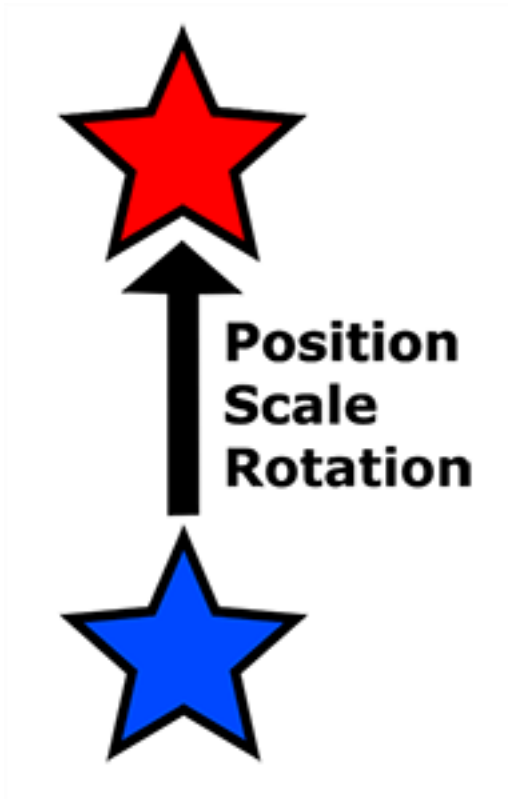# Parenting in Adobe After Effects

In today's tutorial we will take a closer look at another very important basic technique available in Adobe After Effects: *parenting*. Parenting is used to link one or more layers to a single parent layer. Moving, scaling or rotating the parent layer will then automatically affect all of its children.
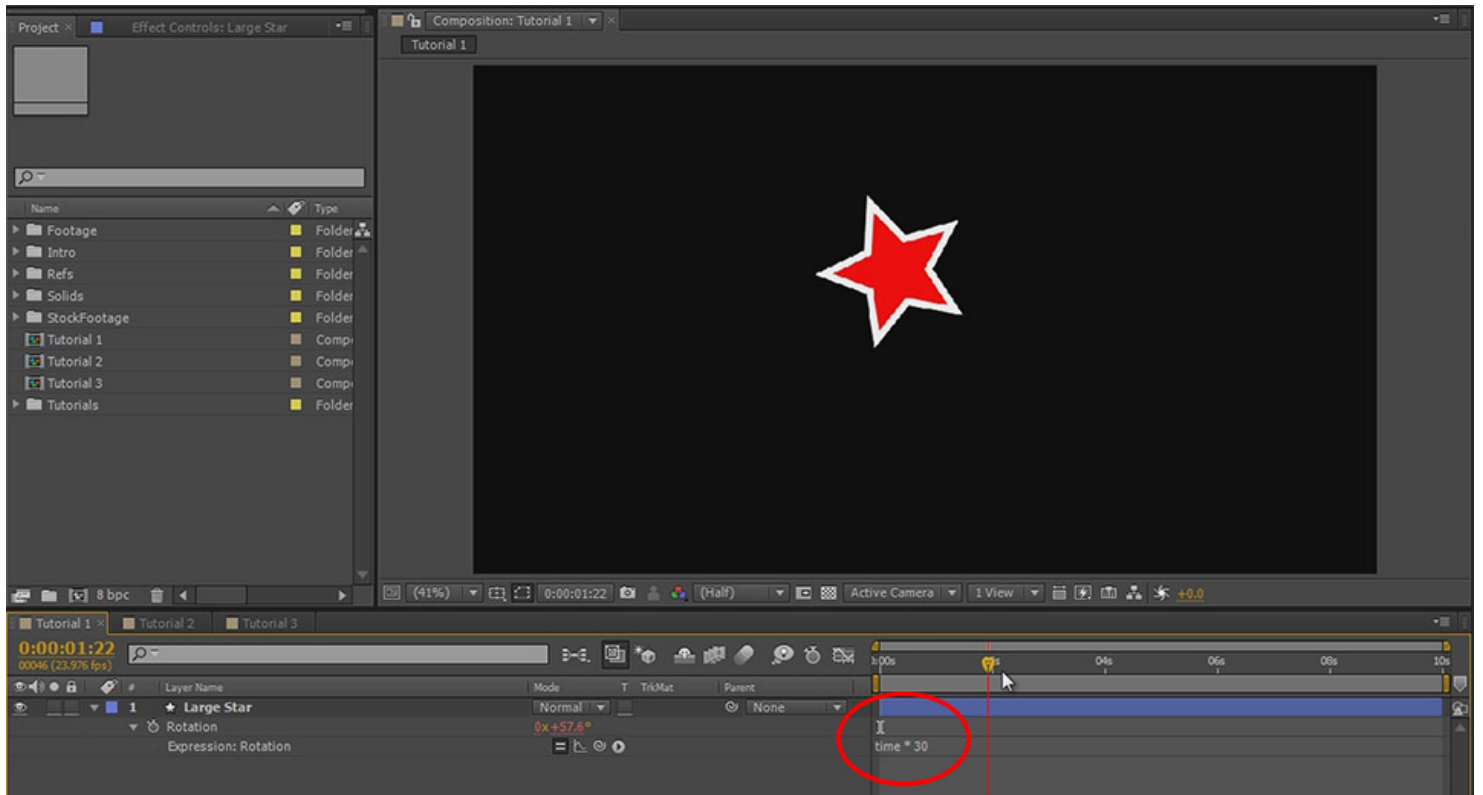

