

An African Christmas Cloth

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This unique book was skilfully illustrated by the author in pictures embroidered on cloth of different colours and textures. The story is the diary of a scooter-trip taken by Aunty Apples from Johannesburg through the South African country side where she camped and embroidered her memories. She returns on Christmas Eve and the cloth becomes a gift for her relatives, the Cupido family.



Memory verse

Acts 20:35 “It is better to give than to receive.”

Copywork

Criss-crossing the country were buses, taxis and trains filled with people travelling home for Christmas and going on holiday.

Bible – Giving

The Bible tells us that it is better to give than to receive. In this story we see how Aunty Apples uses her talents to create a cloth of memories, which she gives to her relatives at the end of the story.

Talk about whether it would be easy to give away something that you have spent hours making and that has sentimental value, like the cloth in this story.

Your children might not be able to embroider, but perhaps they could draw a series of pictures of a holiday that they remember or do a series when next you take a family holiday or trip.



Social studies – Christmas in Africa

Ask your children if they have noticed that many other children's stories about Christmas are about winter and snow. Explain to them that in the northern hemisphere it is winter at Christmas time, but here in the southern hemisphere it is the height of summer. This explains why our story begins on 13 December with the words: "The day was already hot..."

Geography - Johannesburg

If you live in Johannesburg or its surrounds, ask your children if they can guess from which city Aunty Apples set out. See if they can recognise the Hillbrow Tower and the mine dump shown in the picture opposite the page marked 13 December.

Place the picture disc on Johannesburg on your large wall map.

Readiness skills – Visual identification

As you read or re-read this story, play a game with your children and ask, "Who can spot" Ask them to identify some small detail in the picture, for example on the first page depicting the city, ask who can spot the bicycles or the small yellow car, or the car pulling a trailer etc. Encourage your children to appreciate all the details of these magnificent picture spreads. There is much to discuss that will not be covered in these lessons.

Attentiveness is a valuable character skill – encourage your children to look carefully at the details around them, just as Aunty Apples did, as depicted in her borders running along the bottom of each page.

Language – Christmas carols

“Aunty Apples sang all the Christmas carols she could remember at the top of her voice.”

Teach your children some Christmas carols or listen to a Christmas collection CD together. If you don't own any, borrow some Christmas music from the library.

Geography - Dam

Explain to the children that dam walls are usually built across rivers to create a reservoir that will provide a source of water for crop-farming and to supply towns and cities. The picture depicted is possibly the Vaal Dam, built on the Vaal River. Using a map from the appendix or your dry write map, draw in the Vaal River.

Geography - Mapwork

Mark Johannesburg on your map. Mark the dam that you think Aunty Apples visited. Use Prestik to attach a piece of wool or string to the map and extend it between the two points to mark Aunty Apples's route. Using an atlas, follow her journey and try and guess where she spent each day. By 23 December she was somewhere in the Karoo. Extend your wool to a point of your choosing somewhere in this region and then from there, extend the string back to Johannesburg. This should give your children a good idea of the circular nature of her trip.

Social studies – Water recreation

On the page, 15 December, you can see some people enjoying water recreation. Make a list, written for older children, oral for younger children, of the other types of water sports and recreation that they know. Examples are windsurfing, waterskiing, canoeing etc. Perhaps you could take your children on an outing to a dam in you area.

Nature - Firefly

Read about fireflies in A Bushveld Safari on page 56.

Geography – Star-gazing

Spend some time outside gazing at the night sky. See if you can spot aeroplanes and satellites passing overhead. Which constellations can you point out to your children? Talk about the phases of the moon again, if you can see the moon. There are lessons about the sun, moon and stars in One Round Moon and a Star for Me.

Nature – Butcher bird and weavers

Find a picture of a Fiscal Shrike, also known as a butcher bird or Jacky Hangman. Explain how this bird has a habit of catching small reptiles or insects and pinning them to a spike, like a thorn or wire fence to eat later.

The yellow birds that build basket nests are weavers. Read more about them in A Bushveld Safari on page 40 or refer to the lesson about the Masked Weaver featured in The Hunter.

Geography – Hail

Hail forms in large cumulous clouds high in the sky where temperatures are very low. Raindrops tossed up and down by air currents in the cloud, freeze and layers of frozen water build up to form hailstones. Eventually the hailstones become too heavy and drop to the earth. In the Highveld area, hailstones as large as golf balls often occur and they do serious damage to cars and farmers' crops.

History – Day of Reconciliation

Background for parents: This day is celebrated each year on the 16th of December. It used to be called the Day of the Vow. Afrikaners traditionally celebrated 16 December as the Day of the Vow, remembering the day in 1838 when a group of Voortrekkers defeated a Zulu army at the Battle of Blood River. Before the battle the Voortrekkers had made a promise to God that they would set this day aside to remember His faithfulness to them if they defeated the enemy. ANC activists commemorated it as the day in 1961 when the ANC started to arm its soldiers to overthrow Apartheid.

