

Archaeology

Family Winter Trail

Long ago in winters past, when days were cold and nights were long, Stone Age farmers, Bronze Age warriors, Viking children and Medieval lords and ladies passed the time and celebrated feasts in different ways.

Follow the trail to find the objects that tell us what these people did.

museum

National Museum of Ireland
Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

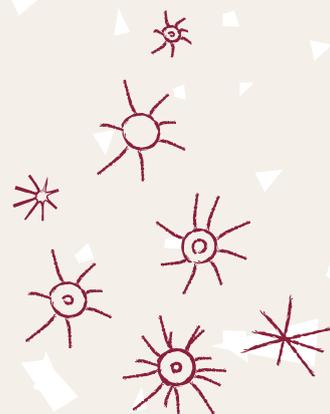
Archaeology

Stop 1

START! Go across the reception area, through the door into **Prehistoric Ireland** and take a left to find the passage tomb, a special structure made of stones.

Farming and tomb building in Ireland started at the end of the Stone Age, in the New Stone Age or *Neolithic*. Passage tombs were built by these first farmers who placed the burnt remains of the dead inside.

Fact Box: The most famous passage tomb is called Newgrange, in Co. Meath (image). Each year on a certain day, the sun rises and shines into this tomb through the roofbox above the doorway. The special day is called the Winter Solstice and is on the 21st December. The 21st December is the shortest day of the year and the sun is in the sky for only a few hours.



Newgrange entrance



Winter Solstice sun in the passageway



Around 5000 years ago, when Newgrange was first built, the farmers would gather at the hilltop at Newgrange to wait for sunrise on the Winter Solstice. They may have celebrated and danced on the hill to welcome the sun as it returned after the longest night of the year.

Complete this sentence: The sun helps the farmers to grow

LOOK at the shapes on the passage tomb and on the panel on the wall to the right of the passage tomb. The big stones around the outside of the tomb are called kerbstones.

There are circles, spirals, lines, dots, diamond shapes, zig zags, and wiggles.

Some archaeologists say that these shapes may have been:

