Ages 6–8 30–40 minutes · 1 child, a team, or a whole class

The Vanishing Ornaments

Every night this week, one round, shiny ornament has vanished from the porch tree on Maple Lane, and the snowman's buttons are gone too. This morning there's fresh snow, and a trail of tiny tracks. Your Snow Trackers follow it to find out who is taking them.

The trackers make five stops: the porch tree, the snowman, the sled hill, the woodpile and the big oak. At each stop the tracks lead to a puzzle (ornament patterns, a note in picture code, a tangle of crisscrossing tracks), and solving it earns a letter. Each stop's letter goes in its own shape: a tree, a mitten, a boot, a mug and an acorn. On page 8 the five shapes come back in a new order and spell out who did it. Then everyone makes a folded paper ornament and gets a certificate. It's all snow, lights and a hungry neighbor, so it fits any home that celebrates in December, or none, and any classroom.

Skills: patterns · picture code and early reading · following tracks · adding within 20 · counting and sequencing · cutting curves · folding and gluing

What you need

- Pencils and crayons
- Scissors (a grown-up can cut) and a glue stick
- Plain printer paper. Card stock makes a sturdier ornament.
- A piece of string or yarn, if you'd like to hang the ornament

How to play

1. Read page 2 together. Early readers can take the short lines; you read the rest.
2. Go stop by stop, in page order. Each puzzle ends with a letter for that stop's shape.
3. Kids can work alone or team up. When someone is stuck, read the puzzle aloud and point at the pictures. Page 11 has three hints for every stop, from a small nudge to nearly the answer.
4. On page 8, each shape matches one stop. Kids look back, find the stop with the same shape and copy its letter. The shapes spell the answer.
5. Finish with the folded ornament and the certificate.

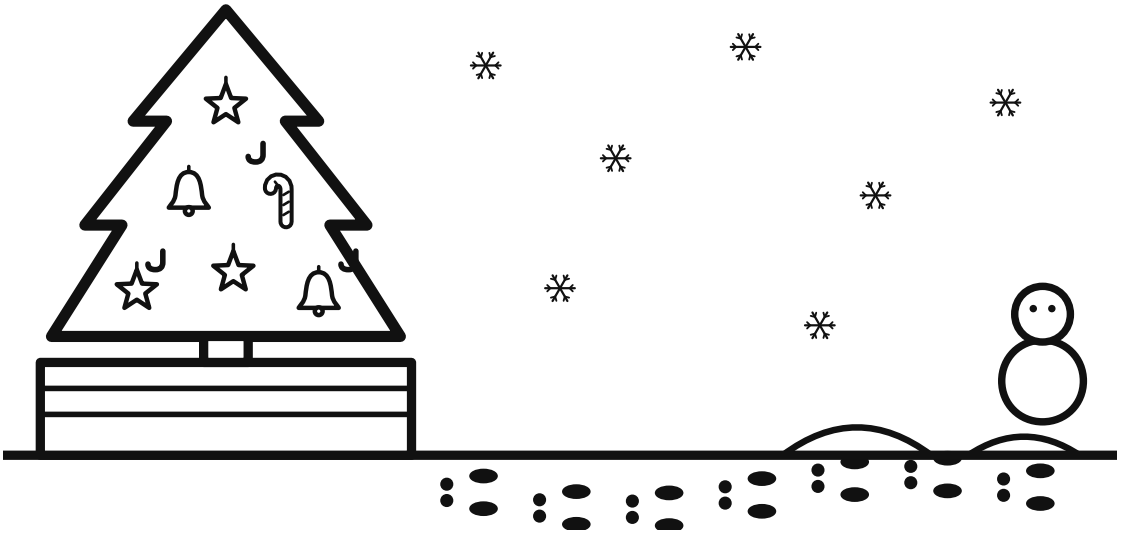
Answers and hints are on page 11. They aren't hidden, so keep that page to yourself until the end.

If a player can't easily see the pictures or uses a screen reader, page 12 tells you what to read aloud at each stop.

