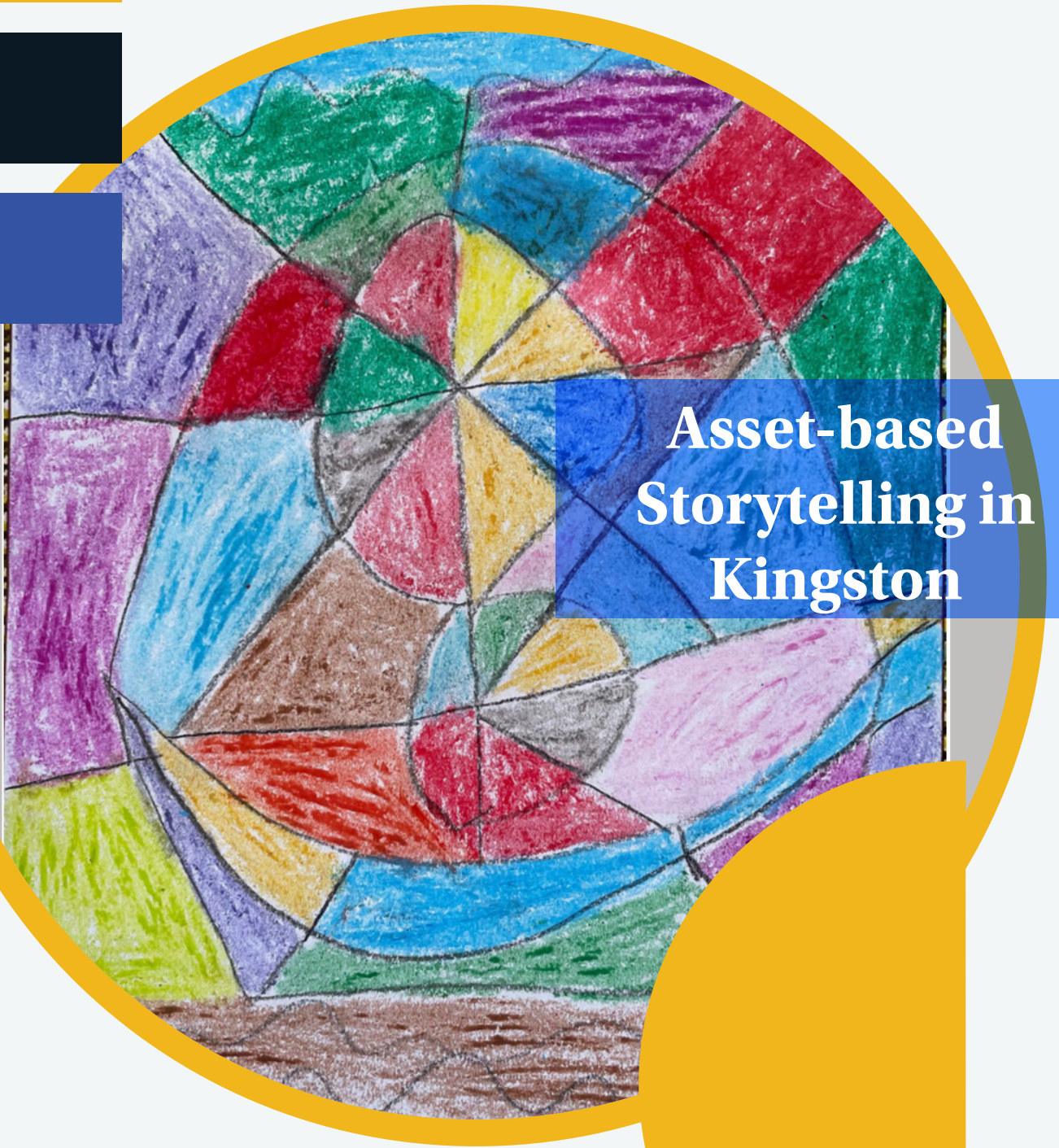


Storytelling

A toolkit

Asset-based
Storytelling in
Kingston

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MARIA CHATZICHRISTODOULOU



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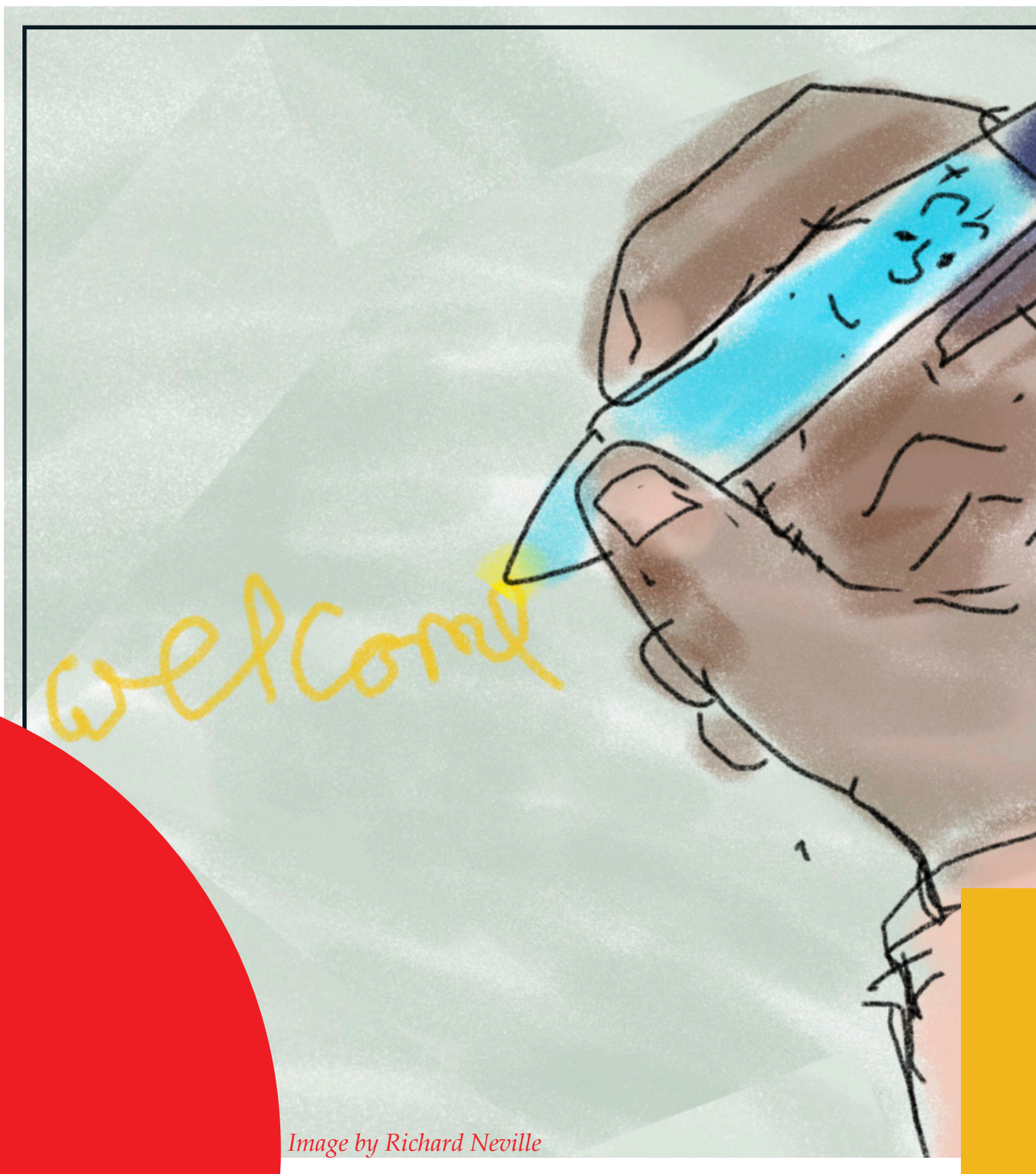


Image by Richard Neville

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1. Introduction

An overview of the project and storytelling

by **Alexander Laffer**

This toolkit was developed as part of Asset-based Storytelling in Kingston, a community storytelling project run by Kingston Libraries in partnership with Richard Neville, a professional storyteller, and Kingston University, in 2021-22. The project was funded by Arts Council England. It emerged from prior research conducted by Kingston Libraries (Re-imagining Kingston Libraries, 2020) that explored how their service should develop over the next decade, to meet the needs of its users, by transforming into a community and creative hub.

To this end, Asset-based Storytelling in Kingston saw collaborative storytelling sessions being designed and delivered with participants from seven community organisations, supporting people with varied and specific needs. Taking a participant-led and collaborative approach to storytelling, a programme of sessions was

designed and run for each of the following organisations:

- **MENCAP**, a charity supporting people with learning disabilities.
- **BALANCE**, an employment support service for people with learning, physical or sensory disabilities.
- **MIND**, a mental health charity
- **HESTIA**, a charity supporting those in and recovering from times of crisis.
- **The Pearl Project** (Voices of Hope), working with women who have been through abuse.
- **Refugee Action Kingston** (RAK), a charity supporting refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness** (KCAH), a supported residential home for those who have experienced homelessness and addiction.