Ancient calendars

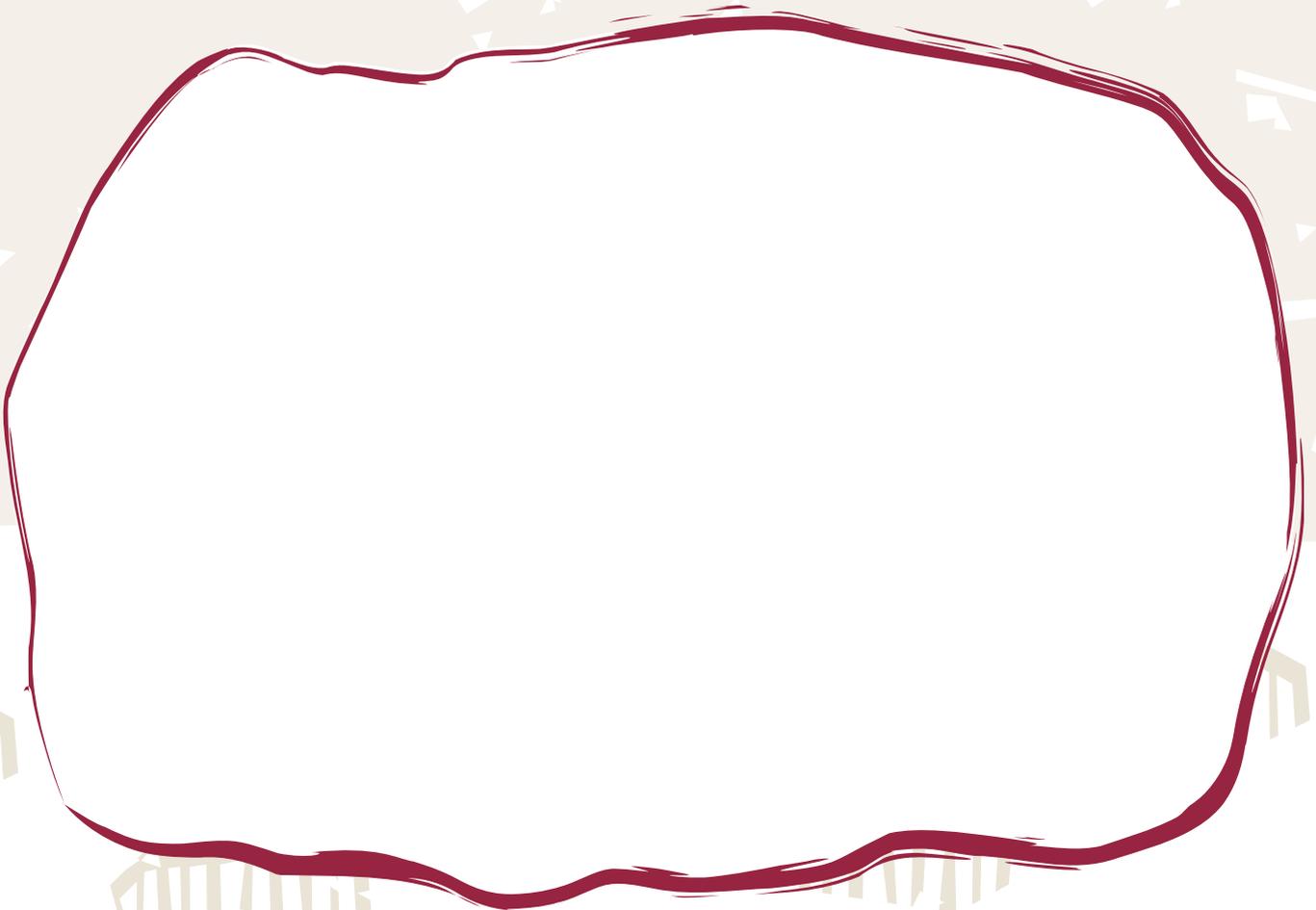
People's names

Magic signs

Stone Age artwork

Circle the idea above that you agree with

Decorate this kerbstone with the shapes that you see.

