Around the Circle
Celebrating the Church Year
in a Deep Talk way

Suggestions from Deep Talk folk for how to playfully explore
Around the Circle - Celebrating the Church Year
by Laura Alary, illustrated by Claire Westwood







Introduction

Welcome to this resource to help explore the book "Around the Circle - Celebrating the Church Year" by Laura Alary. We hope you find some of the ideas helpful and feel able to adapt them to your context.

Some Deep Talk folk wanted to create this resource because the purpose of Laura's writing is to 'make us bigger on the inside" which is also the purpose of Deep Talk. This what Laura says about her books:
"My name is Laura Alary and I write stories that make us bigger on the inside. What does that mean?
It means my books make you think. Wonder. Ask big questions. Maybe understand other people a bit better. Some of them are serious. Some are funny. Most are a bit of both. But they all aim to stretch minds and hearts."

You can read more about Laura and her books here. We highly recommend every one of them - they cover many themes including science, mythology, stories from the bible, and biographies of people.

We have ommitted the words from the book in the scripts and in the Youtube recordings out of respect for copyright, so you will need to purchase the book (with its wonderful illustrations by Claire Westwood) in order to use this resource.

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Information and support in the art of Deep Talk

Deep Talk is a way of sharing stories using objects in an open, safe, brave and playful way, inviting the gathered group to wonder for themselves. A gentle, relaxed structure enables the group or individual to relate the story to their own life experiences.

The Deep Talk approach encourages dialogue in a wide variety of contexts, e.g. workplaces, schools, care homes, wellbeing groups, religious groups, forest church, interfaith groups, hospital chaplaincy, counselling and spiritual accompaniment. Dialogue (both inner and within communities) helps to develop trust and meaningful communication. We use our head, heart and hands. It is soul work and a way of being. Tuula Valkonen developed Deep Talk in the sand and it has been adapted using other mediums e.g. on cloth and outside on the earth.

There are folk in the Deep Talk community who love to support each other and those new to Deep Talk.

Deep Talk newsletter - to receive news, information and events (including training in the art of Deep Talk)
Website (we hope to have another website www.deeptalkstories.org live by early 2027)
Facebook group

Suggestions for sharing Around the Circle in a Deep Talk way

These suggestions can be used with children and adults. The key is to create a safe, brave and playful space in which people can open up to the story, themselves and each other. The Circle of Trust Touchstones from the Center of Courage and Renewal offer a way to do this.

Use objects
Share the story in a Deep Talk way using the words from the book (ideally learned by heart but you could also have them written on cards). Share the whole story or just a part of it. At the end of the story facilitate Wondering and Community Play (please refer to Stages of a Deep Talk session on pages 10 and 11).

Use the book to invite wondering
Share the story using the book and invite wondering at different points or at the end. There are ideas for wondering questions, but be led by the group and respond to what they are noticing, always asking open, honest questions. "I wonder...."

Offer time for a personal response
Offer a time for people to respond to the story in their own personal way. Options could include reading the book, creating with clay, paints, wool, building blocks, playing with the story objects or other artefacts (e.g natural objects like feathers, stones, shells, sticks, leaves) in sand or on trays or cloth. You could offer suggestions like creating an 'Around the Circle' by drawing a circle on card (or using a paper plate) and illustrating it (e.g. with seasons of the year, personal anniversaries and Christian festivals) or creating objects out of clay, paper, pipe cleaners, etc to place around the circle.

Link the seasons of the Church year with other special times
After telling the story you could lay down the words written on cards or material: Advent (purple), Christmas (gold or white), Epiphany (gold or white), Lent (purple), Easter (gold or white), Pentecost (red) Growing Time (green) around the circle. You could invite people to identify special times or anniversaries, like birthdays (perhaps also using cards/material with the months of the year written on them).

Connect the story with the church building and activities
If sharing the story in a church, go for a wander in the church (either as a group or as individuals) and wonder what specific parts of the circle are being celebrated in each place. You can include less religious places like the hall, the kitchen, the children's rooms. Use some of the wondering questions from the script such as "I wonder how you remember Jesus?" If your church uses coloured altar cloths and robes find where they are kept and think about the colours. Or, whilst sitting around the story, name the places in the church that are specific to each season. You might want to provide photos or pictures of the altar table, the font, the lectern, the nativity set, the Advent candles, etc.