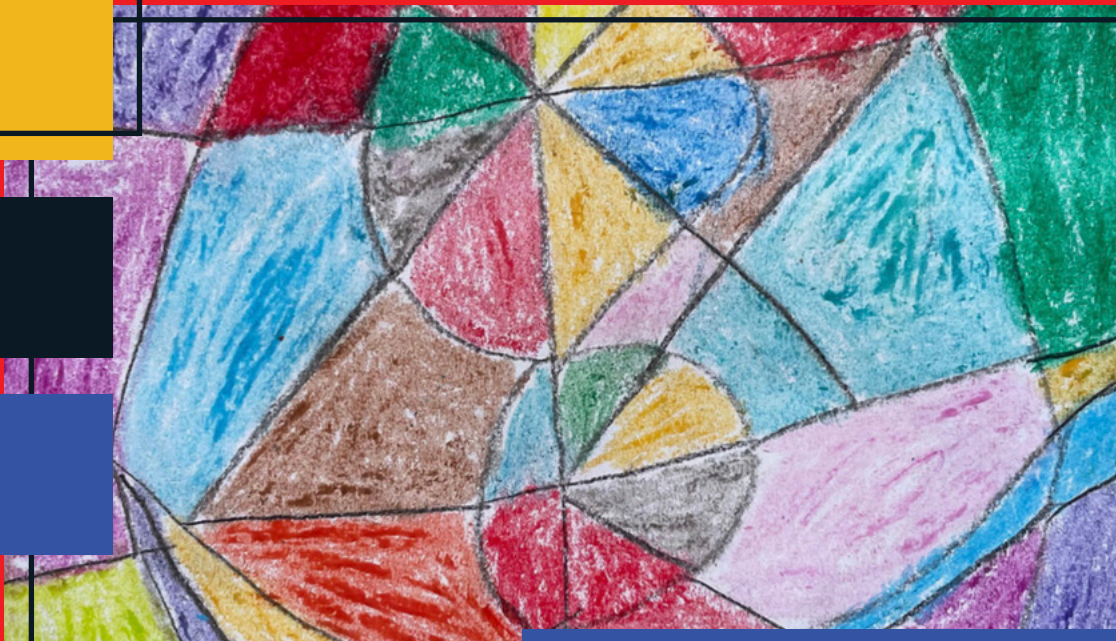


Illustration by Paul from Kingston Mencap

The project provided the support and impetus for many of the participants to take up storytelling and creative writing activities. An evaluation carried out by Kingston University found that: the project contributed to skills development; increases in confidence levels on the part of the participants; a sense of wellbeing for individuals; and a sense of community and belonging for the groups involved. Importantly, where many of the participants felt ignored or marginalised by the wider community, the storytelling activities gave them a platform to develop and nurture their voices, and a safe space to realise the value of their experiences and share their stories.

This toolkit is designed to support you in the development and delivery of storytelling activities. It is not prescriptive but designed to provide useful guidance in the following key areas:

- Organising groups
- Designing Activities
- Safeguarding
- Developing storytelling outputs

There is not a one-size-fits-all system for activities. However, with some thought and preparation, the toolkit will help you develop and deliver engaging storytelling and creative writing sessions that fit your organisational aims.

For example, at Refugee Action Kingston, storytelling was used to contribute to language-learning goals. While at MENCAP, interactive storytelling helped participants enhance their collaboration skills, while fulfilling MENCAP's remit of engaging and entertaining members.

Still unsure if storytelling activities will work for you? Then please read on to understand what we mean by storytelling |and why we think it is so important.

To find out more, scan or click the QR code to view a video of Richard Neville introducing the project



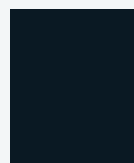
1.1 What is storytelling?


“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”
Joan Didion

At the outset of our project, many of the participants were unclear what was meant by storytelling. If anything, for some participants there was a perceived distinction between creative writing – developing written skills for fiction and poetry – and storytelling, as something oral and perhaps lower status. We hope to redress this balance slightly when we consider the importance of storytelling in the next section (1.2 Why is storytelling important?)

It is important to have a clear understanding of what storytelling is to help you develop and promote your activities. What many people don't realise is just how pervasive storytelling is:

- sit down and tell someone about your day, and you've told them a story
- share a childhood memory, that's storytelling
- even making a social media post could be storytelling.





There are lots of definitions, academic and otherwise, that attempt to describe storytelling. At a basic level, anything that involves sharing an experience, whether real or imagined, might be considered storytelling. This might be something highly structured, worked on and refined, but it could also be something informal and spontaneous. By taking a holistic view of storytelling, we can maximise the range of tools at our disposal and better adapt to participants' needs and expectations when developing activities.

To illustrate, here are just some storytelling activities our participants engaged with:

- Chatting about recent experiences
- Describing childhood events
- Telling jokes and anecdotes
- Reading visual stories
- Creating poetry
- Developing new folktales
- Creating flash fiction (very short stories)
- Producing stories in response to images
- Performing
- Puppetry
- Creative writing (fiction and non-fiction)

This list is by no means exhaustive and we encourage you to explore with your participants: what they think storytelling is; what methods and modes they prefer to work in; and what they want to get out of the sessions. This will all depend on their capabilities, skills, experiences, interests and objectives.

It's important to remember that even a small, shared story can be as important as the longest novel, if it helps us understand ourselves. Research suggests that sharing stories with others can lead to improvements in personal wellbeing and help us maintain and create relationships (Abi Zeid Daou et al., 2022; Folostina et al., 2015; Grove, 2013; Zipes, 1995). They are also an important resource for social organisation, and we might want to think about the type of stories we share across our communities (Linabary et al., 2017; O' Toole, 2018).

As facilitators, we should encourage participants to realise that there is value in their stories in whatever form they are shared.

1.2 Why is storytelling important?

“Stories help us understand others and ourselves.”
Kate Hurst

Planning and delivering storytelling sessions will take time and resources. Therefore, we thought it would be useful at the outset to discuss why storytelling is important. Hopefully, this will reinforce the value of doing storytelling within your organisation and provide motivation and justification for your sessions.

A lot has been written on how integral storytelling is to who we are as people. Jonathan Gottschall even goes as far as calling humans “storytelling animals”. Whether you agree or not with the extent of this claim, we have found storytelling to play a vital role in many people’s lives, providing a creative outlet with benefits to wellbeing and further important social functions.

The importance of storytelling cannot be ignored. We tell stories about ourselves that shape our personalities and attitudes. We share stories with others to create bonds

‘[It’s] poignantly wonderful to get our stories across!’
KCAH Participant

**'Storytelling is a little cove
where the waves don't
buffet you.'
Hestia Participant**

and build relationships. We are even influenced by the stories that circulate through society, binding us together in shared world views.

Our capacity to tell and appreciate stories shapes how we process and experience the world. For example:

- We tell stories to understand what is happening to us, to make sense of ourselves and those we interact with.
- By telling stories we invite other people to know us, forming bonds between whoever is telling a story and their audience.
- We use stories as a social resource to develop individual relationships and collective attitudes, to empathise with or demonise others.
- We rely on storytelling to make sense of abstract and complex experiences and to support our beliefs and world views.

To frame the above on a more practical level:

- Had a tough day? We look to decompress and process by telling someone about it.
- Experienced a big life event? We want to share this with friends and family.
- Met someone new? We offer stories about ourselves to see if our views are compatible.

Now imagine that no one has asked you to share your story before. Many of the participants we worked with felt they had been ignored or marginalised by mainstream society. They couldn't share their experiences because their stories were not valued and/or could not compete with the social stories about people like them.

Participants from KCAH described themselves as 'hidden' but with a 'story to tell' and 'a valuable voice'.

Participants from MENCAP, were so pleased to see themselves represented in stories, while those from BALANCE gained confidence through understanding their stories were valued outside of their organisation.

Participants from HESTIA gained great benefit from having agency over their stories and the creative process, rather than being given a service.

Participants from Pearl group experienced the workshops as a 'safe environment' where they were supported to develop their confidence without criticism or judgment. They found this to be a

healing process that helped them process traumatic experiences, despite the fact the workshops only touched on such experiences indirectly (see section 4. Safeguarding).

We often take storytelling for granted and it is only when this capacity is taken away from us or we are targeted by negative stories that we realise it's import. We found that the process of creating and sharing a story had powerful positive impacts, particularly for those who are vulnerable, marginalised and ignored.

However, some key benefits from the sessions include:

- Enhancements to participant and staff wellbeing.
- Improvements to relationships between participants, extending out to positively influence the wider organisation.
- Strengthening of social and community relationships.
- Development of skills across a range of areas, including communication, interpersonal, creative, and social skills.
- Fostering of empathy between participants, and with other marginalised groups.
- Encouraging and nurturing participants' unique voices, giving participants the confidence to value and share their stories.
- Supporting staff members to engage and better understand their participants through the sharing of experiences.

We hope this justifies your decision to engage in storytelling activities. If you want a fuller picture of project findings, which goes into greater detail of the value of storytelling activities, you can read our evaluation report which is available on our Project page (scan or click the QR code):



Testimonials

'...somebody actually having a voice and being able to tell their own story. And I think especially working with people who use substances, people that have been homeless, it does very much feel that in society, their voices are lost and they're not heard. They're the people that you walk past in the street and you don't want to look at them because they might ask you for money. They're the people that are congregating on the street corner drinking and you swerve to go around them. And all of these people are individuals who have lived life. Quite a lot of them have experienced trauma which has led them to where they're actually at. But actually, as you'll know, when you start speaking to these people, they're funny, they're intelligent, they're engaging. (KCAH2)

Staff at Pearl Project discussed how storytelling could 'break [the] stigma of abuse' and 'gave survivors a voice.' A participant from Voices of Hope, shared how the sessions were 'a powerful experience and it has changed my life'

'Having people work together on a singular thing and join their ideas together...[it's] a social skill as well as... this skill to be able to find links and draw parallels between ideas and create something that is bigger than the sum of its parts.' (MENCAP)

2. Organising Groups

2.1 Identifying participants, collaborators and partners

2.1.1 Participants

It is useful when planning storytelling activities to consider who your intended participants are. You may already have a group in mind or be delivering the sessions as part of an existing programme within your organisations (in which case refer to section 2.2). If not, you may want to decide who within your organisation might benefit most from storytelling activities.