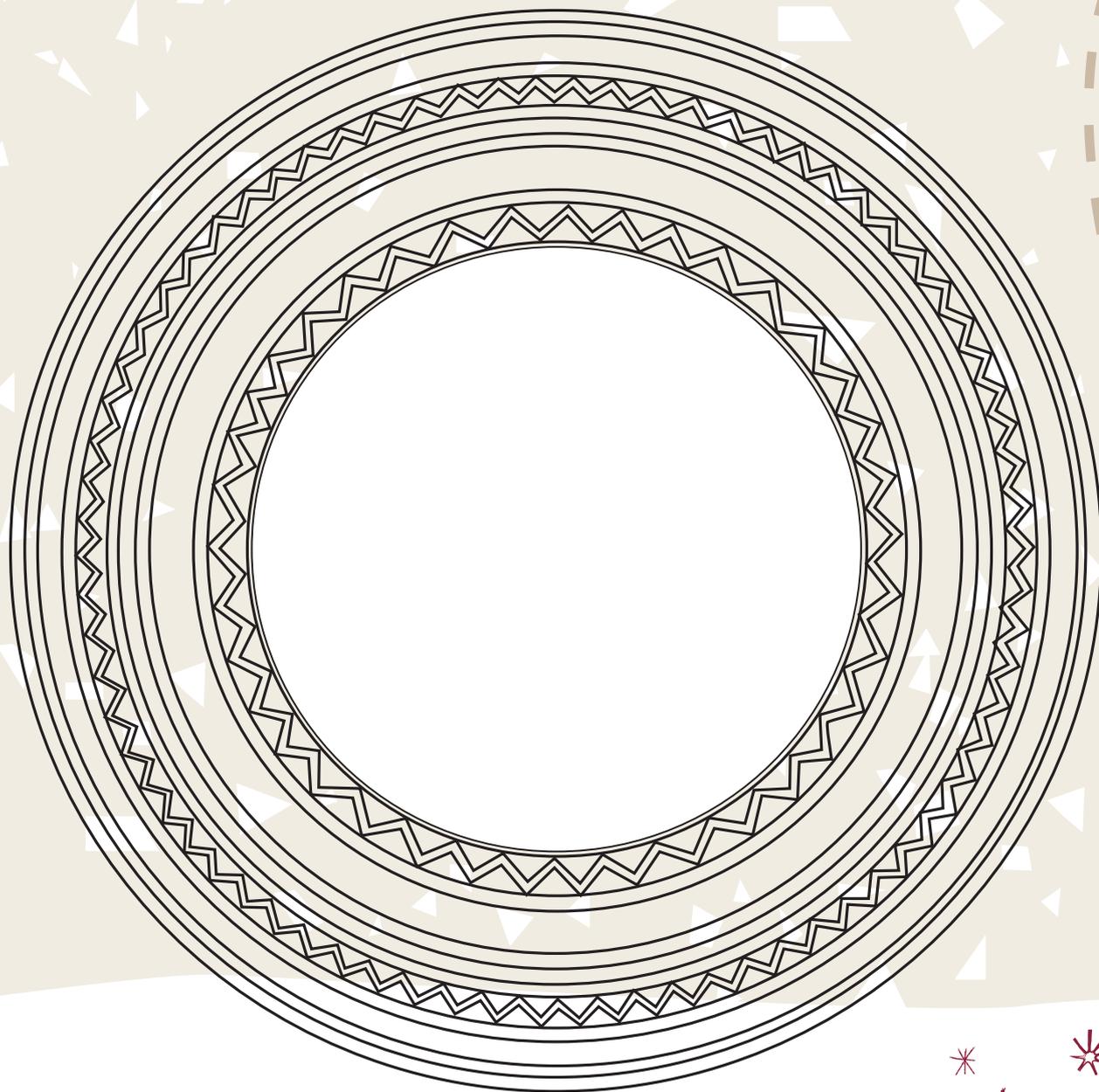


Stop 2

Now go down the steps into the Irish **Bronze Age** gold collection, one of the biggest in Europe!

Can you find the **GOLD DISCS**?

Can you finish this drawing?



Question: LOOK at the shape of the discs. Does it remind you of anything else?

Answer: _____

Stop 3

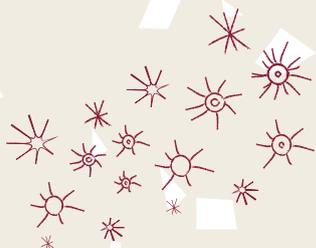
Now let's find some music!

Go back up the three steps, can you find the horns in the case along the wall? (Hint: the case also contains swords and shields)

Imagine trying to play these horns. **What** kind of sound would they make? These are the oldest musical instruments that have ever been found in Ireland.

Question: People play music to celebrate at festivals as well as at other times. **When** might a horn like this also be used? (hint: they were found with weapons)

Answer: They were maybe played before and during _____
This was to give courage and also to frighten enemies.



Stop 4

Now go up the stairs to the first floor and find the **Viking** boat

The Vikings came from Scandinavia to Ireland in the year 795 AD. Scandinavia is another name for the 3 countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The Vikings first came as raiders looking for treasures and slaves.

Fact Box: The Vikings made small settlements called **longphorts**. These were places to stay for the winter to avoid the bad weather and stormy seas. Over time, these longphorts turned into permanent homes and later into towns for the Vikings. In 841 AD Dublin began as a Viking longphort!

Question: For travelling far over the stormy seas, the Vikings used deep sided, long vessels. For daily trips and fishing they used smaller boats. **Which** type do you think this one was?

Answer: _____



Fact Box: The Vikings were pagans. They believed in many different gods and goddesses. To honour their powerful gods such as Thor, god of thunder, they had a great celebration called **Yuletide**. This took place at the darkest, coldest time of winter. Feasts were had and animal sacrifices were made to please the gods so that they would help the crops grow in the spring.

Stop 5

Now go past the boat and down the stairs to enter the Viking Ireland Exhibition, turn right and find the gleaming silver brooches. (Hint: they are on the right)

Imagine you are invited to a great Yuletide feast.
Design a brooch to wear.