Going Deeper into a part of the story
You may want to add to the story materials to go deeper into a certain part of the life of Jesus, e.g. have some stones that look like bread and consider the temptations in the desert or share the story of Jesus in the temple turning over the tables or one of the parables. Deep Talk folk have created scripts for many different stories that you can access through our community - or make up your own story.



An example of how some adults responded to the story, during the 'community play' of Deep Talk.



Examples of natural objects offered to invite people to respond to the story.

Suggestions for using objects to share the story in a Deep Talk way

Materials:
You will need a copy of Around the Circle - Celebrating the Church Year.
Adapt the materials to what you have and to your context. Some ideas are given here:

Advent candles: Four short purple candles, a short white candle, a short red candle (these can be made by cutting up long candles), matches (preferably long), candle snuffer or use purple, pink (for third sunday in Advent), white, red flowers
Swaddling clothes: a cream or beige strip of cloth wrapped up as if a baby is inside (wrap it around a finger) and placed on a manger (e.g. a piece of hessian) or just use the white candle or flower to represent the baby Jesus
Star to guide the Magi: a small gold star or a yellow flower
Jordan river: six lengths of thick blue wool
Last Supper table: piece of wood or bark from a tree, resting on something for the legs, e,g, small pieces of wood or a rock
Wine - something small and cuplike e.g. an acorn cup or a red grape
Bread - something that looks like a plate or a piece of pitta bread
Cross - made of two sticks bound together with twine
Grave clothes - a strip of cloth - same material as the one that the baby is wrapped in, but wider and longer, wrapped up as if a body is inside (wrap it around your two fingers) or just indicate with your hands the body being laid in the cave.
Stone in front of the cave - a large round stone
Growing time - green leafy sprigs.

Optional
If you want to use wooden figures to represent Jesus as a baby, a boy and a man then you can use Deep Talk, OutoftheBox, Godly Play figures or peg people to do this. Be careful to ensure that the figures do not distract from the story.

Cards or material with the words Advent (purple), Christmas (white or gold), Epiphany (white or gold) Lent (purple), Easter (white or gold), Pentecost (red) Growing Time (green), the months of the year, the words of the book Around the Circle written onto cards or cloth. It is best to have the cards/cloth in white and the words in the different colours or they detract from the story materials.

Medium on which to play with the story
If using sand you will need a sandbag or a square piece of cloth (preferably blue) and sand. A pattern to make a sandbag is included at the end, but a square of cloth will suffice If you are telling the story on cloth use a square cloth (preferably blue) with a light coloured circle (preferably tan coloured) to go on top. You could also tell the story on a round tray or straight on the ground - in which case just trace the circle with your finger.

For the Community Play and for personal responses
Deep Talk people, peg people or objects to represent people (e.g sticks, stones, seedheads), other objects with which to play and be creative.

Actions for the story - Around the Circle in a Deep Talk way

Each section refers to one page of the book. See page 'Suggestions for using objects to share the story in a Deep Talk way' for ideas of what objects to use. You can represent Jesus (baby, boy and adult) with Deep Talk wooden people, peg people, stones or anything to represent people. Or you can represent Jesus with your hand (two fingers together). This script uses the materials shown on the page 'Illustrations to accompany the story - using wooden figures.' Ideas are also shown on the page 'Illustrations to accompany the story - without wooden figures.'
You might like to refer to the Youtube videos on Channel @KathrynDeepTalk for the actions. Story with people figures. With 'found objects' and no people figures.
Handle the objects carefully. Take your time and leave pauses for people to imagine and reflect. If possible, learn the story and tell it from your heart. Don't be tempted to rush or add more words!

Ask *"Are you ready for a story?"* Move the sand into a flat circle. Or, if you are using cloth, unroll the tan circular cloth on top of the blue cloth. Say the words *"Here is an open place, full of grace."* Moving the sand in silence helps people get ready and enter into a contemplative and imaginative space.
From now on you will use the words that are in the book. For copyright reasons they are not reproduced here.

Starting nearest to you, move your finger slowly clockwise in the sand to create a large circle (with enough room to place the objects outside of the circle). Wait to say 'No beginning' until you come back to the beginning, and then circle around again - finishing when you say 'No end.' Circle around a third time.