From our project we learned that storytelling helps people (re)discover their voice, particularly those who have been marginalised. Who do you think would gain the most from sharing their story and learning that their experiences are valuable?

Storytelling activities also enhanced participant wellbeing. You may want to consider which of your members may benefit most from engaging in a collective, creative, and collaborative environment?

Skills development was an important outcome of our sessions. These ranged from interpersonal and social skills to critical and creative thinking and language and communication skills. Who in your organisation might need support in one (or a number) of these areas?

Other things you may want to consider when identifying participants:

- What do your members understand by storytelling?

It is important to manage expectations and provide sufficient detail to promote sessions.

- What level of access to culture and creativity do your participants have?

Some potential participants may be intimidated by their unfamiliarity with format or content. Conversely, these are often participants who find the activities most transformative.

- Does your organisation offer any other storytelling or related activities? And will sessions be run within an existing programme of activities?

Some participants may want more of the same or you may decide to reach out to a new group.

- Will the sessions be purely focussed on participants or will they contribute more broadly to organisational stories?

Refer to section 1.2 for a full list of benefits to consider

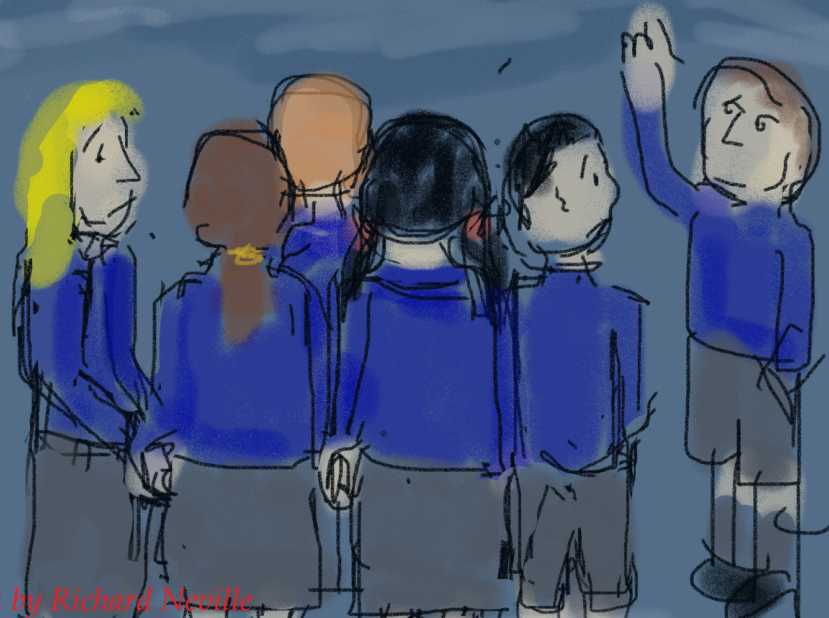


Illustration by Richard Neville

These are not mutually exclusive. For example, with Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness, the sessions were very much designed to support the participants. However, one of the most profound outcomes was the use of the stories they developed to memorialise their residential centre that was closing.

Working with a varied group of participants we have learned the following:

- Be open to your members abilities. Many of our participants were natural storytellers, even if they don't realise it, and want to share their stories.
- Remember, participants can feel side-lined and lack confidence, so may need encouragement to join activities.
- Suffering trauma can impact on the ability to engage in creativity. Group activities can provide an avenue to rediscover creativity.
- These groups often had very motivated and relatively skilled participants. Make sure that you manage expectations, particularly in terms of negotiating between 'creative writing' and more discussion-based forms of storytelling.
- Those living in uncertain environments often feel they don't have the time and space to engage in creative activities and may need additional support to attend.

- Those with limited access to culture can find the idea of storytelling sessions intimidating. This can be compounded by lack of confidence and perceived literacy issues.

You can mitigate some of the issues raised by the above questions by managing expectations and by promoting activities with a clear understanding of storytelling (Section 1.1 & 1.2) and an idea for approach and process (Section 3).

A note on numbers:

There is no correct number of participants. A lot will depend on the type of activities you are planning and the needs of your participants.

What is important to remember is that these storytelling sessions can be invaluable even if delivered to only one or two people. That being said, based on feedback, groups of five or six seem to be preferred for collaborative storytelling. Larger interactive storytelling sessions of between 10 and 20 participants, as delivered to MENCAP and Pearl, also work well but require some additional time management and support.

2. Organising Groups

2.1.2 Collaborators and Partners

Alongside identifying participant groups, it is worth exploring within your organisation who might provide additional support or even share responsibility for delivering the sessions. This could include colleagues from:

- **Facilities:** to help organise locations and schedule activities.
- **Events/Activities:** Those already engaged in activities and programmes (who may be able to help identify participants or suggest connections with their activities).
- **Communications:** to help promote your sessions and outputs.
- **Wellbeing:** to support the complex needs of your participants.
- **Carers and guardians:** to provide additional support to participants and assist in sessions.

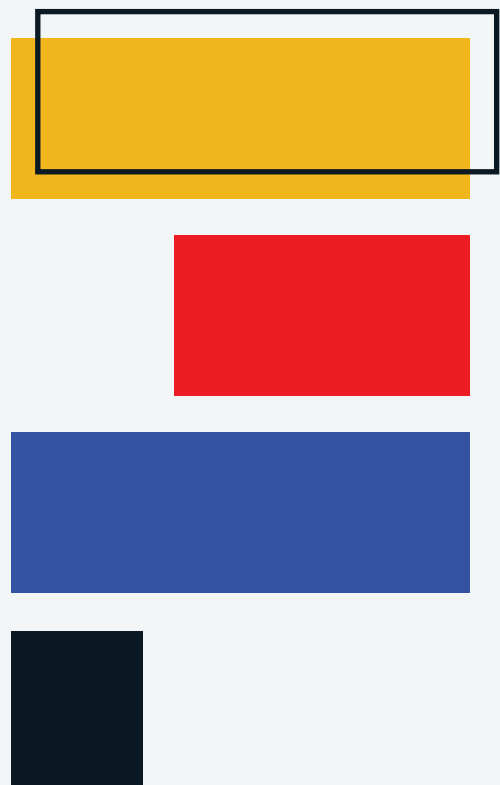
Getting help can be essential if you are new to organising activities. However, make sure to establish who holds responsibility when it comes to running and managing sessions and communicating with individuals and groups.


You also might want to expand the remit and reach of your activities by identifying potential partners amongst other community organisations. Besides obvious economies of scale (in terms of promotion, facilities, and facilitation), we found participants gave a lot of importance to sharing their voices to a wider community audience. Collaborating with other groups provides an opportunity for this.

If you want to work with other organisations, you may want to look for synergies or complementary aims. All the partner organisations involved in our project demonstrated a desire for future collaborations and activities. So if you are based in Kingston, you could start your search here:

- [MENCAP](https://www.kingstonmencap.org.uk/)
<https://www.kingstonmencap.org.uk/>
- [BALANCE](https://balancesupport.org.uk/)
<https://balancesupport.org.uk/>
- [MIND](https://www.mindinkingston.org.uk/)
<https://www.mindinkingston.org.uk/>
- [HESTIA](https://www.hestia.org/)
<https://www.hestia.org/>
- [VOICES OF HOPE](https://voh.org.uk/)
<https://voh.org.uk/>
- [Refugee Action Kingston](https://www.refugeeactionkingston.org.uk/)
<https://www.refugeeactionkingston.org.uk/>
- [Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness](https://kcah.org.uk/)
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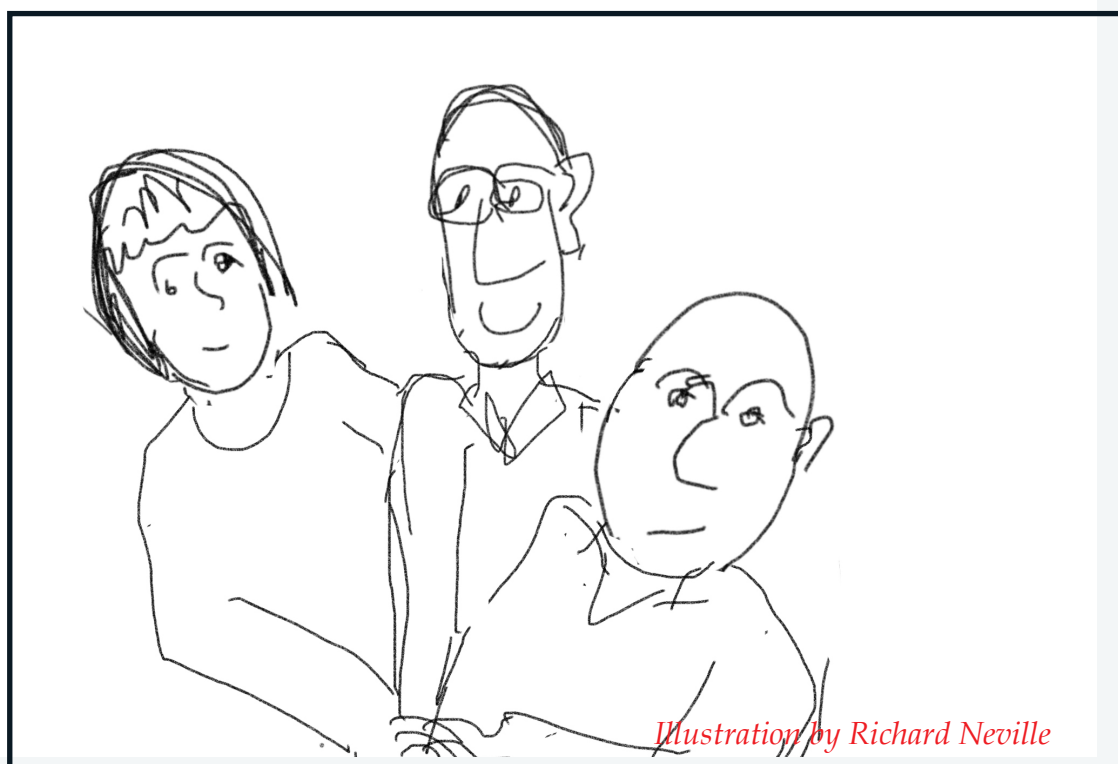
For practitioners working in other locations, MENCAP and MIND work across the UK or you could look for similar types of organisations and charities in your own communities.





