

Morse Code with a Twist

by Chris Bisailion

Cubs and Scouts have had a long tradition of learning and using Morse Code. This craft is intended to expose Scouting youth to Morse Code while having fun at the same time.

Although many people think that Morse Code is not relevant in today's technologically advanced society with cellular phones and the internet, amateur radio operators (also called ham radio operators) and others are still using Morse Code to communicate over long distances by radio or visual (light) means. In noisy or weak radio conditions, Morse Code can be distinguished better than voice.

Personalized Bracelets or Zipper Pulls

Materials available in craft and grocery stores: small multi-coloured beads; small black beads; multi-coloured plastic straws; cups or trays to hold beads and straw pieces; plastic lace; photocopies of Morse Code in dots and dashes; paper.

Note: total cost was less than \$0.50 per youth.

Preparation:

1. Sort small multi-coloured and black beads into cups or trays by colour.
2. Cut straws into 1.25 cm (1/2 inch) lengths and sort into cups or trays by colour.
3. Cut plastic lace into 30.5 cm (12 inch) lengths (one for each youth).
4. Tie a knot in one end of the lace and thread a small black bead as a starting bead to indicate the start of the Morse Code message. For extra security, the lace can be looped through the bead. This also allows you to prepare the lace and first bead ahead of time.

The Activity:

1. Hand each youth the Morse Code reference sheet.
2. Each youth writes their first name in large letters on the sheet of paper.
3. Below each letter, they print the Morse Code equivalent for that letter in Dots and Dashes. Between each letter they print a forward slash.
4. Hand each youth the plastic lace with one bead at the end.
5. They now thread small beads for Dots and short straw lengths for Dashes onto the plastic lace, spelling out their name. The forward slash between letters should be done with small black beads.

6. When they are done, tie a knot to prevent the beads/straws from sliding off the plastic lace. For extra security, the lace can be looped through the final black bead and a knot tied.

7. The remaining lace can be used to tie to the start bead to form a bracelet or to make a loop that can be attached to a ring to become a zipper pull.

A Morse Code Game

1. Gather up all of the bracelets/zipper pulls and mix together.
2. Hand out in random sequence to each youth.
3. Each youth tries to decode the name that is represented on the bracelet/zipper pull and hand it back to the owner.

Success!

Although I tried this activity with Cubs, it would be suitable for Scout age youth as well. We have a relatively large pack with 42 Cubs and I am happy to report that it was a hit! From start to end it lasted about 40 minutes. Many of the Cubs wanted to play the Morse Code Game again which is always a good sign. We did this craft soon after Jamboree on the Air (J.O.T.A.) where many of the Cubs had heard Morse signals. This helped to re-enforce the use of Morse today. For extra interest, we used glow-in-the-dark beads. Added cool-ness! Send your feedback to: leader@scouts.ca.
— Chris Bisailion, known as "Hathi" with the 7th Kanata Pack, Ontario is an amateur radio operator with the call sign VE3CBK.

Program Links:

Cubs: Tawny Star A #10

Scouts: Pathfinder Citizenship Badge, #8



The 7th Kanata Cubs hard at work deciphering their names in Morse Code.



Heather from 7th Kanata Troop helped with the organization.



Using Morse Code, the author spelled out his Scouting name. Can you figure it out?

Photos: Deborah Bisailion