In a classroom

Free for home and classroom use. Copy pages 2–10 once per child, or once per team of two or three. It fits a 40-minute period, or split it: stops 1–3 one day, then stops 4–5 and the ornament the next. The pages avoid big black areas, so they go easy on toner.

The Vanishing Ornaments



On Maple Lane, the porch tree is full of ornaments. But every night, **one round, shiny ornament vanishes!** The snowman's round buttons are gone too.

This morning there is new snow, and tiny tracks. You are the Snow Trackers. Follow the tracks and find out who is taking them!

Your path:



1 porch tree → **2** snowman → **3** sled hill → **4** woodpile → **5** big oak

At each stop, solve the puzzle. Write its letter inside that stop's shape.

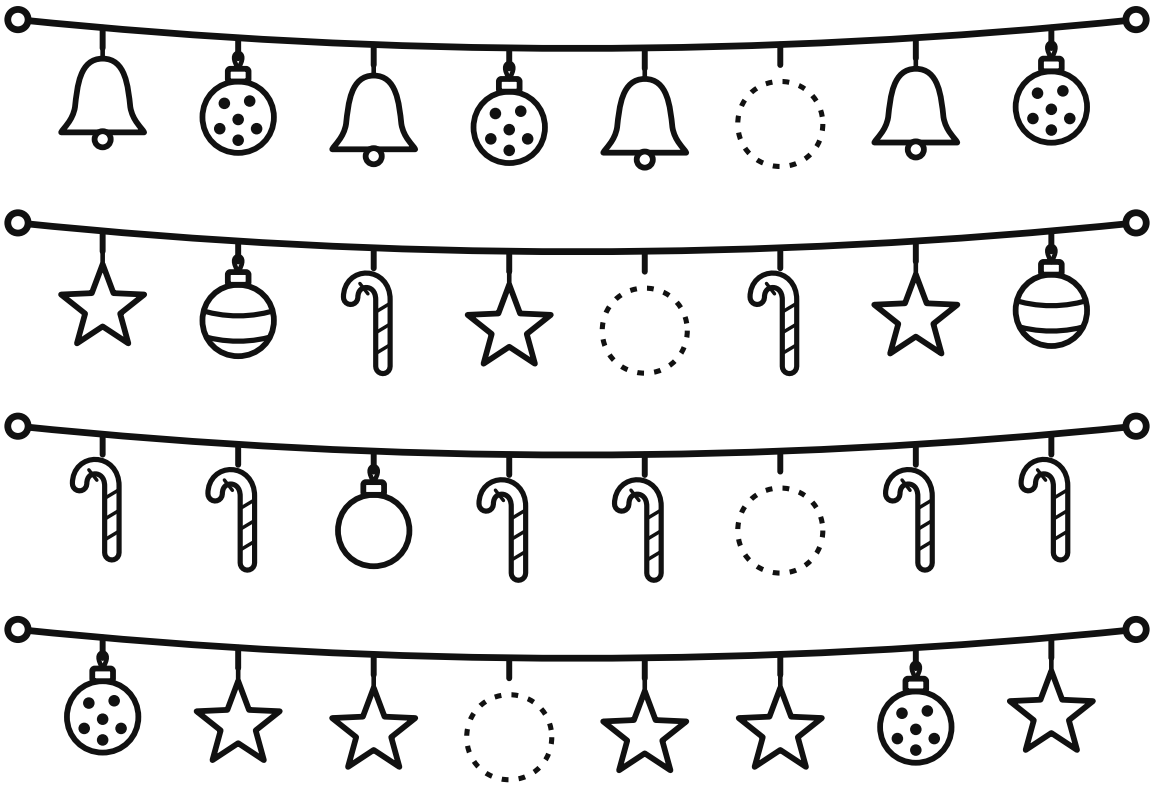
Color the porch while you get ready!

STOP 1

The porch tree

Each string of ornaments has a pattern. Last night, one hook on every string went empty!

Draw the missing ornament on each empty hook.



