

Subversive Forgiveness


This week's texts intersect around the theme of forgiveness, unity, and the subversive ways these gentle but powerful forces can restore relationships, heal divisions, and, as the writer of Psalm 133 says, become the foundation for the blessings ordained by God.



Focus scripture
Genesis 45:1–15

Additional scriptures
Psalm 133

Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32
Matthew 15: (10–20), 21–28

 *Seasons of the Spirit*
is based on semi-
continuous readings of the
Revised Common Lectionary.

Focus scripture: Genesis 45:1–15

Neither Joseph's brothers nor the rulers of Egypt could have anticipated Joseph's response to seeing his brothers who had come to Egypt in hopes of finding relief from the famine gripping the land. Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery. Upon realizing that Joseph had risen to a position of power and authority, they were filled with fear and dismay, no doubt anticipating that Joseph would now have his revenge. As one who had learned to navigate the imperial world of Egyptian rule, Joseph knew that utilizing his power for retribution would not only be understood, but expected.

Imperial and patriarchal systems of authority thrive on division, control and exploitation. Joseph himself had spent years in an Egyptian cell, even though the charges against him were false (Genesis 39). It was Joseph's vision that enabled the Egyptian people and now his family to survive the famine, but survival within an imperial system came at a tremendous cost, including the appropriation of land, livelihoods and ultimately freedom (Genesis 47:12–26). In spite of Joseph's considerable power and authority, he never escaped the discrimination of segregated dining where Israelites, including Joseph, were kept from eating in the same place as Egyptians (Genesis 43:32).

Joseph's brothers, along with Egyptian rulers, expected Joseph to live by these imperial norms with retribution being the direct result. However, Joseph, remembering the covenant making, freedom-giving God of his youth, chooses to live by different standards and different values – an alternative way of being. Even though his brother's intention was one of harm to him, rather than have

them thrown into jail as anticipated, Joseph reframes their experience by seeing the God of liberation at work. Refusing to be confined and imprisoned by hatred and bitterness, Joseph sets himself and his brothers free with forgiveness and charity. In time, these counter-norms of forgiveness, healing, and unity will become a threat to Egypt. But for Joseph and his family, its immediate impact is to restore a relationship that had been severely broken.

Psalm 133 offers the subversive claim that to live in unity with kindred (one another and creation) is to experience the blessings of God.

Romans 11:1–2a, 32 is Paul's reframing of division, insisting all need God's mercy? God's gifts (of healing) and calling (for unity) are irrevocable.

Matthew 15 (10–20), 21–28 tells the story of Jesus continuing to subvert the norms of imperial rule by ignoring the superficial trappings of power and wealth, instead guarding against practices that fracture relationships and community. Jesus himself is reminded of the fullness of God's mercy, healing and unity when confronted by a Canaanite woman.

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Forces of domination both foster and rely upon division, resentments, and conformity in order to maintain their status and power. A spirit of forgiveness and charity subverts this power by making possible a unity of care and compassion, setting us free from all that separates us. This subversive spirit of forgiveness and unity runs throughout today's text. What is it that makes forgiveness so subversive? What challenge does it present to those with power and authority?

**Holy one, you
called this world
into existence,
forging a unity of
life from the very
beginning. The div-
isions and broken-
ness we have cre-
ated are met by the
irrevocable power
of your mercy and
grace. You show us
the way of for-
giveness with the
gentle blessing of
your love.**

Amen.

Lection Connection
links current events
with this week's
scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and
click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 3–5

Family is central for young children. They are dependent on parents and other caregivers for all of their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. Children in this age group have a growing awareness of where they fit in a family; they are beginning to notice family dynamics, particularly where the authority lies and who makes decisions. Children who are observant are likely to recognize family difficulties, situations with conflicts, and emotional ups and downs. Joseph's story is a fascinating family narrative, but it is too long and complicated for three- to

five-year-olds. The session will focus on the end of the story, when Joseph forgives his brothers and the family is reunited. Children will hear the rest of the story details as they grow older.