ADVENT
Place down four purple candles, (leaving enough room to safely bring in the white candle and the baby Jesus) and light each one from the same long match as you say each phrase.

CHRISTMAS
In the palm of your hand hold out the baby Jesus wrapped in a white cloth lying in the manger. Hold the baby so his head is nearest to you and gently place down in the centre. Place the white candle behind Jesus and light it from the last purple candle. Pause.
Extinguish the four purple candles with a snuffer. Pause. Extinguish the white candle.
(Remove the candles to outside the circle in the order hope, peace, joy, love). Pause.
Remove the Christ candle leaving baby Jesus in the manger in the centre).

EPIPHANY
Hold the star in your left hand above baby Jesus. With your right hand indicate the slow movement of the wise ones from your right towards baby Jesus. Then open out your hand to indicate the gifts.
Look at the gifts.
Look at the star.
(Remove the star to outside the circle, leaving room for the baby to be placed next to the white candle).

Place a figure of the child Jesus in front of the baby, furthest away from you.
Remove the baby in the manger to outside the circle.
Move the boy Jesus in a half circle so that he ends up next to you.
Place an adult Jesus figure in front of the boy Jesus.
(Remove the boy Jesus to outside the circle).
Move the adult Jesus in a half circle so he ends up furthest away from you.

LENT
Place down the strands of wool across the centre to create a river. Turn Jesus to face the river and walk him towards you into the river. Turn Jesus sideways and lower him into the water and move the wool so it covers him. Bring Jesus back up out of the water.
Hold a dove over Jesus in your left hand. Use your right hand to gesture a hand of blessing over Jesus.
(Remove the dove to outside the circle).

Move Jesus towards you to the other side of the river 'into the desert.'
Place a hand of blessing over Jesus when you say 'God is there.'
Turn Jesus around and walk him back through the water.
(Remove the water to outside the circle , wrapping it into a 'nest' and placing the dove on top).

Actions for the story contd.

Walk Jesus in a half circle with your right hand. Indicate people following Jesus with your left hand. Stop when he is nearest to you. Turn him to face away from you.

EASTER
Place a table in the centre. Move Jesus to stand behind the table.
Place down the cup and the plate when you say wine and bread.

(Remove the table with the plate and cup still on it to outside the circle, leaving Jesus alone in the centre).
Move Jesus away from you to the edge of the circle.
Place a cross nearest to you.
Turn Jesus around to face you and move him slowly to the cross.
Hold onto Jesus with both hands, turn him around and push him against the cross.
Pause and keep silence.
Place down the large stone to the right of centre. Take Jesus off the cross and carefully wrap the body in the grave clothes. Place the wrapped body in the centre with his head towards you (to mirror the position of baby Jesus in the manger). Roll the stone slowly in front of Jesus. Pause.

Concealing what you are doing behind the stone, take Jesus out of the grave clothes, leaving the cloths on the sand.
Roll the stone slowly away to the right to reveal the grave clothes. Place Jesus in front of where the stone was.
(Remove the cross, the stone and the grave clothes to outside the circle, leaving Jesus standing in the centre).

Hold your left hand about 30cm above Jesus with your palm facing towards you and use your right hand to raise Jesus into and behind your left hand. Pause.
(Remove Jesus to outside the circle).

PENTECOST
Place a red candle in the centre and light it. When you say 'wind' emphasise the soft 'w' like the sound of the wind. When you say 'breath' gently breathe on the flame so it flickers. When you say 'Spirit' raise your hands to shoulder length with palms in a receiving gesture.
(Remove the lit candle to outside the circle).

GROWING TIME
Place sprigs of leaves within the circle. Pause.
(Remove the leaves to outside the circle so they fill the space between Pentecost and Advent).

Hold out your hands to encompass the whole circle.

Use your finger to circle round the year.

Optional - place the words for the seasons - Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Growing Time around the outside of the story

You could move into a time of wondering or go through all the stages of a Deep Talk session.
Perhaps walk a Deep Talk wooden figure along the circle as you ask the wondering questions.

When you are ready to put the story away you might like to use a candle snuffer to 'change the light of Pentecost'. You can say something like *"All the light is spreading from the flame into the room. Now watch as I change the light - the smoke is now spreading out into the room. Everywhere we go the Spirit of grace is with us."*

Illustrations to accompany the story - using wooden figures.