The ornament key

K	E	R	N	T	S
					

Which ornament did you draw two times? Write its letter in the tree.

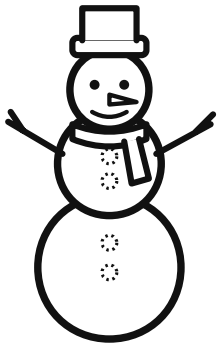
Stop 1



Only round ones are gone. Tiny tracks lead to the snowman →

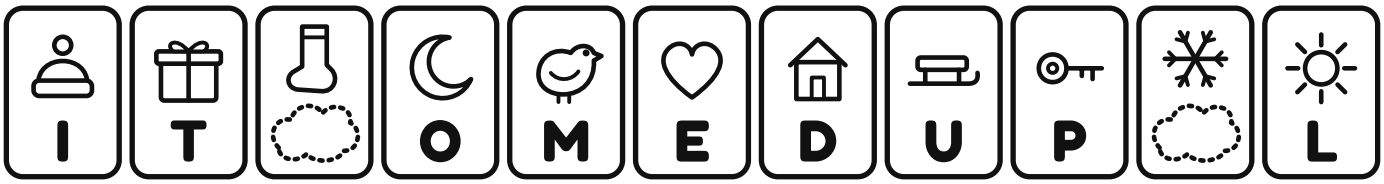
STOP 2

The snowman

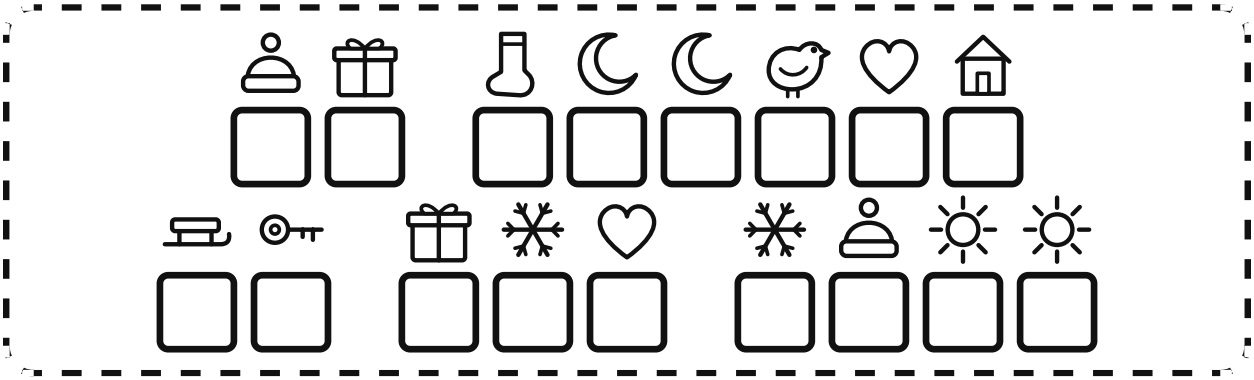


His buttons are gone! The twins next door saw something. They left a note in picture code.

The code key



Write a letter under each picture in the note.



Snow covers two letters in the key. Read the note to work them out.

Which letter goes with the sock? Write it in the mitten.