Parenting allows you to easily control a number of layer by linking them to a common parent. This is very useful for motion tracking and for managing more complex visual effects.

Let's start by creating a simple rotating star! Start with an empty composition and then, with the star mask tool, simply drag in the centre of the preview window to create a new shape layer containing a star shape. I've set mine to use a red fill colour with a white outline and called the layer 'Large Star'.

Open up the layer settings and alt-click on the stopwatch icon for the Rotation property. This will open up the After Effects Expression editor. In the editor, enter
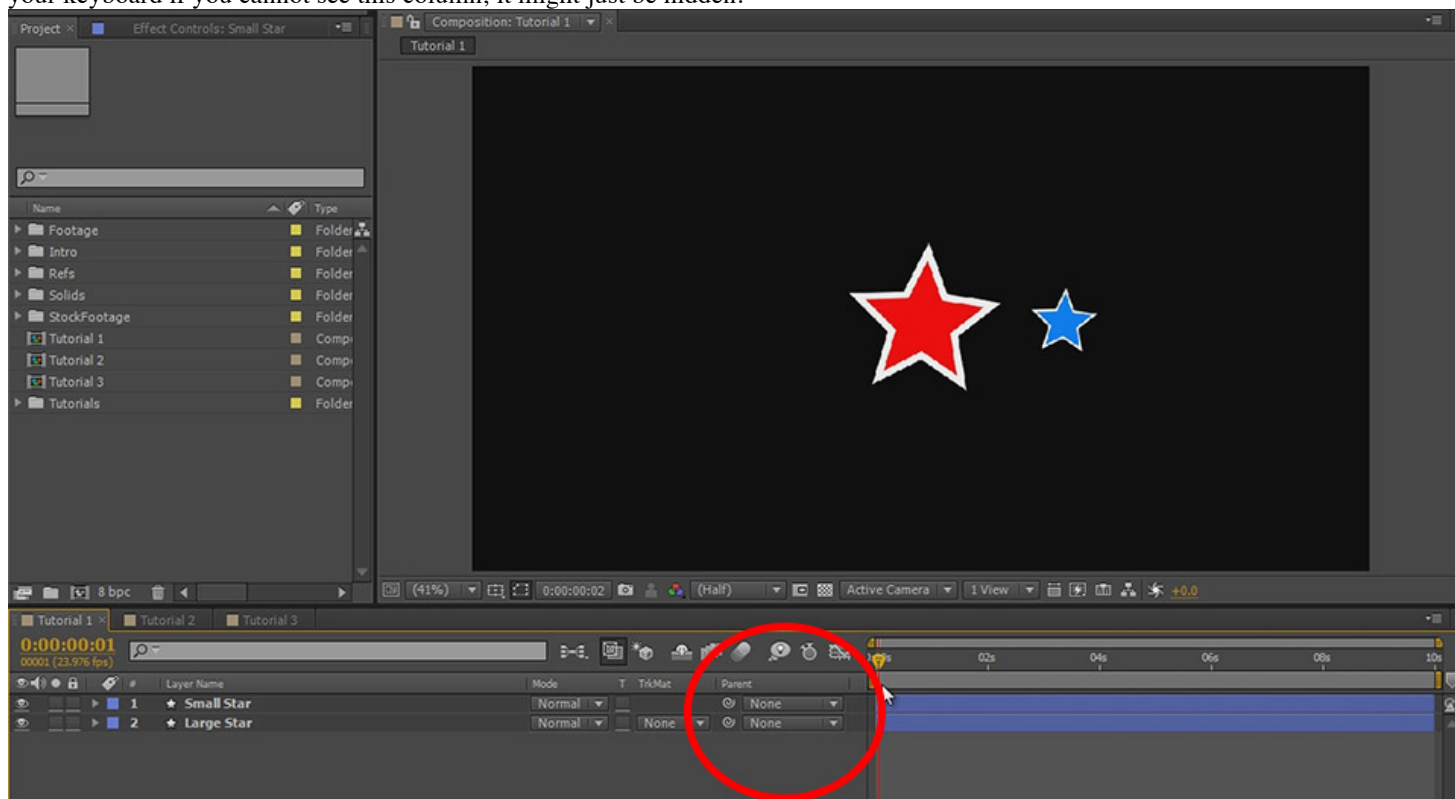
*time * 30*