Kingston Library is also a great place to explore collaboration. They have expertise in this area and an ongoing commitment to community and creative activities. You can get in touch with libraries@kingston.gov.uk or refer to our project website [<https://www.storycircles.co.uk/asset-based-storytelling>]. Of course, other public libraries would also make good partners and might be open to collaboration. We recommend getting in touch with public libraries in your area, especially those who publicly declare a wish to function as a 'community hub'.

Finally, depending on your project and needs, it could be worth contacting Kingston University or your local university/Further Education provider. Do some basic research to find out if they have relevant expertise and/or teach storytelling or creative writing. If they do, it is possible that academic staff would be interested to meet you and might be able to support you in different ways. As Universities have to evidence their public engagement activity, they are keen to reach out to their local and regional communities, so this could be a win-win for both organisations.



2. Organising Groups

2.2 Participant needs: access and space

Before you start sessions, it is important to evaluate your participant needs so that you can provide an environment that is suitable for storytelling activities. These needs may be familiar to you already, depending on your experience working within your community and with your members. However, if they are not, you should take some time to consider what physical and emotional needs your participants may bring to the sessions. Seek guidance from your colleagues, but don't forget to talk to those people likely to be involved to get a sense of how they might like sessions to be run. You may want to consider holding an informal pre-meet to introduce yourself, share your goal for the sessions, and get to know some of the likely participants. Understanding and managing expectations can be an important component of ensuring success.

It is important to note that storytelling benefits from a physically safe space but also an emotionally safe space that encourages creativity. Our project took an asset-based approach to storytelling, meaning the focus was on the positive skills, attributes, and experiences of the participants. However, participants still need to feel comfortable sharing experiences from their life.

In terms of the physical environment, you might want to consider:

- Can participants physically access the room?
- Do participants need a dedicated member of staff to guide them to the space?
- Is the location somewhere familiar and considered a safe, or neutral, venue?
- Will participants be free from distractions?
- Is the environment comfortable (e.g. the right temperature, access to facilities)?
- Is the environment welcoming to all (e.g. if a faith or minority community setting, do all participants feel safe and happy to access)?

Key to ensuring an emotionally safe space are the following areas:

- **Privacy**

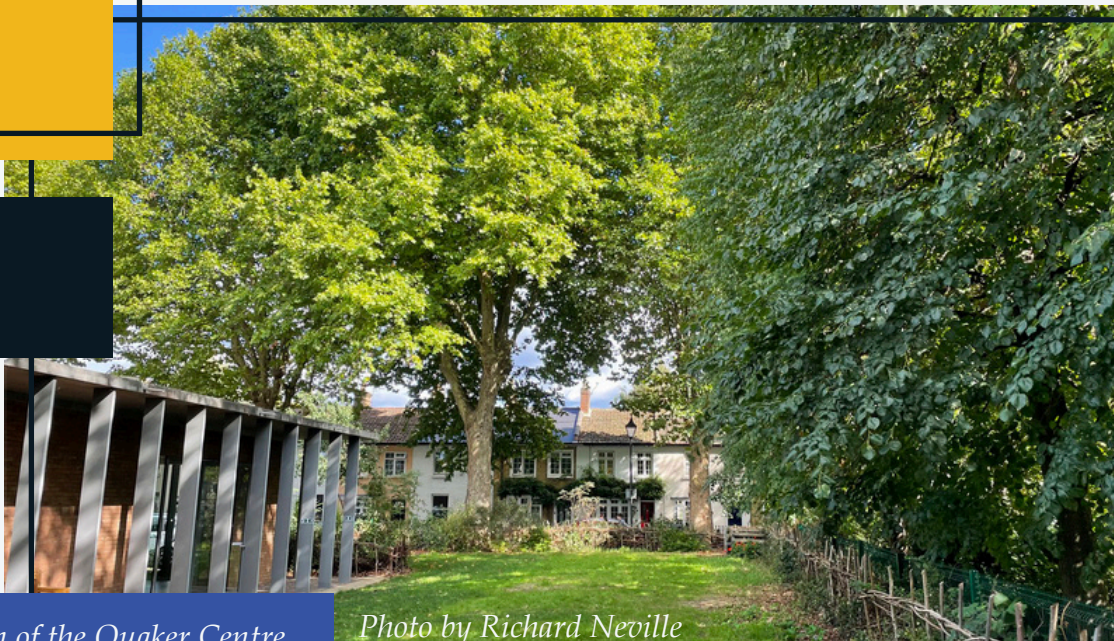
Will your participants be free from interruption and away from disturbances? This is important so that they feel comfortable sharing life experiences without judgement.

- **Tranquillity**

Does the space afford calmness and the opportunity for reflection? Creative activities are often seen as a respite from participants' daily lives and a tranquil space enhances this.

- **Safety**

If participants have experienced trauma or are currently living in unstable environments, then ensuring a feeling of safety is essential. Parameters, such as 'women-only' groups, should be established and enforced.



The Garden of the Quaker Centre, Kingston. An excellent example of a tranquil storytelling environment

Photo by Richard Neville

You might also want to consider Familiarity, although this is perhaps less essential than the above factors. While participants will often feel less intimidated and/or anxious if they are using a space they have visited before, there may be reasons to encourage adoption of new spaces – for example, to develop social skills and support community integration.

Kingston Libraries have a number of spaces that may be suitable for your participant needs. You can visit your local branch or get in touch via email or by phone: libraries@kingston.gov.uk or 020 8547 5006. Other public libraries should have similar facilities and you can search for local library services here: <https://www.gov.uk/local-library-services>.

It is also worth remembering that needs are not static and may change from session to session. You are not there to provide therapy or counsel the participants, but you should be open and attentive to any needs and adapt delivery accordingly. This might be as simple as not calling on a particular participant to contribute if they appear anxious or providing breaks in the session to allow participants to decompress. Similarly, you aren't there to police participants, but you may need to manage group dynamics to ensure all members are given opportunities to be heard and, conversely, are not pressured to share either experience or work, if they are not comfortable doing so.

Some further questions that might help you reflect on participants needs:

- Are there variations in the abilities of the people you support?
- Can a single group cater to all abilities, or will you focus on a particular group?
- How much individual support do your participants need? Do you have the required support from staff and caregivers?
- What literacy, language and communication skills do your members have?
- Do your participants have any experience or frame of reference for this type of creative storytelling activity?
- What prior experiences might impact on creative expression or ability?
- Are group members compatible and joining with shared expectations?

2. Organising Groups





2.2.1 Face-to-face or Mediated

It is also worth considering to what degree you want to conduct activities and meetings online. This is particularly relevant for those with physical disabilities and participants struggling with mental health. For some, there is no safer location than home and by holding session online you may be enabling participation for those who would struggle to attend and contribute in face-to-face sessions.

We found most participants and staff members taking part in the project preferred face-to-face delivery. This allowed for more opportunities for engagement and better held the attention of participants. We would therefore only recommend online delivery for small groups with some existing digital literacy. The main benefits of doing so include:

- Providing access to services for those with mobility issues.
- Enhancing sense of safety, for those who might feel more comfortable engaging from their own environment.
- Minimising feelings of risk for anxious participants, as they don't have to meet other people face-to-face and it is easier to leave a meeting.

While physical access needs are mitigated, you need to be careful not to exclude people through lack of technological access or expertise. If you do decide to go for online delivery, we would recommend doing a technical audit to ensure those who want to participate can.

There may be potential for running hybrid sessions, where some of the participants and/or facilitators are physically present and others are online. However, this does require some technical expertise and specialist equipment, for example a projector or large screen if delivering to a large number of participants. A laptop screen quickly becomes too small when used by more than one or two people, and the rest of the group may find it exclusionary and lose interest.

3. Designing Activities

3.1 Overview

Once you have identified potential participants and know where you want to hold your storytelling sessions, you need to start thinking about what each session might involve. This can be intimidating and a little overwhelming if you are new to running activities. Our suggestion is to start with a single activity, topic or theme, and begin to build a session around this. Our activity guides provide some examples to get you started and you will find further material through the linked resources (Section 3.3).