Stop 2



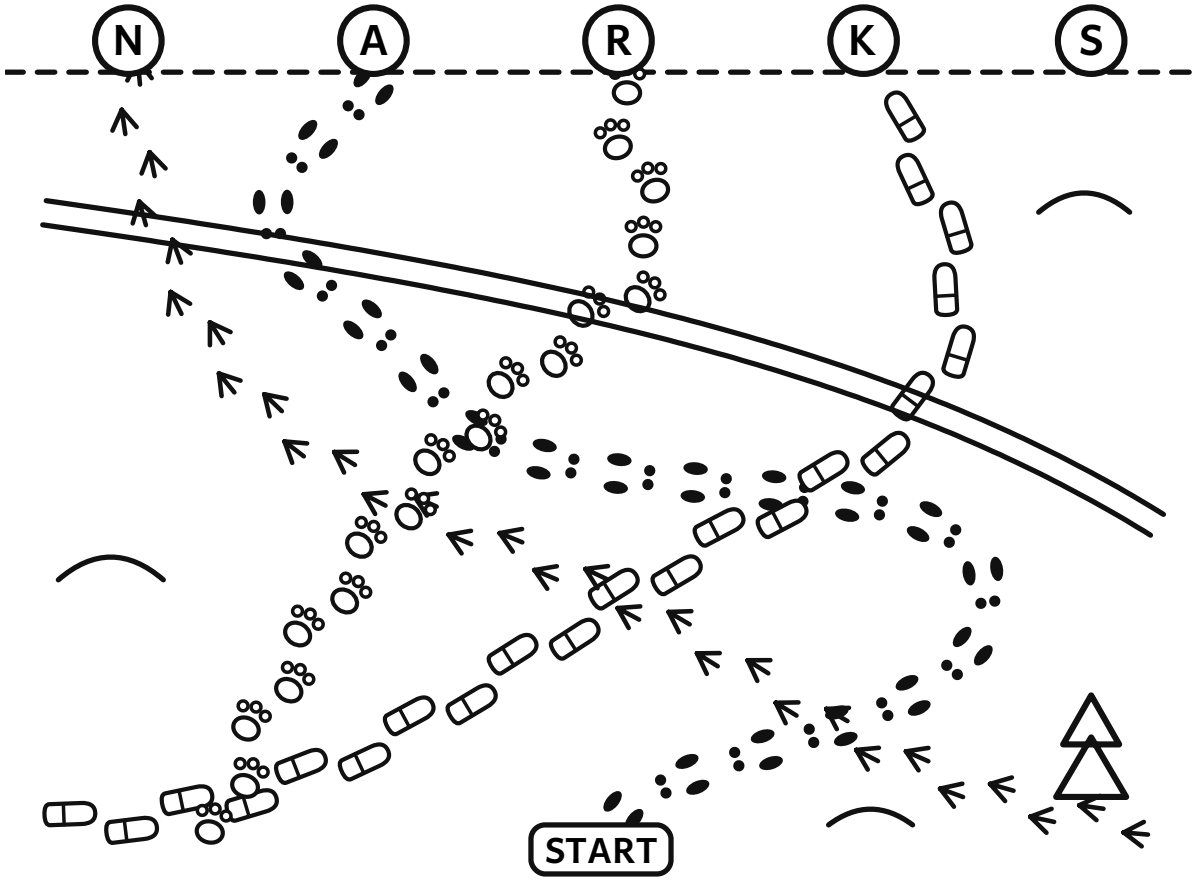
STOP 3

The sled hill

The tiny tracks go up the sled hill. But boots, birds, a dog and a sled crossed them!

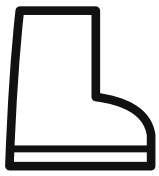
Follow these tracks:

Start at START. Trace the tiny tracks with a crayon.



Where do the tiny tracks leave the hill?
Write that letter in the boot.

