anxiety, as well as access to the participatory groups, where he could make friends and find support from the other young people who attend.

Nicky, a mental health practitioner, said, 'We work with young people facing a wide range of challenges and no two days are the same. The most common difficulty we see is anxiety, followed by low mood and also young people experiencing a lot of anger. We also see a lot of young people coming in with issues around bullying, both on and offline.

'For Jamie, we offered him an informal and immediate space to drop in to talk about how he is feeling or something that might have happened that same day, opposed to having to wait for his next appointment with his care coordinator. Knowing that we are there seven days a week to come in and talk to has been a huge help to him.'

Today, Jamie has been coming to us for three years. Here he has made friends, gained confidence and has somewhere to talk to people about how he is feeling. He also regularly attends various workshops including creative writing and 'Hot Topics', a group for young people who may be feeling isolated, where they can meet others and socialise.



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Jamie said, 'Friends are always good to have when you are down. Sometimes having that one person to talk to is really good so you can get your emotions out there like how you are feeling.'

Jamie has also been part of a participatory group for three years, which is for young people who want to give something back to their local community. Here he has deepened his relationship with his peers and is able to speak out on topics he cares about.

He is also passionate about raising awareness of the importance of children and young people's mental health and well-being and hopes to be an advocate for those experiencing challenges themselves or don't feel listened to.

'I feel like you need a voice because some adults, they don't want to listen to you, because you are young and you don't know what you are saying. I have had good experiences with The Children's Society and college

because they are both a very supportive network to me.

'The Children's Society has helped and it does help a lot of young people, including myself. You can come in and have a chat, and I like it because it gives me a chance to talk to different people. It's important to share your expressions and how you are feeling with other people. It's helped me to talk about my problems.

'I've gained a lot of things like confidence and it brings out the best in me. I get to meet new people and gain experience which is really great. For this year's Christingle event, I presented a speech about what the service would do in the future to support young people and they cheered for me.

'In the future, I just want to have a stable job and I just hope that the service will continue to help young people and me as well.'



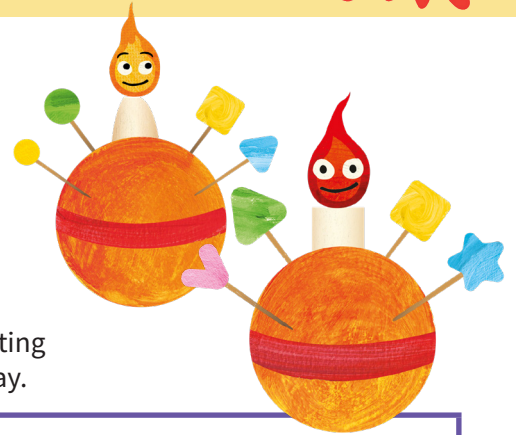
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Activity 10

Over to you

You can respond to the following questions either by drawing pictures or writing your own words, as you think about all that you have experienced so far today.



Which activity did you enjoy the most?

Which activity could have been better?

Which activity made you think the most?

What new thoughts about the Christingle have you had today?

What have you found out about **The Children's Society**?

How can your own Christingle light go on supporting the work of **The Children's Society** in the year ahead?