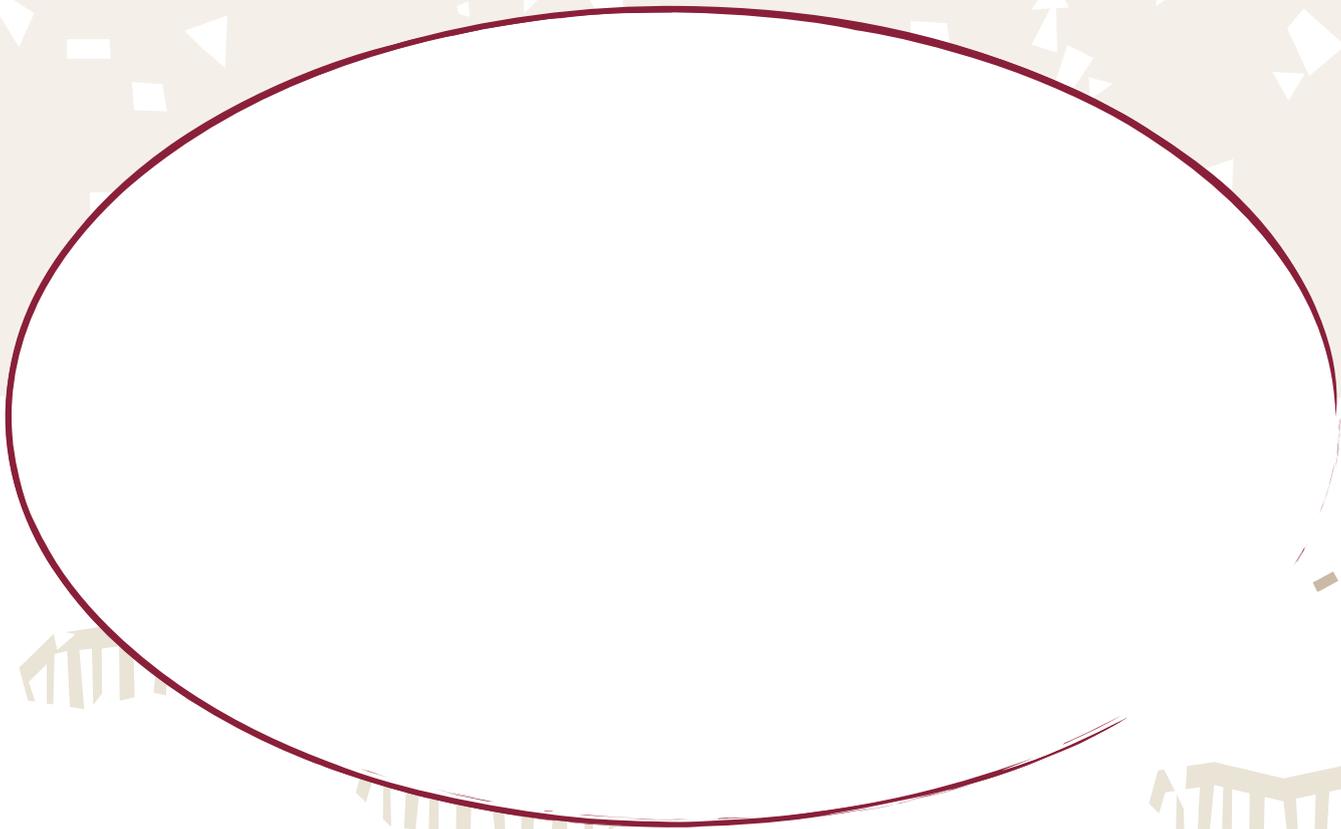
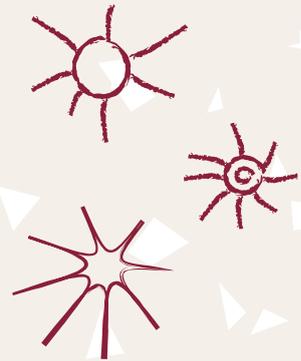
Think about:

What **shape** would it be?

What **materials** would you make it from?

(Circle the materials below)

Amber gold plastic silver wood bone



Stop 6

Find the model of Viking town and see if you can find the Viking ice skates made from horse bone in the case beside it.