Stop 3

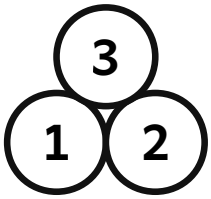


Over the top, the tracks hop to the woodpile →

STOP 4

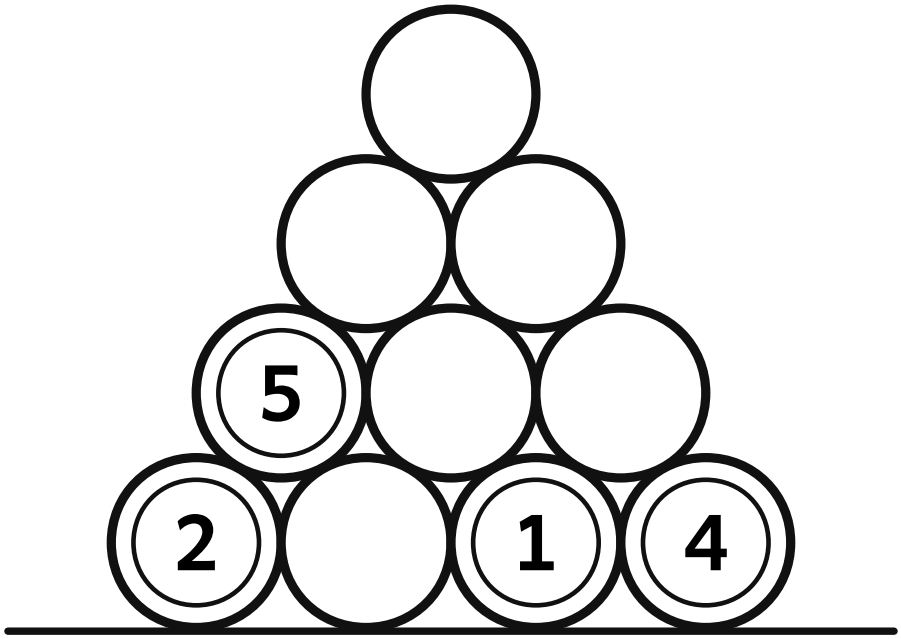
The woodpile

The tracks go into the woodpile. Some numbers on the logs got rubbed off!



Each log is the two logs under it, added together.

Fill in a number on every log.



The knotholes have numbers. A letter hides in each one.

15	16	18	19	20
S	R	L	K	N

Find the knothole with the top log's number. Write its letter in the mug.

Stop 4



STOP 5

The big oak

Under the big oak, you find four drawings of the porch tree. A neighbor drew one every night! The wind blew them here.

1 Cut off the strip at the bottom of the page.

2 Cut out the four drawings.

3 Glue them in order: the most round balls first.

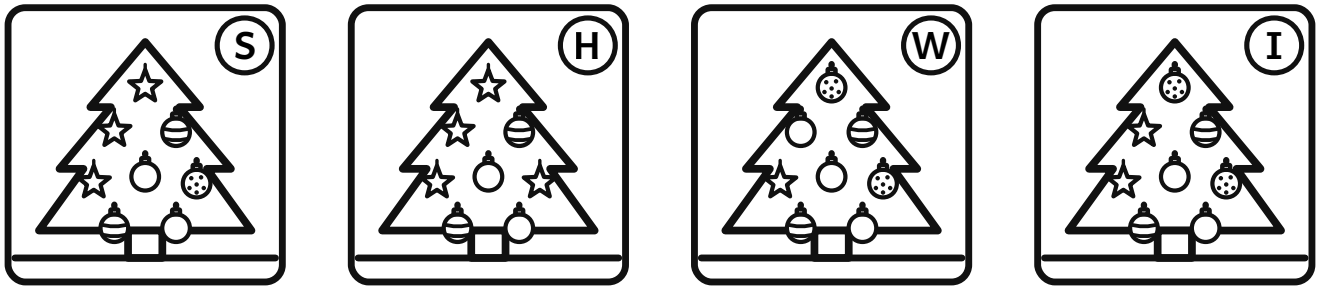
1st	2nd	3rd	4th

Read the letters from 1st to 4th.
Do they spell a word? Then you got it!

Write the letter on the LAST drawing in the acorn.

Stop 5

Something rustles up in the oak. Turn the page!

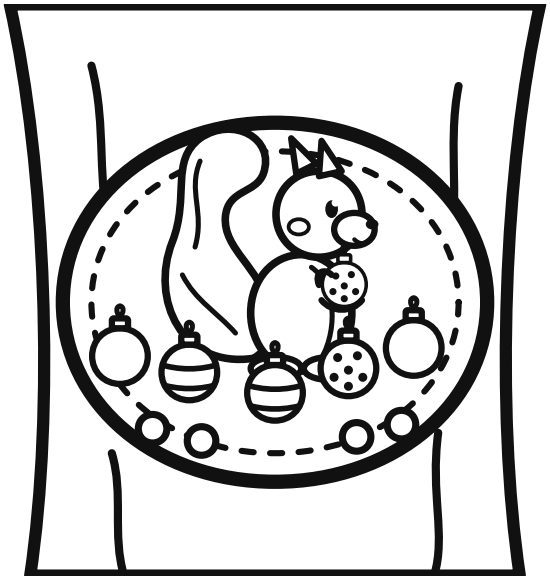


Who took the ornaments?