It is important to note, this toolkit isn't designed to give you a prescriptive, structured programme of activities for you to take and apply. Rather, it provides the resources for you to develop storytelling activities, which can be conducted as individual sessions or structured into a series of activities.

Based on our storytelling project, we have identified four different activity types:

- 1. Written prompts**
- 2. Multimodal prompts (such as images)**
- 3. Discussion-based storytelling**
- 4. Collaborative storytelling**

While there is overlap for the different groups, generally we found that:

Groups working with people who have learning disabilities might want to start with

- Collaborative storytelling
- Discussion-based storytelling

While groups working with those who have experienced trauma or have mental health issues:

- Written prompts
- Multimodal prompts
- Discussion-based storytelling

Those who are currently experiencing uncertainty in their lives, may find it helpful to avoid (or indeed process) their experiences through more structured activities:

- Multimodal prompts
- Written prompts

Although, this may develop into more discussion-based activities as sessions progress.

Remember though, different groups will vary. You can make an initial judgement based on your perceptions of participant needs, but don't be afraid to make mistakes. There will likely be some trial and error as you engage with participants and understand what they want to get out of the sessions. You can then experiment with what works best for you and your participants.

Richard, the professional storyteller on the project, took a collaborative approach to designing the sessions. He would come prepared with suggested activities but be open to adapting them based on the participants, for example, changing prompts or themes, even abandoning more structured activities to engage in discussion and oral storytelling. Participants appreciated the flexible and responsive approach as they felt it demonstrated Richard's desire to "accommodate the group" and the fact he was being "thoughtful of participants' needs".

It is often easier to start by planning a single activity and session and it may be a necessity to stick to self-contained activities if attendees are likely to change between sessions. For example, if you choose to operate the sessions on a drop-in basis because you have participants who will struggle to commit to regular activities.

If you want to think more long-term and how to connect multiple sessions, you might want to consider:

- What themes/topics might be relevant to your participants?
 - o Remember, this doesn't need to focus on trauma or health.
 - o Why not explore your participants' assets and interests to provide suggestions?
 - o A theme could be as simple as "Friends and Family"
 - o For many participants, they have felt overlooked by the wider society because of their specific needs,

so you could develop stories that animate lives and address the experiences of your members.

- What themes/topics might be relevant to your organisation?

o These might be obvious to people inside the organisation, but you could develop activities that might communicate your organisation's story to a wider community audience.

- What skills are your participants trying to develop?

o For example, if you are trying to improve social skills, you might ask participants to engage with stories about different social interactions they might encounter.

o If you are trying to improve language and communication skills, you might think about alternating between written and oral storytelling, or exploring different genres (see below).

o This may be as simple as rediscovering creativity and the freedom to experiment and play free of judgement

- How to explore different literary genres:

o This can be particularly effective for those with limited access to literature, introducing them to creativity in lots of different forms.

o Your participants may also express an interest in non-literary genres. Be open to their suggestions; and remember how broad storytelling can be (see Section 1.1).

- How to explore different areas of the arts and culture:

o Performance-based areas, such as puppetry, are particularly effective to engage large groups.

- Do you want to work towards a particular output?

o See Section 5 on presenting creative outputs



Image by Richard Neville

3. Designing Activities

3.2 Example activities

Icebreakers

You may want to start each session with a short icebreaker. These might be used to help a group interact more comfortably, particularly if they are unfamiliar with each other; or an icebreaker might help participants transition into a creative environment and enter a storytelling mindset.

Have a look at the activity examples presented in the subsequent sections as many of the initial activities could be treated as ice breakers

Icebreakers should last between 5-10 minutes and encourage group participation (with the usual caveats to be sensitive to individual participant needs). If your session is going to be largely prompt-activity-based then you may want to start with a more discursive icebreaker. You might want to dispense with the icebreaker, if your group know each other well and want to get stuck into more extended storytelling activities.

As an example of some simple discussion-based suggestions, you could ask participants to share,

- *what happened to them on the way to the session?*
- *what was the best thing that happened to them this week?*

Or, if you want to focus more on access to arts and culture, you could:

- *Read a 'short' poem and ask whether people liked it or why?*
- *Share a piece of 'flash fiction' (a story under 100 words long) and ask participants if they think it works as a story?*
- *Play a piece of music and ask participants how it makes them feel or what it makes them think of?*

You can find examples of poems to use by scanning or clicking this QR code



You can find examples of flash fiction to use by scanning or clicking this QR code





If you are in a rush or struggling for inspiration, why not choose a word or two from this nature-based word cloud.

You could do something with written or visual prompts:

- *Play a word association game. Start with something simple, like 'Apple' or 'Chair' and ask participants to take turns sharing the first word that comes into their heads.*
- *As above but replace the word with a simple image.*
- *Ask each participant to write a noun. Share this with another participant who then has to come up with a suitable adjective to describe the noun. This is particularly effective for groups trying to improve their language skills.*
- *For groups very invested in developing creative writing skills, you could even ask them to write a story of under 50 words based on a visual prompt.*

See section 3.3 for further resources and places where you can find prompts.

3. Designing Activities

3.2.1 Using Written Prompts: Proverbs and Fables

1. Overview

Type: Structured prompt writing activity

Purpose:

- o Introduce basic creative activities
- o Provide a structured form for scaffolded creativity
- o Encourage discussion of literary form
- o Reflect on past experiences
- o Reflect on cultural differences
- o Encourage a sense of 'play' in creativity

Time: 60 minutes + 45 minutes extension

Resources: pencils, paper, scissors

In this exercise, you will use the idea of proverbs and fables as inspiration for participants' own creative activities. You will start by introducing some examples of proverbs and inviting participants to share any they know themselves. Participants will then create their own new proverbs, using a structured prompt, which can be shared and remixed to create playful new meanings. Participants will then select one of the newly created proverbs as the basis for a short fable. If comfortable, participants are encouraged to share their work and discuss what inspired and motivated their writing. Facilitators are encouraged to identify something to praise for each participant. The group are then invited to feedback on each other's work, focussing on positive elements.

2. Instructions

A) Introduce the activity (5 minutes)

- Explain to the participants that you will be taking inspiration from proverbs and fables.
- They will create their own proverbs with the help of a structural prompt (If.../then...)
- They will play a literary game to remix their proverbs.
- These remixed proverbs will then be used as the basis for writing a short fable.
- You could introduce an icebreaker at this point. For example, asking each participant if they can think of and share a proverb (see below). Alternatively, refer to the previous section on Icebreaker activities for further examples.

You can watch a video of Richard Neville giving a background to using proverbs by clicking or scanning this QR code



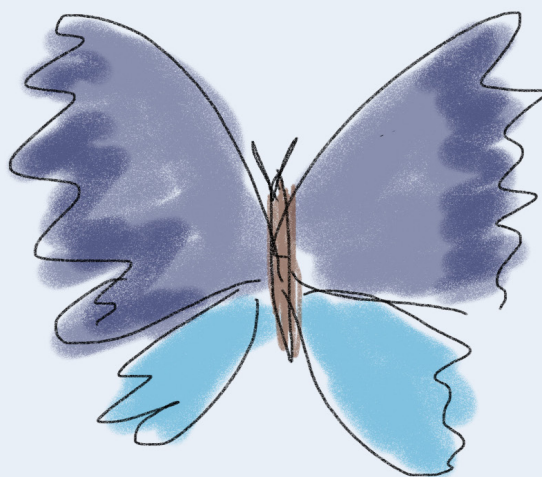


Illustration by Richard Neville

B) Introducing proverbs (15 minutes)

- Ask the participants if they are familiar with any proverbs?
 - o A proverb is a short, conventional saying that imparts a piece of advice, wisdom or moral lesson.
 - o Some examples you might want to share:
 - An apple a day keeps the doctor away*
 - A stitch in time saves nine*
 - A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step*
 - If you can't stand the heat, then get out of the kitchen*
 - When the going gets tough, then the tough get going*
 - o Contrasting participants familiarity with different proverbs is a potential avenue for discussions around experience, culture, and community.

C) Creating proverbs (20 minutes)

- Give each participant a piece of paper and ask them to draw two columns on the page, titling the left-hand column "if" and the right-hand column "then".
- Show them some examples of proverbs that use the if.../then... structure:
 - If life gives you lemons, then make lemonade.*
 - If a job is worth doing, then it is worth doing well.*
 - If you lie down with dogs, then you will get up with fleas.*
- Ask them to come up with five of their own proverbs by filling out the two columns.
 - o Encourage participants to be as creative as possible;
 - o They should aim to write interesting combinations rather than focussing on a potential 'message' for the proverb. To encourage this, you might ask them to fill out each column separately before connecting the "if..." and "then..." elements.
- If there is time, you can ask participants to share some of their examples.
 - o Remind participants that they only need to share if they feel comfortable doing so, but frame this by saying that storytelling is a collaborative experience and we often benefit from sharing our work.

3. Designing Activities

D) Remixing proverbs (15 minutes)

- Ask participants to cut their paper in half to separate the two columns and then cut out each proverb.
- Collect the parts so that you have an 'if' pile and a 'then' pile.
- Shuffle each pile and then ask each participant to randomly select an 'if' and a 'then' to create a new proverb.
- As a group discuss what you think each new remixed proverb means.

For advanced/literary-focussed groups, you can let them know that this activity is based on the games the Surrealists used to unlock creativity.