What was it like to be a child in Viking Ireland? Just think, the Vikings did not go to school, they didn't have televisions – but they did have fun!



They would **skate** along rivers and lakes for winter sports and fun.

Look around you. What else can you find that might have been a game or toy for a child in Viking Ireland?

Here is a clue...



Make a list of what you can find.

Now go to the end of the room and turn right before the last door – now you're in the **Medieval Ireland** exhibition



In **Medieval Ireland** between 1,000 and 500 years ago, (1150–1550 AD) there was a lot of warfare and many castles were built. Lords and ladies lived inside the castle walls.

Kilkenny Castle, Co. Kilkenny



Cahir Castle, Co. Tipperary



In the dark winter nights lavish celebrations must have happened behind the stone walls. By the time the Medieval period came, people in Ireland were Christians and so they celebrated the birth of Christ. Christmas celebrations almost always involved plenty of food and drink, often served in beautiful vessels to match the important occasion.

Stop 7

Find the beautiful horn on the left hand side of the room

It is the Kavanagh Charter Horn – a symbol of the king of Leinster. This horn was passed down from one king to the next. The horn is made from elephant ivory.

Question: Why would elephant ivory be so special in Medieval Ireland?

Answer: _____



There is writing around the horn. Imagine you have your very own drinking horn. **What** would you write on it? **Write** it in your most elegant writing below:



Stop 8

Now look closely at the items in this case to the left of the horn – which of the items list below can you find?