Be sensitive to any stresses with siblings, parents, and even extended family the children may be concerned about. At this age, they might announce what's on their minds or keep it deep inside. Pray that the children in the group will be supported and blessed in their interactions with their families.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Genesis 45:1–15, and [biblical background material](#) (p. 63).
- ❑ Set a worship space with green cloth, candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Music CD*, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 3), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 3), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring "Welcome Song" (on resource sheet ["Additional Songs and Poems,"](#) p. 82) or "Family Thank You" (p. 8 in *SGF Songbook*; #4 on *SGF Music CD*).
- ❑ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ❑ Bring resource sheet ["Together Again."](#)
- ❑ Bring shallow tray with sand and the story figures of Joseph, the Brothers, striped coat, and Egyptian robe (from poster [Storytelling Resources #2](#)).

- ❑ Bring set of paper dolls for each child (see resource sheet ["Patterns,"](#) p. 83).

Respond

Choose from the options provided.

Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Greeting cards:** copies of resource sheet ["God helps us to be friends!"](#) construction paper; trim edges of resource sheet.
- ❑ **Mosaics:** construction paper, yarn, collage materials (such as wrapping paper scraps, lace, ribbon); cut a large paper heart for each child and print on one side of each heart the message, "God helps me to show God's love to others."
- ❑ **Friend circles:** construction paper, paper doll figures (see resource sheet ["Patterns,"](#) p. 83); cut set of four figures for each child.

Bless

- ❑ Bring "Blessing Song" (on resource sheet ["Additional Songs and Poems,"](#) p. 82) or "Zulu Carol" (p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #5 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3; or p. 32 in *SGF Songbook*, #22 on *SGF Music CD*).

For groups consisting mostly of three-year-olds, supplemental resources can be downloaded from the Library at www.seasonsonline.ca.



Subversive Forgiveness

Scripture

Genesis 45:1–15

FOCUS To show how God's love helped Joseph reconnect with his family

Gather

Welcome each child, saying "Hello, (*child's name*), we're happy you're here." Invite them to share experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space. Light the candle, saying, "This candle reminds us of God's love which is all around us."

Pray Thank you, God,
for the stories in the Bible,
that help us learn about your love.
Thank you that we can be
with our friends here today. Amen.

Sing "Welcome Song" (p. 82) or "Family Thank You" (p. 8 in *SGF Songbook*, #4 on *SGF Music CD*).

Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

☐ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hi (*names each child*). Yesterday was a great day!

Leader: What happened, Priscilla?

Priscilla: I had a fight with my best friend last week but now we are playing together again.

Leader: What were you arguing about?

Priscilla: I can't even remember now!

Leader: Children, have you had times when you haven't gotten along with someone you care about? (*Encourage responses.*) We are happiest when we get along with our family and friends. Our story from the Bible today is about a family who worked out their problems. (*Say goodbye to Priscilla.*)

☐ **Getting along** Explain that today's Bible story is about a family who had some problems to work out. Invite children to talk about times when they've had disagreements with people they love. How were they able to work things out? (*Encourage responses.*) Teach them the following song (*tune: "The More We Get Together"*):

The more we talk together,
together, together.
The more we talk together,
the happier we'll be.
(other verses: sing, play, care)

Engage

Before the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Genesis. Show the figures of Joseph and the

striped coat (from the poster *Storytelling Resources #2*) and recall last week's story about Joseph getting a special coat from his father, which caused his brothers to feel jealous.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "Together Again," and the figures of Joseph, the Brothers, the striped coat, and the Egyptian robe (from the poster Storytelling Resources #2) to tell the story based on **Genesis 45:1–15**.

After the story

Give each child a set of paper doll figures to decorate as members of Joseph's family. Then tape all the sets together to form a circle to show how Joseph's family came back together again.

Sing "Listen, Listen" (on resource sheet "Additional Songs and Poems," p. 82)

Respond

Choose from the following activities.

- ❑ **Greeting cards** Joseph and his brothers were so happy to meet again and to get back together. Invite children to make cards to give to others as reminders of friendship. Distribute the copies of the resource sheet "God helps us to be friends!" and read the message. Have them glue these onto sheets of construction paper and fold in half to create a card, with the message on the inside of the card. As children decorate the outside of the cards talk together about those to whom they would like to give their cards.
- ❑ **Mosaics** Joseph showed God's love to his brothers. God helps us show love to others too. Give each child a large heart shape and read the message "God helps me to show God's love to others." Have them decorate the other side



by tearing paper into small pieces and glueing these onto the hearts. Encourage them to choose from the rest of the craft materials and add these to their collages. Help them punch holes in the tops of their shapes and thread with yarn loops to hang these up at home as reminders to show God's love to others.