E) Closing (5 minutes)

- If ending the session, encourage the participants to reflect on what they have achieved.

This is another good opportunity to identify work for praise.

- If you are planning to create an output or record from the storytelling session, remember to ask participants if you can keep a copy of their work.

F) Extension: Introduce fables (15 minutes)

If you have limited time, extension activities (F + G) could be completed at home by participants or during a future session, as appropriate.

- Ask the participants if they are familiar with any fables?

o A fable is a (very) short story, normally involving animals, that imparts a piece of advice, wisdom, or moral lesson.

A version of The Hare and the Tortoise is provided at the end of this guide, if you need an example to show the participants. Point out how short it is, that it involves only two characters, both of whom are animals. Discuss with the group what they think the meaning of the fable is.

- Invite the students to share any fables they are familiar with.

o They may not recall the entire story but encourage them to describe what happens and potential meanings/lessons from the story.

G) Extension: Writing a fable (30 minutes)

- Ask the participants to choose one of the remixed proverbs.

o You can be flexible here and let participants create a new proverb if they like.

- Make sure they have a sense of what the 'meaning' or 'lesson' of their chosen proverb is.

- Ask them to write a short fable based on the proverb which conveys the same message.

o To get them started, you might encourage them to select two animal characters that might help them tell the story.

- Ask participants to share their stories.

3. Advice and alternatives

- If your participants are struggling to come up with their own proverbs, you can try using visual prompts. You could search your word processor's (e.g., MS Word) clip art folder, which should contain a range of basic stock imagery.

- This exercise can be used as the basis for considering literary genre (parables and fables). However, you could focus on the exercises themselves with minimal reference to literary forms and just ask the participants to create a story based on the prompts. Similarly, you could explicitly foreground fables by introducing a number of short examples and give participants more time to discuss them.

- o This version of the activity encourages access to culture by connecting to wider literary and artistic outputs. For advanced groups, it can also be a route into discussing literary style and/or engaging in critique of literary work.

- o You can find examples of fables here:
<https://www.read.gov/aesop/001.html>
<https://aesopfables.com/aesopsel.html>

- To enhance a sense of 'play', and explore different artistic forms, you might provide hand puppets or costumes and ask the participants to perform the short fable they have written.

- o Encourage the participants to keep the narrative simple and involve only two main characters.

- You could use participants contributions to develop and perform a fable to the group.

If you love your enemy,
then you will know yourself. (*)

Story - lived
A dragon and a crocodile
in the same kingdom,
and they were fierce
enemies. The dragon had
a daughter and the
crocodile had a son.

Daughter and son in
love with each other and
began to meet often
secretly. The parents
of the children found
out about this and were
upset, but then they
saw the pure love of
their children.

Children were able to
change the inner world of
their parents, because
the parents were able
to recognize their mistakes
and changed their
attitude towards their
enemies and made them
friends. (*)

Love and goodness
always triumph over evil!

08.07.2022
Vitaly.

A parable written by Vitaly from
Refugee Action Kingston during a session

3. Designing Activities

3.2.2 Using Visual Prompts: Journey through a landscape

1. Overview

Type: visual prompt writing activity

Purpose:

- o Introduce basic creative activities
- o Reflect on creative process
- o Connect to personal experience
- o Provide access to culture
- o Work towards extended storytelling

Time: 60 minutes (+ 30 minutes extension)

Resources: approx. 4 visual prompts, related by location, e.g., the countryside; the beach. Examples provided at end of the section.

In this exercise, you will show participants a series of related visual prompts. After each image, they will be asked to write (or speak) a line or two in response to the image. This can be personal or fictional. If comfortable doing so, participants are encouraged to share their work and discuss what inspired and motivated their writing. The group are then invited to feedback on each other's work, focussing on positive elements. Facilitators should identify something to praise for each participant. If time permits, the participants then work to connect their responses to each prompt into a cohesive story.

2. Instructions

A) Introduce the activity (5 minutes)

- Explain to the participants that you will be doing a written storytelling exercise.
- This will involve responding to a number of visual prompts.
 - o Depending on available time, we suggest 3-5.
- They will need to write a few lines for each image that is shown.
 - o Make it clear to the participants that they can respond in whatever manner they like. For example, they could write about a personal experience, try something descriptive or even imagine a character into the image.
 - o You can leave it up to individuals to choose whether they attempt poetry or prose.
- After they have written about each image, they will be invited to share their work and discuss each other's work.
- You could introduce an icebreaker at this point. For example, asking each participant to think of an image/landscape that inspires them and share a quick description with the group.

You can watch a video of Richard Neville introducing the activity by clicking or scanning this QR code





B) Writing process (30 minutes)

- Show the participants the first image.
- Encourage them to spend 60 seconds looking at and reflecting on the image.
- Ask them to try and write a few lines based on the image.
 - o Encourage participants to try and write freely. Focus on getting something down and not worry about editing. They will have an opportunity to do this later.*
 - o If participants are struggling, you can encourage them to start by writing down any words that comes to mind.*
- Repeat for each image.

C) Sharing and discussion (20 minutes)

- Check that participants are comfortable sharing work and invite them to do so
 - o You can share your own work as encouragement for the rest of the group*
 - o Remind the group that storytelling should be a shared experience. For example, you might say: 'We get more out of storytelling by sharing, whether that is developing our abilities or building a stronger group relationship.'*
- Invite participants to reflect on their own work.
 - o You may want to connect to personal experiences (relevant to your group/organisation). For example: 'What made you think of that?'*
 - o You could make connections to literary equivalents?*
 - 'It reminded me of...'*
 - 'What inspired you...'*
- Participants are invited to feedback on each other's work.
 - o Encourage them to focus on positive elements. For example: 'What did you like about X's work?'*

D) Closing (5 minutes) or Extension activity (30 minutes)

- If ending the session, encourage the participants to reflect on what they have achieved.
 - o This is another good opportunity to identify work for praise.*
- If you are planning to create an output or record from the storytelling session, remember to ask if you can keep a copy of participants' work.

3. Designing Activities

Extension activity:

- Give the participants time to read over their work.
- Ask participants to consider how the responses to the individual prompts might connect and be combined into a single narrative.
 - o Some participants may have been doing this anyway. If this is the case, this is an opportunity for them to reflect on their work.*
- Ask participants to write a connected story based on their previous responses. This might involve:
 - o Remixing the order of responses.*
 - o Creating additional content to bridge the narrative between existing responses.*
 - o Using their original responses as inspiration for a new story.*
 - o Working individually or collaborating on a shared narrative.*
- If time is limited, this activity could be completed at home or during the next session.

3. Advice and alternatives

- This activity can be adapted for groups involving participants with learning difficulties by asking them to respond either orally or visually to the prompts. Alternatively, if they have support workers, they can help record their responses to the prompts.
- If participants look like they are struggling, then stick to one or two visual prompts to give them more time to work on their responses.
- Feel free to experiment with different visual prompts. They don't necessarily need to be linked to a landscape. For example, you may want to use images of your local area or prompts relevant to your organisation's aims. Other potential sources for prompts include clip art or book covers.
 - o If you are unfamiliar with participants' prior experiences, you should be careful in your selection of images to keep them neutral. This is why we have initially suggested landscapes.*
 - o You could ask participants to supply their own images. For example, taking photos of locations on their way to the session.*
- There are a number of photo libraries that provide free to use images. Particularly handy if you are planning on publishing or otherwise sharing the work and hoping to include the images. Why not try:



Or if you want prints and artwork, you could try the New York Public Library's digital collection:



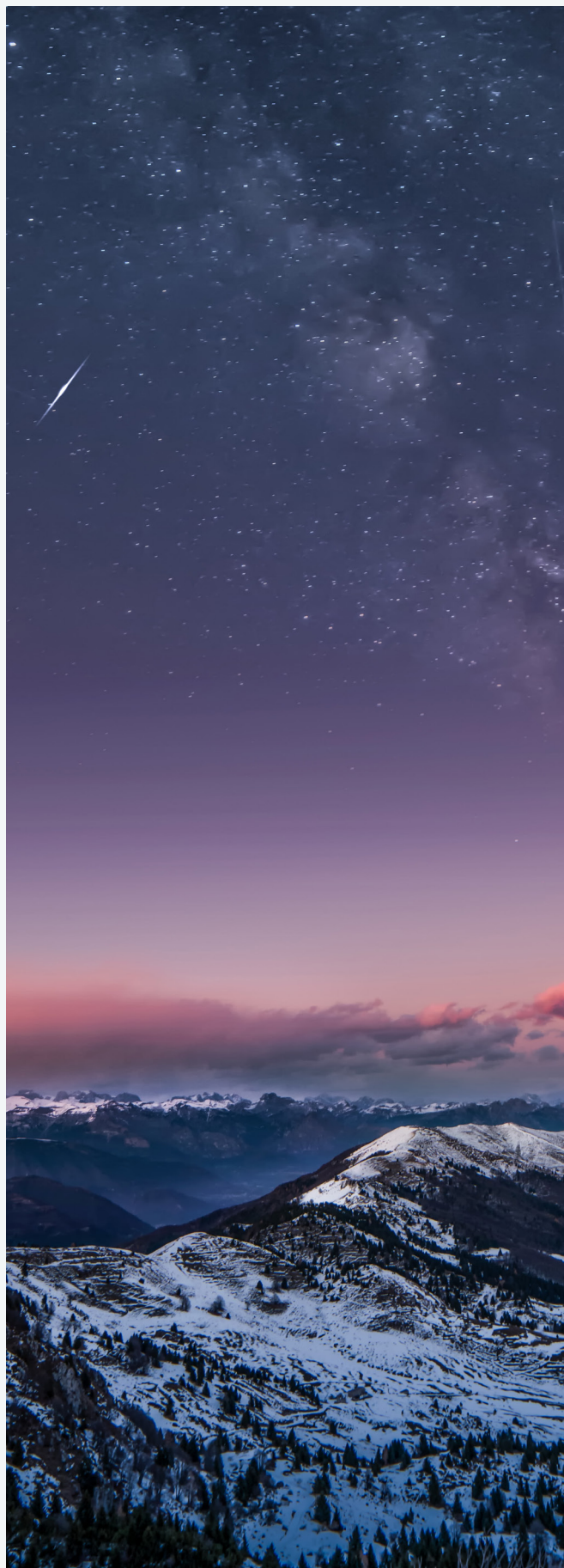
(but remember to select "Search only public domain materials")