Wooden Mether

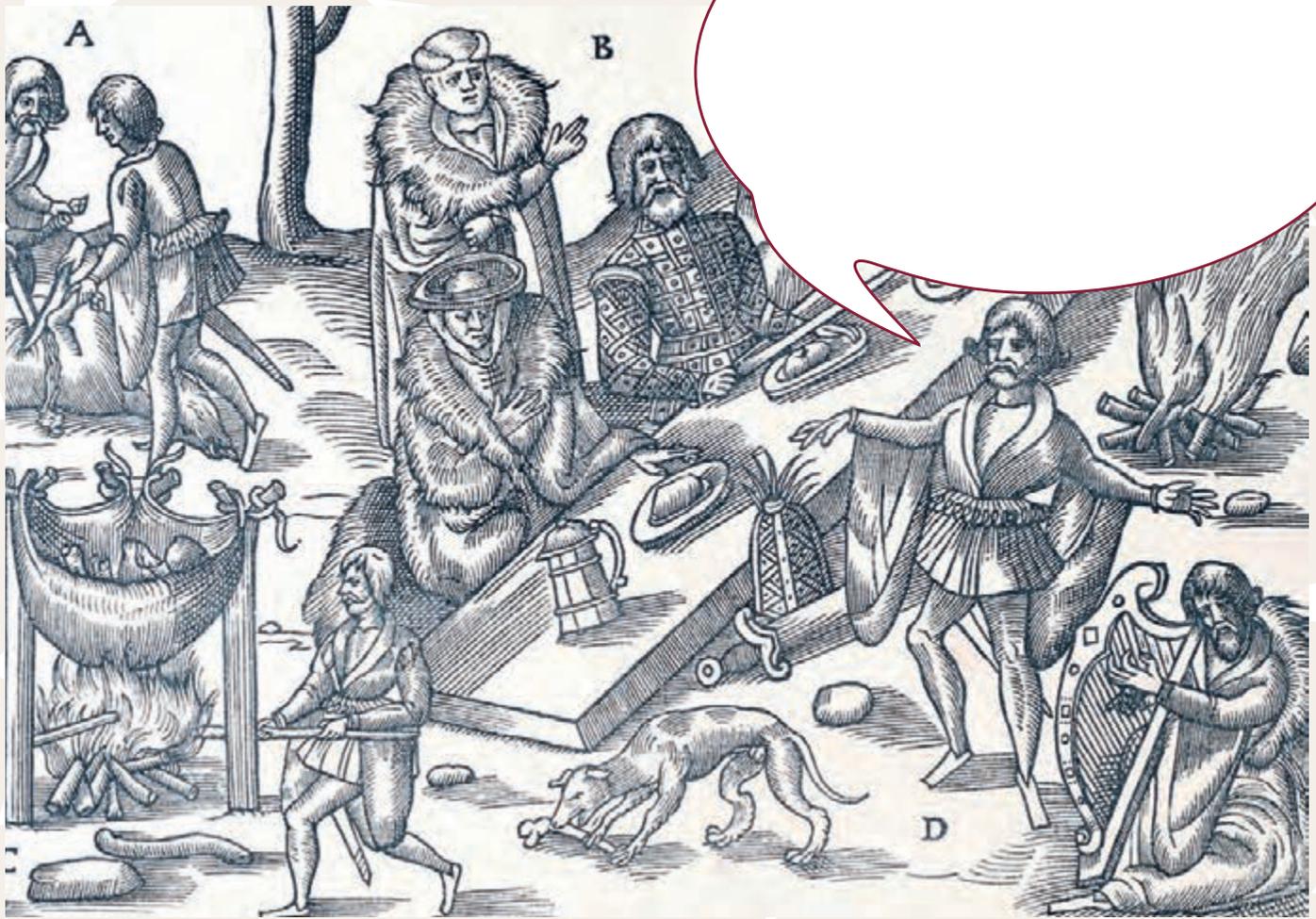
Copper Bowl

Silver Spoons

Pottery Knight wine jug

Fact Box: Did you notice that you couldn't find any plates or forks? This was because forks were not used in Medieval Ireland. People ate with spoons and fingers. Instead of using a plate, people cut a thick slice of bread, and put their food on them. At the end of the meal these slices of bread were picked up and given to the poor.

Find the image on the wall of *An open air feast of a Mac Sweeny chief of Fanad, Donegal*



Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

**Write down what you this figure might be saying?
Is he looking at the dog?**

Stop 9

To continue through Medieval Ireland go up the stone stairs and up the second set of stairs and then turn left.

People did not have central heating in winter in the Middle Ages.
Can you find the winter woollies that would keep you warm?

Question: Are the hats made of fur or wool?

Answer: _____

Stop 10

Now go to the very end of the **Medieval Ireland Prayer** section, until you get to the back wall.

Tucked away to the right, can you **spot** a miniature Christmas scene? There is the Virgin Mary, a donkey and an ox complete with a crib. (Hint: it is on something called a *diptych*)

Fact Box: A *diptych* is a work of art or writing tablets with two hinged panels that can be opened and closed like a book. It can be made of wood, ivory, bone or metal.

Question: What material was this carved from?
Would a poor or rich person own something like this?

Answer: _____

Who were your favourite people you met on the trail?
Place a tick beside your favourite.

- The **farmers who cleverly built a tomb** which the sun could shine into?
- The **Bronze Age Warriors** who frightened their enemies by playing horns?
- The **Vikings** who played board games in the long dark winter months in Dublin?
- The **Medieval lords and ladies** who ate with their fingers?

Congratulations!

You have finished the Archaeology Family Winter Trail

Here is the gold disc from the Irish **Bronze Age** gold collection. It was made from a sheet of shining gold. **Cut** this disc out and put some string through the top of it. You can even **hang** it up as a Christmas decoration.



If you enjoyed this, try our range of other worksheets in the **National Museum of Ireland, including “My Favourite Object”.**

Do you want to know more?

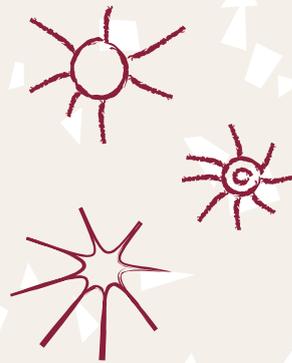
For more information on exhibitions and education programmes, contact the Education & Outreach Department of the National Museum of Ireland:

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Credits

The images of *Newgrange, Co. Meath, Kilkenny Castle, Co. Kilkenny* and *Cahir Castle, Co. Tipperary*, courtesy of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The image from John Derrick's *An open air feast of a MacSweeney chief of Fanad, Co. Donegal*, the Images of Ireland, 1581, courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.