- ❑ **Friend circles** The story of Joseph and his brothers reminds us how important it is to get along with each other. Give each child another set of paper doll figures to decorate, encouraging them to imagine these are four members of their family and/or four friends. After these are decorated help children to glue them onto sheets of construction paper and print names beneath the figures.

Bless

Gather in the worship space. Light the candle again and remind children that God loves them very much.

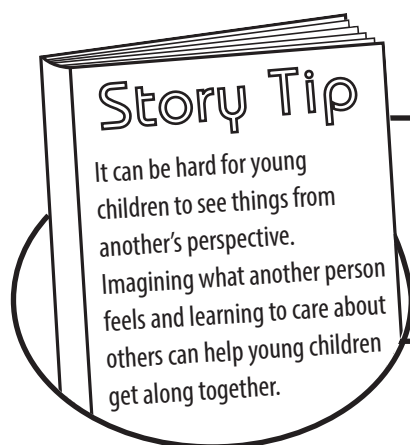
Pray Thank you, God,
for your BIG (*stretch arms wide*) love.
Thank you for helping
us to get along. Amen.

Sing the "Blessing Song" (p. 82) or the song, "Zulu Carol" (p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 3; #5 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 3; or p. 32 in *SGF Songbook*, #22 on *SGF Music CD*).

Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), go out and share God's love with others."

Reflect

In what ways were the children able to identify with the joy of Joseph's family reuniting? Did you observe any unusual responses to the topic of getting along together that may need a follow up?



Together Again

(based on Genesis 45:1–15)

(Sit around a tray or shallow box of sand. Have Joseph, the striped coat, the Egyptian robe, and the brother figures nearby.)

Long ago, Joseph and his family lived in a land that was mostly desert. *(Walk fingers through sand. Invite children to do the same. Place Joseph wearing striped coat and the brothers on one side of the sand.)* Joseph and his brothers didn't get along. In fact, one day, Joseph's brothers were so angry they sold Joseph to traders (traders are people who buy and sell things). Those traders took Joseph far, far away. Joseph was taken to Egypt. He must have been very sad. But even though Joseph was far from home, God was with him. *(Remove robe and move Joseph to other side of sand.)*

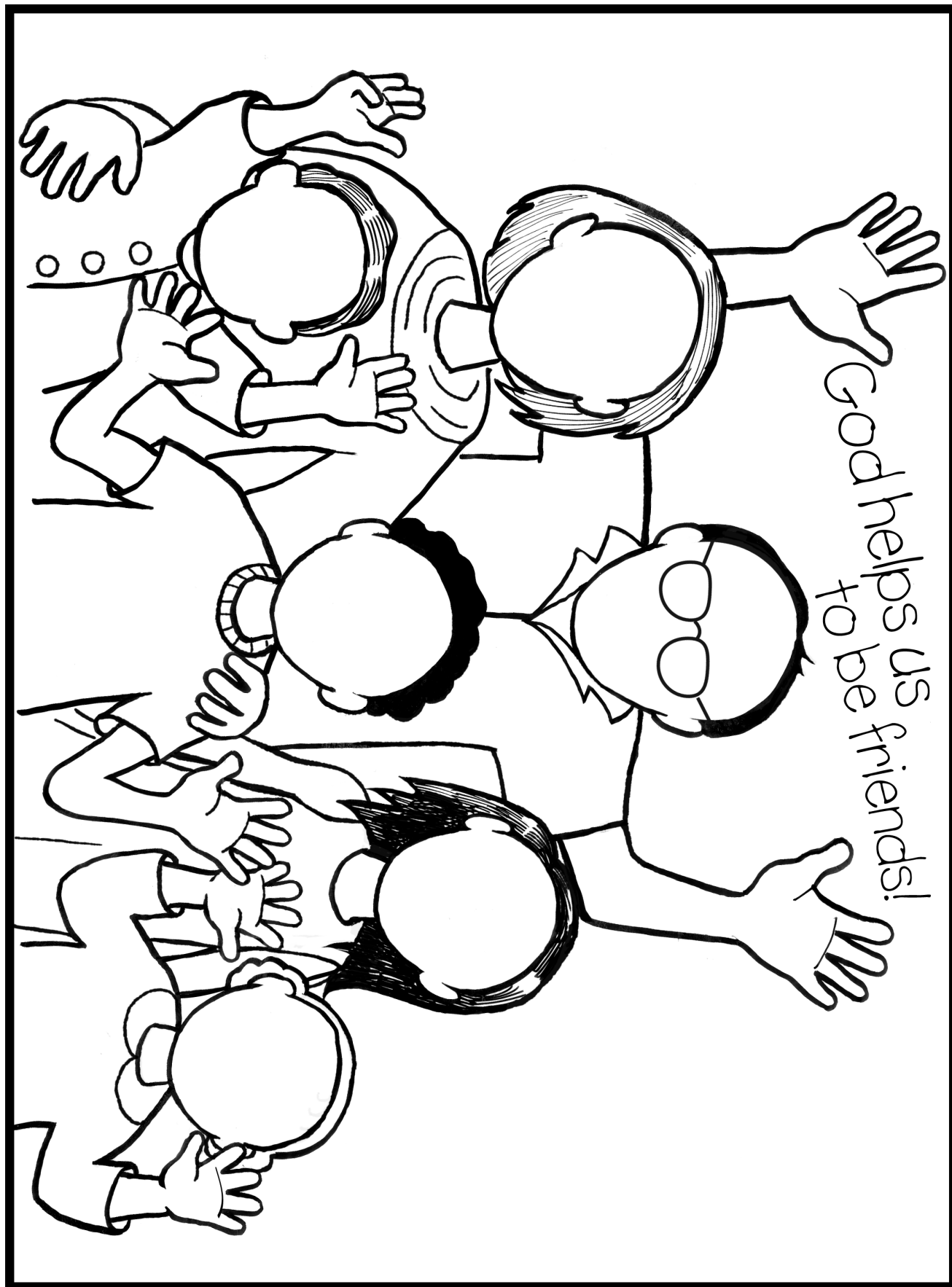
Joseph did well in Egypt. *(Put Egyptian robe on Joseph.)* Joseph had a very important job – making sure that all the people in Egypt had enough food to eat. And the people did have plenty to eat. Then Joseph saved the extra food for later.