- As a variation, you could base your selection of images on a poem or short story you are familiar with. Once participants have shared their own writing, you can introduce the original work.

o This version of the activity encourages access to culture by connecting to literary and artistic works. For advanced groups, it can also be a route into discussing literary style and/or engaging in critique of literary work. You can find example poems here:



- Another alternative is to use music as a prompt for writing. You may want to select pieces from different genres or examples that already have a strong storytelling component, such as Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. You can play a short clip and ask participants to respond in the same way as they do for images described above.



3. Designing Activities

4. Example Visual Prompts





3. Designing Activities

3.2.3 Discussion-based storytelling: talking on a theme

1. Overview

Type: visual prompt writing activity

Purpose:

- o Familiarise groups with different storytelling forms
- o Understand the value of discursive storytelling
- o Connect to personal experience
- o Build confidence in storytelling
- o Support belief in the importance of small stories
- o Develop belief in the value of participant voices
- o Create a space for listening to others

Time: 60 minutes (+ 30 minutes extension)

Resources: None.

In this activity you will share and respond to stories. You will start by selecting a topic and/or theme. You will then encourage participants to reflect on the topic and share stories and experiences through informal discussion. It will be your role as a facilitator to scaffold the discussion, invite further contributions and encourage reflection. You may want to conclude the session by giving the participants space to “write up” the story they have shared or engage with it in another creative form.

While the previous activities have been relatively structured, if your aim is to be more informal, and are open to discussion-based storytelling, then this activity provides the flexibility and framework for doing so. It could also be useful during an initial storytelling session to get to know participants, gauge literacy levels and develop familiarity with creative activities.

Depending on your group, participants may perceive oral and discussion-based storytelling as less valuable than creative writing. If this is the case, be sure to explain how important sharing experiences can be and that this is a form of storytelling that can be practiced and developed in the same way as written forms. Discussion-based storytelling can lead to improved communication and social skills as well as contributing to wellbeing. Refer to Section 1.2 for more advice here.



Image by Richard Neville



An image shared by a participant to suggest a topic

2. Instructions

A) Introduce the activity (5 minutes)

- Explain to participants that you will be doing a spoken storytelling activity.
- It will be largely discussion-based, informal, and involve sharing experiences as stories.
- You will introduce a theme and, if necessary, some prompts, but participants are free to take the discussion in a different direction.
- There will be an opportunity to respond more formally to the shared stories at the end of the session, if the participants wish.

B) Icebreaker (10 minutes)

- For discussion-based sessions, an icebreaker can be particularly important.
 - o You can find examples at the start of section 3.2.
- We suggest using one that gets participants talking about their experiences.
- For example, ask participants to describe their journey to the session.
 - o This can seem mundane but can be used to underscore the value of different forms of story, so be sure to praise contributions.

C) Choosing a topic (10 minutes)

- You may decide to do this in advance of the session, if time is limited or you have clear focus for the storytelling sessions. For example, you may want participants to engage with your organisation's aims.
- However, there are benefits to allowing participants to engage in this activity:
 - o It gives participants a further sense of agency in the storytelling process.
 - o It mitigates the chance of a facilitator choosing a triggering topic.
 - o It enhances participants comfort levels.
 - o It supports participant engagement and therefore should increase contributions.
- To select a topic, if you have a very active group, you could be open and ask: "What would people like to talk about today?"
- Alternatively, you could ask participants to write a suggested topic onto a small piece of paper. Collect and shuffle these topics and then randomly select one. Ensure all participants are comfortable discussion and/or writing on this topic.
- Or, ask participants to share images. Allow the group to select their preferred image and discuss what topics might be suggested by the contents of the image.

3. Designing Activities



D) Reflecting on the topic (5 minutes)

- Give participants a bit of time to reflect on the chosen topic.
 - o Encourage them to think about what it might mean to them.
 - o Ask if they have any experiences of stories that immediately come to mind.
 - o Invite them to make notes, if they wish, but that is not necessary

E) Sharing and discussion (25 minutes)

- To get the discussion started, participants are asked to share an experience or story that relates to the theme.
- Re-iterate to the participants that this is an informal storytelling discussion.
 - o Stories do not need to be complete or polished narratives.
 - o Participants are free to stop and invite comment or response from other members of the group.
 - o Members should also feel free to respond to other participants' contributions and extend and pick up on stories.
 - o Remind participants that they should be respectful of other participants, and not interrupt or demean others' stories.
- As a facilitator, you may want to offer your own story first to ease participants into the activity.
- The facilitator should remain an active participant in the discussion but always try to give space for others in the group. If discussion stalls, you may want to use one of the following prompts:
 - o 'And then what happened...' to invite further contribution from the same individual
 - o 'Does anyone else have a similar story to share...' to open the discussion to the rest of the group.

F) Closing (5 minutes) or Extension activity (30 minutes)

- If ending the session, encourage the participants to reflect on what they have achieved.

o This is another good opportunity to identify contributions for praise.

o Re-iterate the value of discussion-based storytelling

- If you are planning to create an output or record from the storytelling session, remember to ask if you can write out versions of the stories that have been shared.

Extension activity:

- Ask the participants to choose one of the stories that was shared, either their own or someone else's – although they should check that the other person is happy for them to use their story.

- They should then write down bullet points of the key things that happened in the story.

o For advanced groups, you could invite discussion about what makes it a story, e.g., does it have a clear beginning, middle and end? does it need to have these elements?

- Invite the participants to respond creatively to the story.

o They may want to write it out in prose

o They could respond to the emotional content of the story through poetry

o They might feel more comfortable working visually and drawing an image.

- If time is limited, this activity could be completed at home or during the next session.

3. Advice and alternatives

- If you want to make longer term plans and connect across sessions, you could ask for participants to supply topics in relation to a theme (for example, storytelling). You should then collect and keep participant-submitted topics and select a new one each week to form the basis of the discussion.

- If discussion is starting to flag, you could introduce visual prompts to support further contributions.

o A quick google image search of your topic should provide plenty of visuals for participants to quickly reflect on that might surface additional experiences and stories.

- During the project sessions, participants were normally happy to share and kept a conversation going. However, if it seems the discussion has clearly run its course and there are no further contributions, then you can select another topic and begin the process again.

o This might also be necessary to re-focus a session if participants have gone off topic.

- If you are struggling to come up with story topics/themes, Richard Neville has produced a collection of image and word prompts you can use or there theme generators available online:

Richard's Resources



Storyshack's theme generator



3. Designing Activities

3.2.4 Collaborative storytelling: going on a journey

1. Overview

Type: collaborative storytelling

Purpose:

- o Engage audience through oral storytelling
- o Encourage participation through interaction
- o Explore different storytelling modes (oral, written, visual)
- o Build confidence in participants' storytelling ability and contributions
- o Develop belief in the value of participant voices
- o Create a space for collaboration and creativity

Time: approx. 60 minutes

Resources: Paper, Pencils (or other drawing media) .

In this activity, you will be leading on telling a collaborative story. You will work from a theme and may have some prepared ideas around setting and plot, but you will be drawing on contributions and suggestions from participants to advance the story. Participants will also be asked to draw a visual response to a prompt within the story, and you will incorporate the contents of these drawings into the story.

This type of activity draws on your storytelling skills and may be slightly intimidating for inexperienced facilitators to run. However, we would really recommend trying to run a collaborative storytelling session. It can be really beneficial in engaging your participants and giving them confidence in their storytelling abilities. It is important to remember not to be worried about making mistakes, the shared journey of telling a story can be a powerful bonding device for groups, as well as being a lot of fun.

We found this type of collaborative storytelling to be particularly effective when working with people who have learning disabilities. They found it easier to respond visually to the narrative and the use of multiple modes of storytelling (oral and visual – as well as some music and puppetry) enhanced engagement and enjoyment.

Click or scan the following QR code to watch Richard Neville introduce collaborative storytelling:





Illustration by Paul from Kingston Mencap

2. Instructions

A) Introduce the activity (5 minutes)

- Explain to participants that you will be doing a collaborative storytelling activity.
- You will start telling a story but you will need the participants help to finish it and so will invite their contributions
- Later in the story, participants will be asked to draw something in response to a prompt in the story.
- You will finish the story using their contributions.
- There will be an opportunity to respond to and develop the story, if the participants wish.

B) Choosing a topic (0-5 minutes)

- Depending how confident you are, if you do not feel entirely comfortable improvising, you may want to have a topic pre-selected or a few options for participants to choose from to allow you to prepare.

o A few example topics are provided in the advice section below. You might want to tell participants that you are going to tell an adventure story or a ghost story.