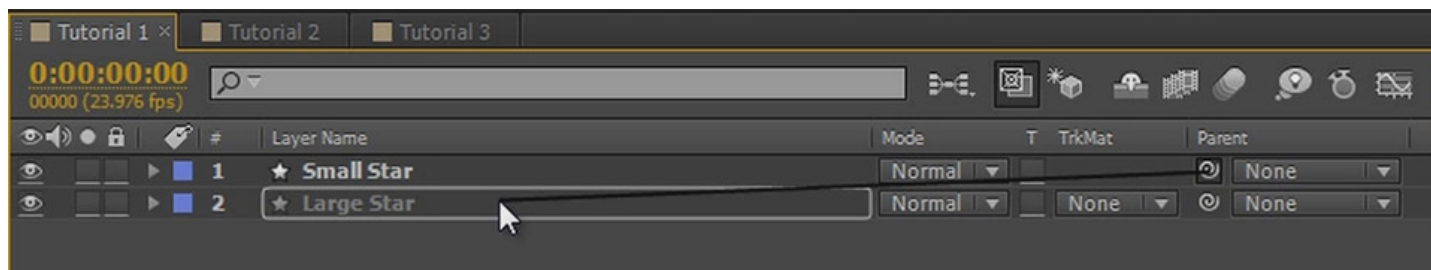This will cause the star to continuously rotate around its anchor point.

Now create a second star, smaller than the central one and off to the side. Give it any colour you like and call it 'Small Star'.
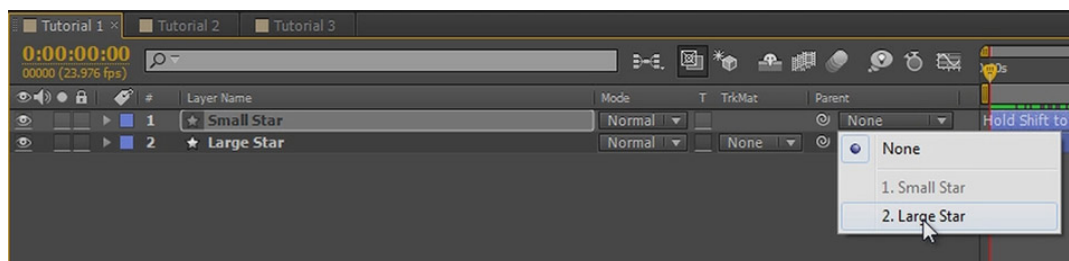
Let's parent these two layers together. In the layer properties window you will find a column called 'Parent'. Press F4 on your keyboard if you cannot see this column; it might just be hidden.

To parent the small star to the large star, drag the pick whip icon from the small star layer onto the name for the Large Star layer.