Joseph's brothers and their families did not do well. There was no rain and no food was growing where they lived. They were very, very hungry. What would they do? *(Pause.)*

The brothers heard that they could buy grain in Egypt. Grain was just what they needed to make bread and other good foods.

So the brothers travelled to Egypt to find the food they needed. *(Move brothers slowly across sand to Joseph.)* The trip across the desert was long. The sun made the land hot and dry. Everyone was hungry. They hoped that someone would be kind to them and help them.

When the brothers arrived in Egypt, guess who they met? Joseph! At first the brothers didn't recognize him. When Joseph told them who he was, the brothers were surprised...and then they were afraid. They thought Joseph would be angry with them for selling him to traders. But even before the brothers had a chance to say, "I'm sorry," Joseph gave them a hug that said, "I forgive you. I know you have changed and are caring and loving to one another." Joseph was so happy to see his brothers again. He told them to go back home, bring all their families and animals, and come to live in Egypt with him. *(Move brothers across the sand and then back again to Joseph.)* All the brothers must have been glad to be together again! Joseph showed God's love to his family.



ADDITIONAL SONGS AND POEMS

WELCOME SONG

(tune: "London Bridge")

Gather round with us today,
to sing and pray, to learn and play.
Gather round with us today,
God loves us in every way.

BLESSING SONG

(tune: "London Bridge")

God is with us as we go,
as we go, home today.
God is with us as we go.
God loves us in every way.

GOD'S LOVE

(tune: "The Wheels on the Bus")

God's love for me goes on and on,
on and on, on and on.
God's love for me goes on and on,
everywhere I go.
(Repeat song using the words "you" and
"us" instead of "me.")

I CAN SING AND PRAY

(tune: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star")

I can sing and pray and grow.
I can draw and laugh and throw.
I can push and pull and lift.
I can choose to share my gifts.
I can sing and pray and grow,
all because God loves me so.

I'M LOVED

(tune: "Head and Shoulders")

Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
knees and toes, knees and toes.
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
all of me is loved!
(Other verses: Wiggly fingers, wiggly
toes... Eyes and ears, and mouth and
nose... Neck and elbows, hips and
feet...)

LISTEN, LISTEN

(tune: "London Bridge")

Listen, listen, God loves us,
God loves us, God loves us.
Listen, listen, God loves us,
God helps us to be friends.