Some are on sand and some on cloth). Unless otherwise indicated the perspective is from the listener.

You can watch this story told in silence on Youtube [Story with people figures]


The gifts and the star


Jesus going under the water


The dove


God saying "I love you"


The wine and the bread


On the cross

(storyteller's perspective)


Taking Jesus down from cross


Resurrected Jesus


Ascension

(storyteller's perspective)



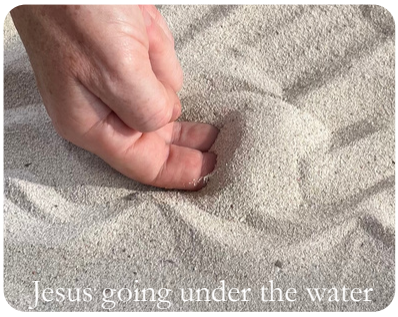
Illustrations to accompany the story- without using wooden figures.

All illustrations are from the listener's perspective.

You can watch this story told in silence on Youtube [With 'found objects' and no people figures.]

























Wondering questions to accompany the book and the Deep Talk story

These open, honest questions can be used to open up dialogue when sharing the book.
They can also be adapted for use in the Community Play of a Deep Talk session. Please refer to Stages of a Deep Talk session (pages 10 and 11) e.g. you could hold the star in your hand and ask 'Let's name, either out loud or in our hearts, those things that are shining for us today."

Circle of the Church Year
I wonder what has no beginning and no end for you?
I wonder what are special times for you?

Advent
I wonder what light is most important for you? Hope, Peace, Joy, Love or something else?

Christmas
I wonder if you are waiting for something to be born?

Epiphany (and Growing Time)
I wonder what is shining for you?
I wonder how you are growing?
I wonder where you are going?

Lent
I wonder if you have been through or are going through the waters, fresh and wild?
I wonder if you have heard God saying 'I love you. You are my child.'
I wonder how you hear God saying 'I love you. You are my child.'
I wonder if you have been into a lonely and bare desert?
I wonder if you know how to be still?
I wonder how you listen?
I wonder how you know that God is there?

Easter
I wonder what it means for you to follow Jesus along the way?
I wonder where a table to remember Jesus could be for you?
I wonder how you remember Jesus?
I wonder if you have ever felt alone, sad or scared?
I wonder if you have ever known death?
I wonder if your friends have cried and said goodbye?
I wonder what 'more to come' you are looking forward to or expecting?
I wonder what it feels not to know what is coming?
I wonder if you have ever felt life come after death?
I wonder what joy/love/life feels like?

Pentecost
I wonder if you have known the wind, fire or breath of the Spirit?
I wonder what the wind, fire or breath of the Spirit feels like for you?

Growing Time
I wonder how you are growing?

Circle of the Church Year
I wonder what you need today?
I wonder where you are in the circle today?
I wonder where you have seen grace?
I wonder where you have seen love given as a gift?

Stages of a Deep Talk session

Getting ready

"*Let's get ready."* Give people time to get ready. You may do a stilling exercise: invite people to lower their gaze, relax their shoulders, notice the points of contact on the chair or floor, and notice their breath. Then, as you look round the circle, ask "*Are you ready for a story?"*

Tell the story

"*This is an open place" (You could add "where there are no rights and no wrongs" or for this particular story - "full of grace")* as you move the sand or unroll the cloth.

Handle the objects carefully. You can represent people by moving your hands (two or three fingers together) or use the wooden figures from Deep Talk, OutoftheBox or Godly Play, or representations of people using stones, seedheads, feathers, sticks...

Take your time and leave pauses for people to imagine and reflect.

If possible, learn the story and tell it from your heart. Don't be tempted to rush or add more words!

Wondering

Invite the group to wonder. You can ask one or some of these questions:

"Now I'm wondering..."

"*What did you like best?" "What didn't you like?" "Where would you most like to be in the story?" "Is there anything you would like to leave out?" "What does this remind you of?" "I wonder where you are in this story?" 'At which point in the story would you find yourself today?"*

Carefully place the objects back in the basket (or in the case of Around the Circle, at the edge of the circle).