Explain to your children that nowadays this public holiday is celebrated as a day of agreement between all South Africans to strive for peace in our country, a day to focus on overcoming the conflicts of the past and building a new nation.

Ask your children to role play a situation where they have been upset by a sibling or a friend. Set up a little table for siblings or even use teddies as the offending party. Teach them the scripture from Luke 6:37 "Forgive, and you will be forgiven," then bring out a surprise dainty tea and real tea in real cups for a party to celebrate the friendship.

Social studies – Different religions

On the page, 17th December, there are a group of Zulu ladies going to "church" under a tree. Their church is called the Zionist Christian Church or the ZCC. This church is one of the largest in Africa and combines normal Christian values with ancestral worship. If you live anywhere in the North of South Africa, particularly in Gauteng, you will see these groups of people dressed just as in the book, in groups dotted all along the road sides on Sunday afternoons.

Social studies - Posting letters

We have often enjoyed writing ourselves a letter and posting it back to our home address. Let older children count the days on the calendar to see how long the letter takes to get back to them. Talk about postage stamps and why they are used.

At this time of the year you could also send Christmas greeting cards to relatives and friends or send grandparents pictures made by the children.

There are some suggestions for personalised Christmas cards in the Christmas Crafts section further on in this manual.

At a convenient time, arrange an outing to the post office.

Language and Nature – Ladybirds

On the bottom right hand corner of the page, 20 December, there is part of a rhyme about a ladybird. See if your child can quote it all. Look for some lady birds next time you are on a nature walk.

Art - Snowflake

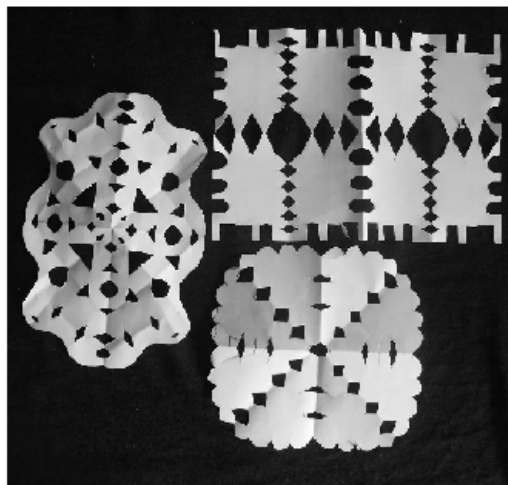
(from Shirley's Preschool Activities: www.shirleys-preschool-activities.com)

In spite of the fact that it is summer in Africa at Christmas, following western tradition, snow is used as form of decoration.

Create beautiful and unique snowflake patterns with this easy preschool craft activity. Cutting encourages the development of fine motor skills.

Make sure that your children have a good sharp pair of children's scissors.

If you have a left-handed child, ensure that s/he has left-handed or ambidextrous scissors. DO NOT expect him/her to use a right-handed pair of scissors!



You will need

paper – plenty per child
safety scissors
pencil

Activity

1. Fold the piece of paper in half and then in half again. Older children may like to make more folds for a more interesting result, but the more folds there are the harder it is to cut through all the layers.
2. Draw pencil lines to create patterns along the edges of the folded paper. Older children may cut freely without drawn guidelines.
3. Neatly cut the patterns on the paper
4. Unfold the paper to discover your beautiful snowflake

Variations

Use coloured paper, gift wrap, aluminium foil or old magazines to create colourful doilies.

Use newspaper and paste the cutting onto black paper.

Art – Stencilling with sponges

Following on from the activity above, use your snowflake designs or commercial doilies to make your own snowflake stencils.

You could decorate coloured tissue paper or plain butcher's paper and create your own stencilled gift wrap. (Refer to the Christmas Crafts section, further on.)

You will need

Small sponges
Water-based paint
Large sheets of paper

Sponge over the snowflakes or doilies with a small sponge dipped in paint to make your own snowflake stencilled designs.

Food – Watermelon

Watermelons are in season in summer. Enjoy some as family. Watermelon is best served chilled.

Social studies – Christmas traditions

In the story the African girls are shown in the Christmas beads. Talk about the different ways that people celebrate Christmas and the traditions that they have.

The woman in the forefront of this picture is wearing the traditional headdress of a married Zulu woman. She also has the huge earrings which stretch the earlobe

dramatically. Aunty Apples greets the woman by saying: “Sakubona, Mama”. Have fun saying hello to each other in Zulu.

Many urbanised black people have a tradition of repainting their homes, so that the walls, often dirty from burning paraffin heaters in winter, will be clean again for this special time of the year!