Alternatively you can select the Large Star layer from the parent dropdown menu on the Small Star layer.
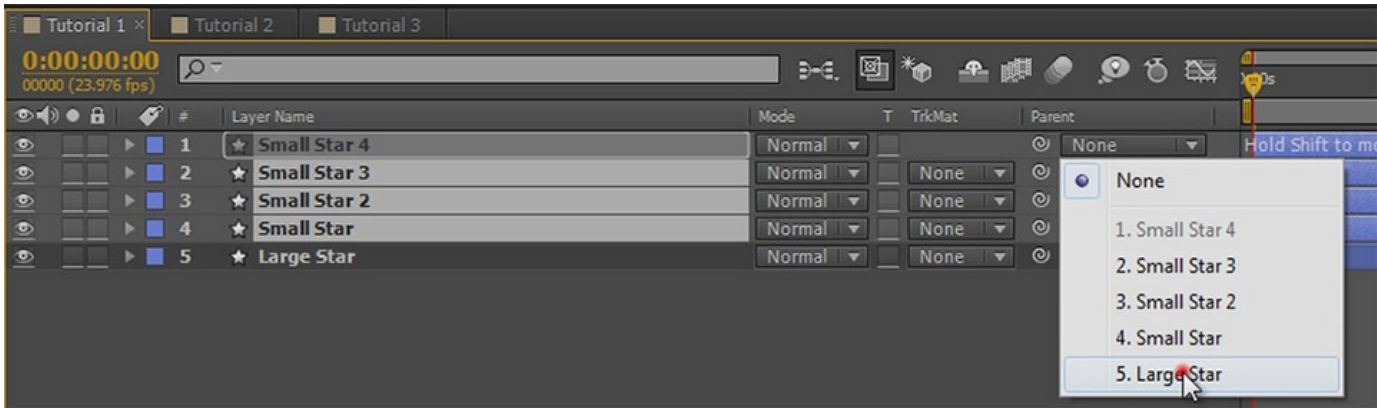
If you scrub through your composition now, you will see that the little star is 'pulled along' as the large star rotates. This is happening because the Small Star layer is a child of the Large Star layer so the rotation to the parent is also applied to the child.
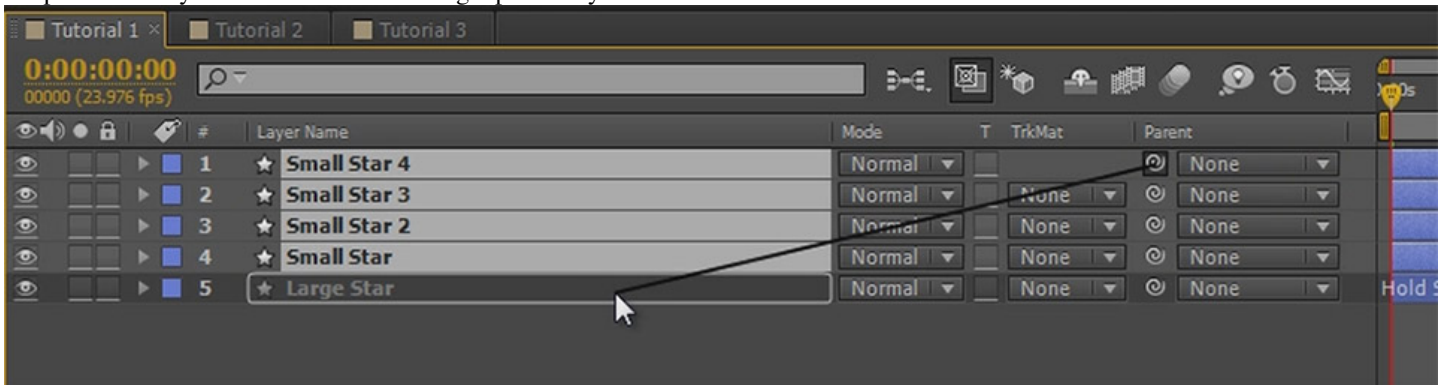

Now that we've got a hang of the basics, let's move on to a few more complex examples!

Create a few more little stars and lay them out around the central, big star. Select all the small star layers and then select the Large Star as the parent from the dropdown menu. Note that you can bulk assign or unassign parent layers.
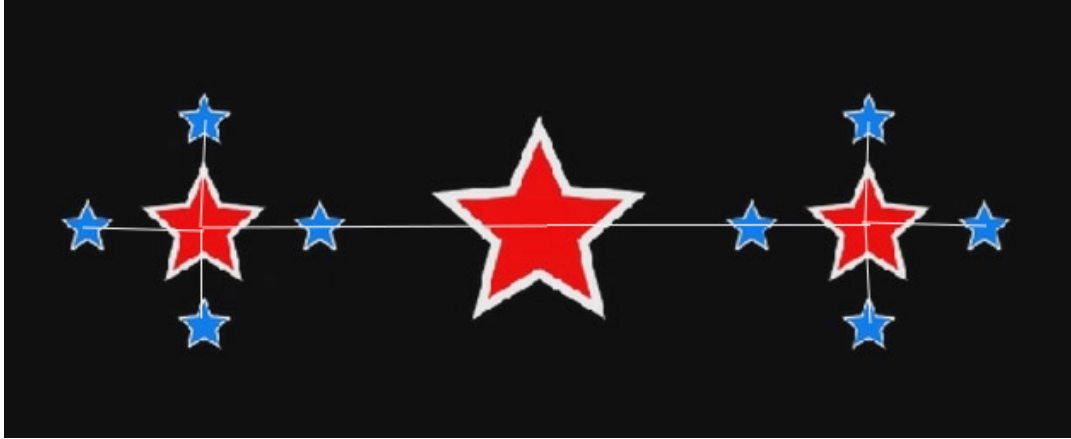

You can even bulk assign using the pick whip icon. Just make sure all the child layers are selected and drag from a pick whip icon for any of the children to the target parent layer's name.

Play back your animation and you should see all the little stars spin around the central star.

Let's get a bit more complicated. I've set up a number of stars to build me a little galaxy. The two red stars to the side rotate around the one in the center and the blue small stars rotate around their respective parent.

Playing this back you will get all of the stars rotating nicely around their respective parent. You can create some pretty awesome effects just using parenting and some clever animations.