Find the stop with the same shape. Copy its letter into this shape.



The tracks end at a hole high in the big oak. Peek inside! It's a squirrel, and her name is in the shapes. She's curled up on every round ornament, and the snowman's buttons too.



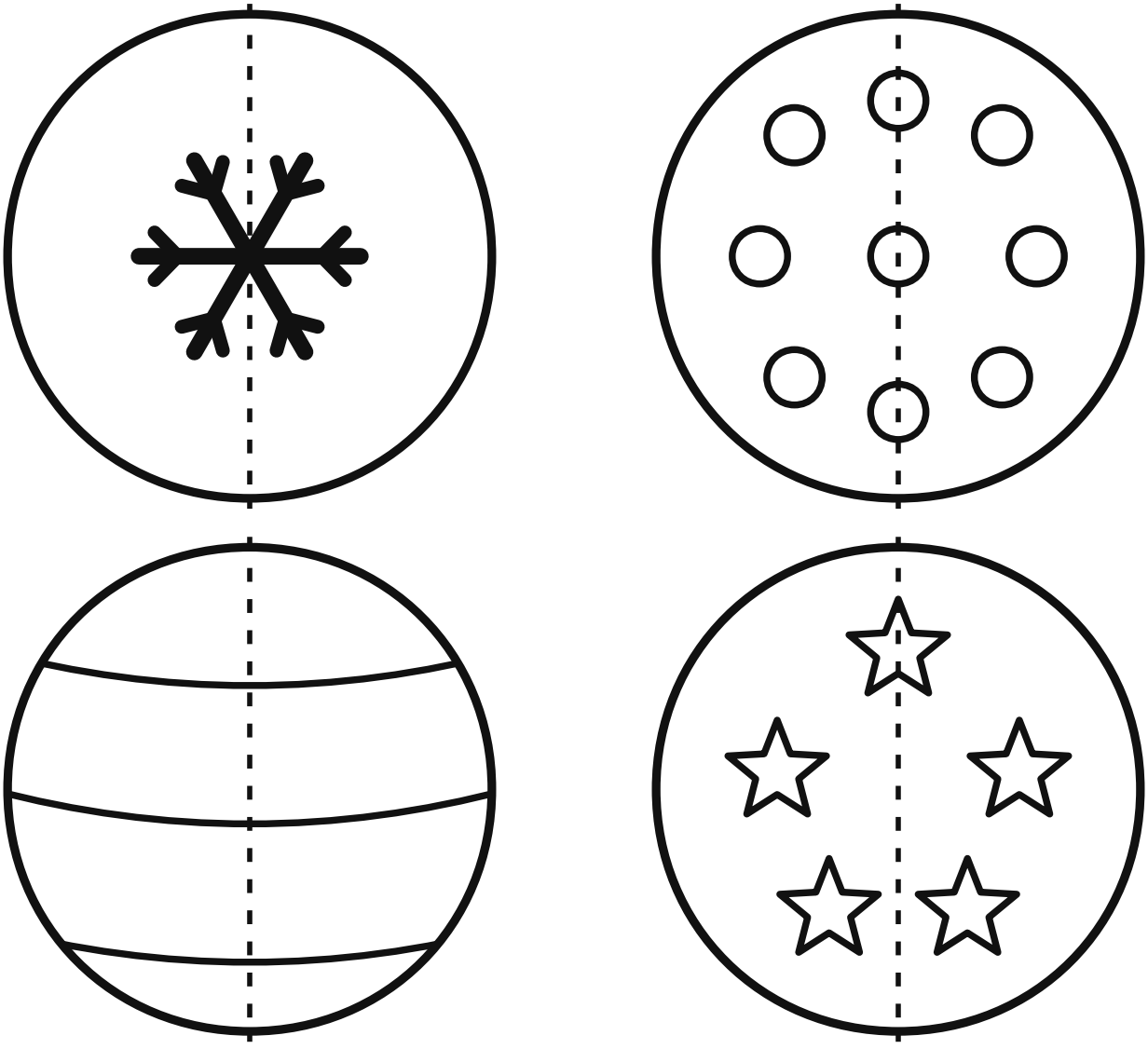
Round and shiny, just like nuts! She was saving them for winter. You show her a pinecone full of seeds, and she trades everything back.