It sometimes feels appropriate not to put the objects away, but to leave the story in the sand and jump straight to choosing a question for the group in the Community Play).

If appropriate for your setting, invite people to change places as you are moving into a different phase of Deep Talk.

Community Play

Representing feelings or your day

Invite people to represent their day or feelings in the sand (or on the cloth).

"*How is your day? How are you feeling?"*

Feelings can be represented in the sand or you may also provide objects that can help with expressing feelings e.g. stones, feathers, candles. (If you are doing Deep Talk on cloth you will need to provide objects!) Depending on time available and size of group not everyone may contribute. Put your own feeling in at the end, or if the group is new to Deep Talk, you might model what to do by going first.

Using a Metaphor from the story

Choose a question for the group that opens up wondering about a metaphor from the story. If there is a physical object that represents the metaphor you are working with, hold it reverently in your hand, e.g. the star, and ask a question. As people speak 'place' those things gently onto the object with your other hand and perhaps repeat them. e.g. if you had told the story of Epiphany you could ask.

"*What are you following?" or "What is shining in the darkness for you today?"*

"Let's name those things out loud or in our hearts..."

At the end of the wondering, speak your contribution too, before saying

"*All the things, said and not said, are here, in this star"*

Ask the group where they want to place the object.

"*Where shall we put this star?"*

Stages of a Deep Talk session, contd.

Pass round the basket of people (or stones, sticks, feathers, shells whatever you are using to represent people)
"*Would you like to place yourself somewhere in the sand / on the cloth?"*
"What would you like to say about yourself?"
"What can you see here?"

In addition you could invite people to place their inner child, or other self, in the sand, and give them time to imagine what their adult self and inner child (or self and other self) might be saying to each other.
"*What are your adult self and inner child saying to each other?"*

When the community play is coming to a close, ask
"Is there anything else that needs to be said or done?"
Allow time for people to say more, or add or move objects.

"Is this good enough?" Pause in case anything else needs to be said.
"This is good enough." or *"This is good."*
Hold out your hands as a blessing (You might invite everyone to make a gesture over the sand, e.g. some may like to do a Namaste blessing. a thumbs up or another gesture.)

Clearing away
Invite people to put away the people they put in the sand and afterwards to take from the sand anything else they have placed down. Alternatively you can do this. Show reverence by packing away slowly and with care.



Community Play after the story was told on cloth.

Information and support in the art of Deep Talk:

There are folk in the Deep Talk community who love to support each other and those new to Deep Talk.
To link in to the community and to receive news, information and events (including training) please sign up to the Deep Talk newsletter
Contact: kathryndeeptalk@gmail.com
Website (we hope to have another website www.deeptalkstories.org live by early 2027)
Facebook group

Pattern for a Deep Talk sand bag

Deep Talk is very effective on sand, but it can be done anywhere, e.g. on cloth or on the ground.
There are many ways to make a Deep Talk sand bag. Here is one way.
In sand play therapy the blue on the sides are symbolic of the sky and the bottom is symbolic of water.

You will need backing material - ideally a plain (beige or sandy coloured) curtain or upholstery material (not too thick) and a blue material that has a tight weave so it won't let sand through (very important or you will end up with sand between the blue and the backing material) Ideally the blue material is smooth so the sand easily moves over it to reveal the blue. You will also need a strip of material or rope to tie the corners together.
For this size of sand bag you will need 3-4 kg of dry sand (use play sand)

1. Cut one blue and one backing square 65 x 65 cm. (Alter the size as required. This will make a bag that is 58 x 58 cm).
2. Put right sides together and sew 2.5 cm from edge all round leaving a gap of about 40cm on one edge so the square can be turned inside out.
3. Cut the four corners to stop it being too bulky.
4. Turn the bag right side out.
5. Push the corners out with the end of a wooden spoon and iron all the seams so they lie flat.
6. Sew all the way round approximately 4 mm from the edge.
7. Fold the square in half to form a triangle and sew the corner several times to form the upright edge.
8. Repeat for all four corners.

Or you can make a Deep Talk bag out of just one material - blue or sandy coloured - but make sure that it is a tight weave or has a fire retardant backing so it won't let sand through.
Or simply cut out a square piece of cloth on which to put the sand.

Please contact kathryndeeptalk@gmail.com if you have other ideas for a sand bag.