Talk about the commercial secular aspect of Christmas and what you believe is the true meaning of Christmas. Also discuss how and why your family will celebrate Christmas.

Nature – Strelitzia

The Strelitzia, one of the prides of South Africa. It is also called the crane flower. You can see a small one on the 21st of December page. Do you have any in your garden to show your children?

On this same page ask your children to spot the Malachite Kingfisher. This bird is only found in KwaZulu-Natal and is a jewel of a bird to see in real life!

Language and Nature – Baobab tree

Read the poem *A Baobab is big* in the poetry book by the same name. Draw your children’s attention to the baobab on the 22nd of December page.

On this same page ask your children to spot the hoopoe.

Readiness Skills and Language – Sensory activity

Page through the story book and examine the different types of cloth that were used. Ask the children to describe and compare the various fabrics.

If you have a rag bag of material off-cuts, select some for them to feel and describe using the vocabulary they have developed. Teach them words like “texture”, “course”, “fine”, “woven” etc.

You could also place the scraps of fabric in a pillow case and ask them to put their arm in, grab a scrap and guess which one it is, using their sense of touch to identify it.

Geography - Sunsets

On 23 December Aunty Apples captured a colourful sunset. One evening, make a point of watching the setting sun with your children. During this time you can explain the following to them.

In the air, even though we may not see them, are many millions of dust particles. The sun’s rays are split as they bounce off these dust particles. Sunsets are generally red in colour as this is the last visible colour as the sun goes down. Encourage the children to notice further colour changes after the sun has set, until the onset of darkness.

Read the poem *The Sun in A Baobab is Big*.

Art - Sunset

Encourage the children to paint a sunset in their nature notebooks.

Craft and Music - Making a band

Aunty Apples saw street musicians making merry on Christmas Eve. Here are musical instruments that you can make with your children:

Tambourine shaker

You will need: two paper plates, paint, glitter glue or koki pens, streamers or ribbons, stapler

Decorate two paper plates on the undersides with paints or glitter glue or felt-tipped pens. Staple some long streamers around the edge of one. Place some kidney beans in the centre. Now invert the other plate and staple it closed. This is a “tambourine-shaker”.

Shaker

You will need: small plastic bottle with a lid, pasta, rice or beads

Fill up a small bottle with rice, pasta or beads to shake.

Drum

You will need: bowl, fabric

Make a drum by stretching a piece of fabric very tightly over a large bowl. Drumsticks can be made with any stick and sticky tape wound into a knob at one end.

Guitar

You will need: empty ice-cream box with lid, empty paper towel roll, rubber bands, glue

A guitar, similar to the one used by the children in the book, can be made by gluing a 2 litre ice-cream container. Seal the lid and then cut circular hole in the lid. Add an empty paper towel roll to the short end of the ice-cream container with tape. Use elastic bands to stretch from one end over the hole to the other end of the container.

Castanets

You will need: two identical metal bottle tops, cardboard, scissors, glue

Cut a strip of cardboard about 15 x 4 cm. Fold it in half. Glue the bottle tops with the top upwards to each end of the inside of the folded strip so that they touch each other exactly.

Language – Play on words

On 24 December Aunty Apples embroidered the play on words: “I scream you scream we all scream for ice-cream!”

Teach these words to your children and talk about them. Think of any other word plays that you know. Many jokes depend on double meanings and puns. Here are some to get you started:

1. What did the big chimney say to the little chimney?

Answer: You’re too young to smoke.

2. Why did the tomato blush?

Answer: Because she saw the salad dressing.

3. What is black and white and re(a)d all over?

Answer: A newspaper

Think of others that you know or enjoy a kids’ joke book together.

Craft – Embroidery

This story will probably inspire a desire to learn embroidery. Begin by teaching your children some easy threading stitches. Let them enjoy threading with different brightly coloured threads.

Embroidery craft kits are available in toy stores, if you need one.

For younger children, take an old greeting card, prick holes around the outline of the picture and help them to thread in and out the openings to add their embroidered touch.

Social studies – Christmas lights

Most towns and city centres are festooned with Christmas lights in December. Plan an outing one evening to go and see them on display. This could become an annual family tradition with a special milkshake or similar treat.

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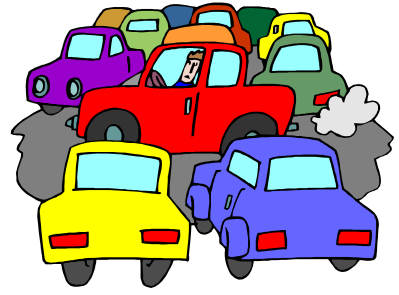


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Little Footprints Copywork

Handwriting practice lines consisting of solid top and bottom lines with a dashed middle line for letter height guidance. The page contains 10 sets of these three-line guides.