That night the porch tree shines again, and the snowman smiles with all his buttons.

Color the squirrel. Then turn the page!

Make a round ornament

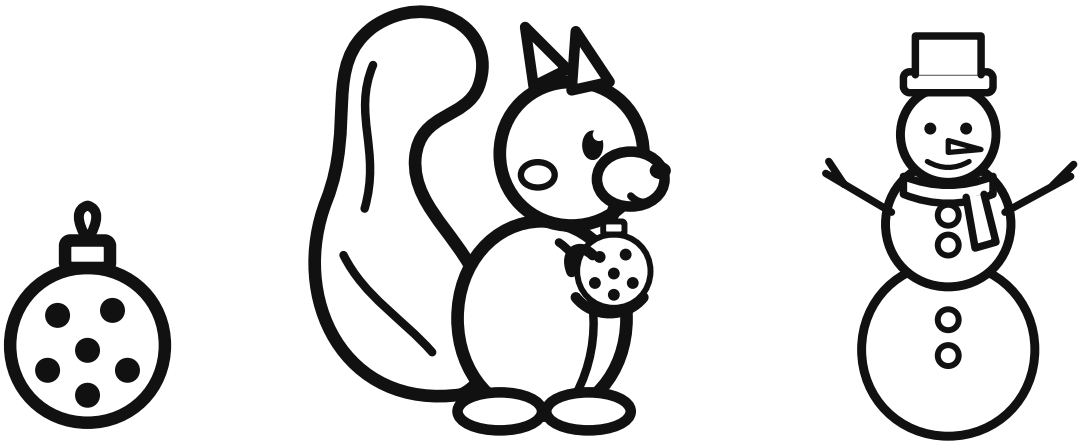
1. Color all four circles.
2. Cut out each circle. A grown-up can help.
3. Fold each one in half on the dotted line, colors outside.
4. Glue the folded circles back to back, so they open into a ball.



To hang it, a grown-up can glue a loop of string in the middle.

SNOW TRACKERS

Ornaments Found!



This certifies that

_____

followed the tiny tracks through the snow,
solved all five stops and brought every round ornament home.

Date: _____

Answers and hints, for grown-ups

Stop 1, the porch tree

The empty hooks need a dotted ball, a striped ball, a plain ball and a dotted ball. The dotted ball is drawn twice → **E**.

Hints: (1) Say each string out loud: bell, dots, bell, dots... What comes next? (2) Some patterns repeat two things, some three. Find where each one starts over. (3) Draw all four first. One kind of ball is on two strings.

Stop 2, the snowman

The note says IT ZOOMED UP THE HILL. The sock is Z and the snowflake is H → **Z**.

Hints: (1) Fill in every letter the key shows. Leave the snowy pictures blank for now. (2) Read what you have out loud: "IT _OOMED UP T_E _ILL." (3) The sock is the first letter of the second word. Which letter makes it a word that means "went very fast"?

Stop 3, the sled hill

The tiny tracks swing right, loop back left and leave at **A**. Boots end at K, birds at N, the dog at R; the sled runs off the side.