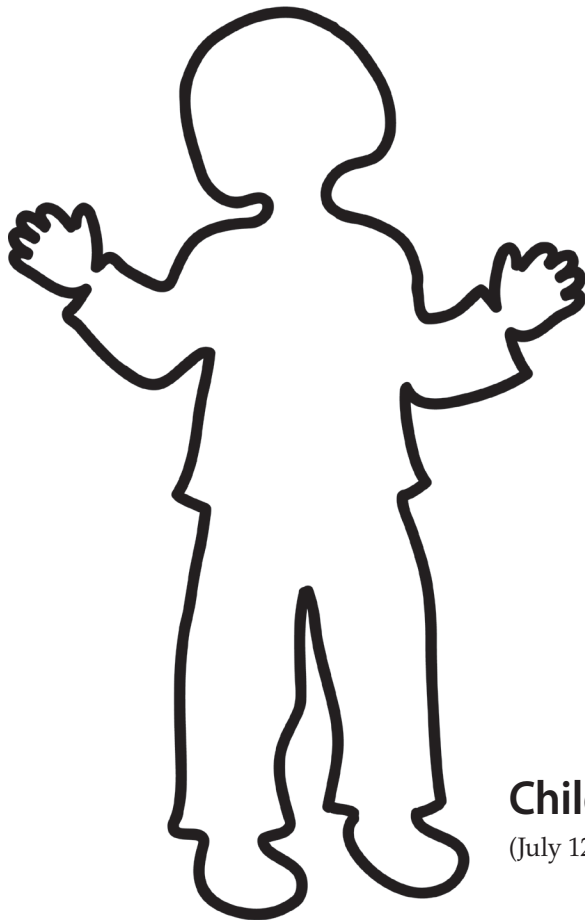
SLEEP LITTLE BABY

(August 23)

Sleep little baby (close eyes and lay
head on folded hands),
safe in my arms (hug arms around
self).
I'll hug and rock you (cradle arms and
rock back and forth),
and keep you from harm (pretend to
hug a baby).
Hush little baby (put finger to mouth
and say "Shhh"),
don't start to cry (wave finger back
and forth and shake head),
I'll hug and rock you (cradle arms and
rock back and forth),
'cause I love you, that's why! (Fold
arms over heart.)



PATTERNS

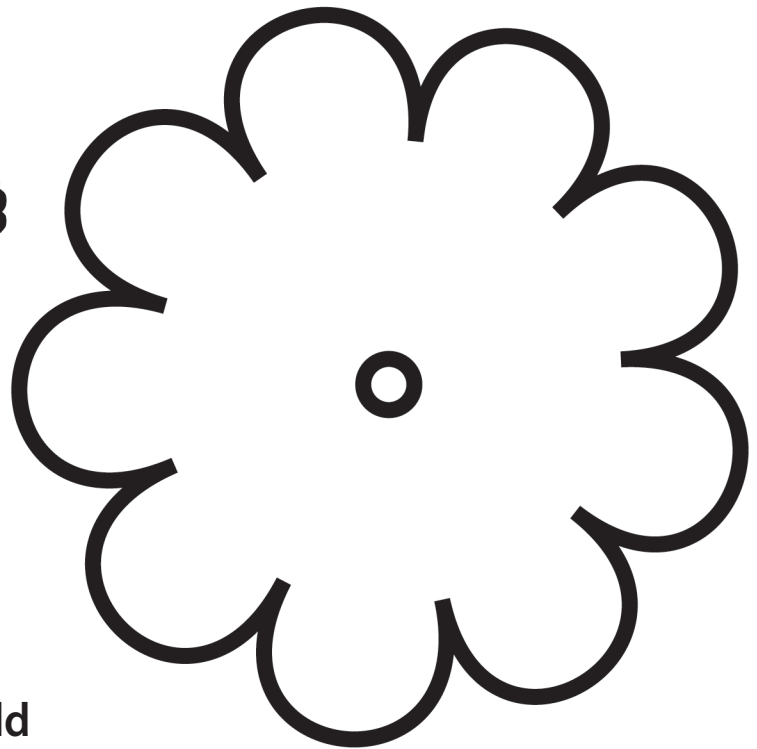


Child

(July 12, August 23, 30)

Flower

(June 28)



PAPER DOLLS

(August 16)

1. Use half a sheet of paper that has been cut lengthwise.
2. Fold paper in half and in half again in the same direction.
3. On the top section, draw a person whose hands extend to the folds of the paper (or trace pattern on this page).
4. Invite the children to do the unfolding to reveal four people.