Hints: (1) Look at the START box. Which tracks begin right there? (2) Tiny tracks come in groups of four: two small dots, two long marks. Keep a finger on them. (3) Where trails cross, keep going the same way. The tiny ones leave on the left half of the hill.

Stop 4, the woodpile

Bottom row 2, 3, 1, 4; then 5, 4, 5; then 9, 9; the top log is 18 → **L**.

Hints: (1) Look at the 5 and the 2 under it. What adds to 2 to make 5? (2) Now the whole bottom row is filled. Add each pair to fill the next row up. (3) The row under the top is 9 and 9. Add them, then find that knothole.

Stop 5, the big oak

Round balls: W has 7, I has 6, S has 5, H has 4. In order the letters spell WISH. The last drawing → **H**.

Hints: (1) Count only the round balls on each drawing. Skip the stars. (2) A round ball vanished every night, so the first night had the most. (3) Each drawing has one fewer than the one before it. The word is something you might make on a star.

Who took them?

The final shapes are acorn, boot, mitten, tree and mug, so stops 5, 3, 2, 1, 4: H, A, Z, E, L = **HAZEL**, the squirrel.

If they get stuck

- On the sled hill, let them trace lightly first. A crayon line is easy to follow back when two trails cross.
- Guessing the name early is part of the fun. Let them check it by finishing the stops.

Grown-ups get a kit too

Free kits for older kids, teens and adults are on the page you got this one from. Kinundrum makes personalized puzzle countdowns for families and group chats.

Credits

Illustrations: original art made for this kit. Fonts: Andika (SIL International), SIL Open Font License 1.1; Fredoka (Milena Brandão and Hafontia), SIL Open Font License 1.1; Noto Sans Symbols 2 (The Noto Project Authors), SIL Open Font License 1.1.

Reading the pictures aloud

For a player who can't easily see the pictures or uses a screen reader. When they reach a stop, read its part aloud; they still solve the puzzle. The hints on page 11 are the same.

Stop 1, the porch tree

Read each string one ornament at a time, and say "empty" for the empty hook.

- String 1: bell, dotted ball, bell, dotted ball, bell, empty, bell, dotted ball.
- String 2: star, striped ball, candy cane, star, empty, candy cane, star, striped ball.
- String 3: candy cane, candy cane, plain ball, candy cane, candy cane, empty, candy cane, candy cane.
- String 4: dotted ball, star, star, empty, star, star, dotted ball, star.

The key: bell K, dotted ball E, striped ball R, plain ball N, star T, candy cane S.

Stop 2, the snowman

The key: hat I, gift T, sock (snow covers its letter), moon O, bird M, heart E, house D, sled U, key P, snowflake (snow covers its letter), sun L.

The note, word by word: hat, gift. Sock, moon, moon, bird, heart, house. Sled, key. Gift, snowflake, heart. Snowflake, hat, sun, sun.

Stop 3, the sled hill

A tracing maze doesn't read aloud. Trace it together, their finger under yours, or give them the letter from page 11.

Stop 4, the woodpile

Each log is the two logs under it, added together. The bottom row has four logs: 2, blank, 1, 4. Above it, three logs: 5, blank, blank. Then two blank logs, then one blank log on top. Counters or fingers help. The knotholes: 15 S, 16 R, 18 L, 19 K, 20 N.

Stop 5, the big oak

Read each drawing's ornaments from the top, and let them count the round balls. Stars aren't round balls.

- Drawing S: star; star, striped ball; star, plain ball, dotted ball; striped ball, plain ball.
- Drawing H: star; star, striped ball; star, plain ball, star; striped ball, plain ball.
- Drawing W: dotted ball; plain ball, striped ball; star, plain ball, dotted ball; striped ball, plain ball.
- Drawing I: dotted ball; star, striped ball; star, plain ball, dotted ball; striped ball, plain ball.

Who took them?

The shapes on page 8, in order: acorn, boot, mitten, tree, mug. Remind them which shape each stop used: the tree for Stop 1, the mitten for Stop 2, the boot for Stop 3, the mug for Stop 4 and the acorn for Stop 5.