- There are benefits to allowing participants to engage in this activity:

o It gives participants a further sense of agency in the storytelling process.

o It mitigates the chance of a facilitator choosing a triggering topic.

o It enhances participants comfort levels.

o It supports participant engagement and therefore should increase contributions.

C) Starting the Story (5 minutes)

- We would recommend framing the story as a journey as this helps to keep a story moving forward (for example, by shifting to a new location).

- You can start by describing:

o Someone sailing over an ocean

o Someone climbing a mountain

o Someone travelling through a forest

- Try to set the scene

o Describe the location

o What does the character see?

o How does the character feel?

3. Designing Activities

- To encourage contributions, you can ask questions:

- o What is the name of the character?*
- o Who do they meet?*
- o What problem do they encounter?*

If you are stuck, the most important prompt to remember is: *What happened next?*

D) Drawing Activity (20 minutes)

- Have your character(s) arrive at a new location for example, a house in a forest.
 - o If you are telling an adventure story, this might be the location of some treasure.*
 - o If you are telling a ghost story, the location could be haunted.*
- Ask your participants to draw something that they might encounter at the location.
- Once participants have completed their drawings, collect them.

E) Sharing contributions (15 minutes)

- Restart the story by describing how the character enters the new location.
- Reveal one of the images drawn by a participant.
- Ask the participant to describe what they have drawn.
 - o Depending on the confidence and/or ability of your participant, you can encourage them to describe what happens when the character encounters what they have drawn.*
 - o If you think your participants will struggle, then you can use their images as a springboard for your own development of the story.*

F) Finishing the Story (5 minutes)

- Resolve the story first by recapping events.
- You should aim to finish by describing what the characters have achieved or how they have been positively transformed by the story.
 - o This is an opportunity for your participants to contribute both in terms of plot (how does the story end?) but also in terms of meaning and/or moral (what did the character learn?)*

G) Closing (5 minutes)

- Encourage the participants to reflect on what they have achieved.
 - o This is another good opportunity to identify contributions for praise.*
- If you are planning to create an output or record from the storytelling session, remember to ask if you can write out versions of the stories that have been shared.

3. Advice and alternatives

- Rather than inventing a character within the story, you may want to make the participants the characters and describe what they do in the story.
- As an alternative to asking questions, you could use a series of visual images or even bring along objects to encourage contributions from your participants. For example, if your journey involves travelling through a forest, you could

have a number of images of things they may encounter (e.g., trees, a cottage, a fox,) and ask them to suggest what happens when they meet these different things. Similarly, you might go and collect object that feature in your chosen locations (for a forest, this might include twigs, leaves, acorns) and ask the participants how they might incorporate these items into the story.

- You might want to use puppets and props to help deliver your storyteller.
- Depending on the ability of your group, you may decide to dispense with the central drawing activity. If you think your participants will be able to provide sufficient contributions to keep the story going orally, then that can be an effective approach – particularly, if stronger participants feel comfortable taking more a leading role in telling the story.

o Topics (and prompts) that have worked well in our sessions:

Superheroes (what would your superpower be?)

Ghost Stories (what would you find in a ghost story?)

Favourite things (what are your favourite things?)

Adventure story (what would you do with a million pounds?)

Genie in a lamp (if you had three wishes, what would you wish for?)

'A wish for your friends and family'

'A wish for yourself'

'A wish for [your organisation]'

- Remember, if you feel the story is losing it's way or you need some time to think about how to move the story forward, you can always do a recap (telling the story from the beginning again). This might suggest to you or to the participants a new direction to take the story in.

- Here is an example of a storytelling and drawing activity recorded by Richard for MENCAP. It only presents the facilitator side of collaborative storytelling, but demonstrates how you might go about conducting an activity of this type. Click or scan the QR code to access the video:



Illustration by Michael from Kingston Mencap

3. Designing Activities

3.3 Storytelling resources

While we hope that the advice and examples in the previous sections are enough to help you design and deliver multiple storytelling sessions and programmes, we know that sometimes you might want a little more inspiration. So we've put together this resource list of useful sites.

A good place to start looking is the [Asset-based Storytelling project website](#) which provides further information on the project and some examples of work produced by participants that should hopefully motivate and inspire your own storytelling activities.



It can be accessed by clicking or scanning the following QR code:

The following websites contain storytelling activities:

Helbing Publishing



Useful activities, particularly for language learners

Storyarts.org



Examples suitable for more advanced writing activities and to inspire your own collaborative storytelling.

The Power of Storytelling



Business focussed but with a number of interesting activities that could be adapted for community storytelling.

The British Council



An education focussed resource with plenty of useful activities and prompts to draw on.

Society for Storytelling



A range of resources, including more advanced guidance on storytelling

Imagine Forest



Lots of short (10 minute) writing exercises

Paths to Literacy



An informative site that covers both the value of storytelling and activity resources.

The National Literacy Trust



A number of resources focussed on younger participants.

Useful sites to find resources for images:

Unsplash



Pixabay



Pexels



New York Public Library



3. Designing Activities

The following websites contain literary resources:

Poetry



The Poetry Foundation

Poetry



The Poetry Society

Flash Fiction



Flash Fiction Online

Flash Fiction



100WordStory.org





Flash Fiction



Milk Candy Review

Visual Stories



Books Beyond Words

Short Stories



Project Gutenberg

Short Stories



TSS Publishing

4. Safeguarding

Safeguarding and dealing with negative experiences

It is important to start this section with a note that this is not a comprehensive guide on safeguarding. However, it does provide some guidance on good practice for running a storytelling session, such as selecting appropriate material and providing feedback. Accompanying this guidance are a few examples taken from our project that underscore how this might apply to your own sessions

Staff and members from your own organisation will be in the best position to assist you, both in terms of understanding internal safeguarding processes and what to do if you require immediate assistance during a session. If you don't already know, find out who your point of contact is (likely your line manager or volunteer co-ordinator, depending on your role), particularly if you are dealing with unfamiliar participants and are not confident in how to respond to negative reactions during the storytelling session.

In our project, there were minimal issues, although we did find that sessions often worked best when the storyteller was supported by a facilitator from the partner organisation. However, this will also very much depend on the type of participants you are planning on working with. For example, how vulnerable they are, whether they are confident enough to engage directly, and how familiar they are with these types of activity.

You may find that you will occupy both these positions, depending on your relationship to participants. However, if you are new to running activities, it could be helpful to have some support in the room until you feel comfortable with the group. We would recommend that any additional staff members engage with the storytelling and become participants, rather than being observers. This adds to the collaborative nature of the sessions and generally makes participants feel more comfortable.

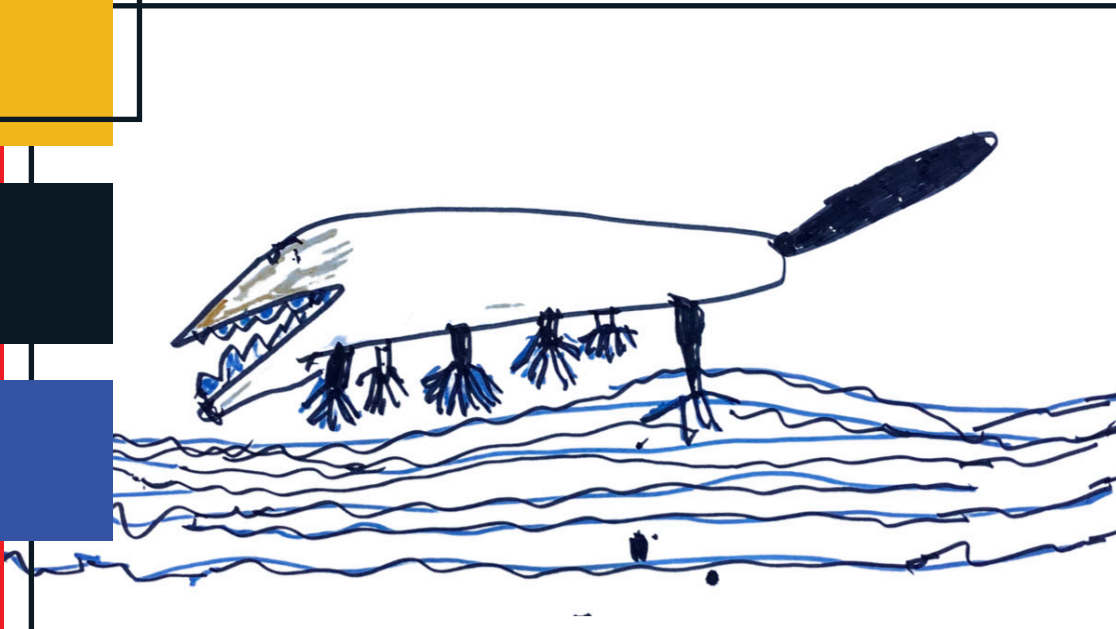


Illustration by Michael from Kingston Mencap

Please note that most organisations will require a risk assessment for any new activities. We believe that it is very important to carry one out. This is a low-risk activity from a physical perspective, but it can be high risk from the point of emotional involvement of vulnerable participants.

If you are volunteering, you may want to consider having a member of staff present to deal with the emotional needs of participants, allowing you to focus on storytelling and activities

Some key points of consideration and guidance:

Know your participants needs

The best way to support your participants is to get to know them and understand their needs. You can refer to section 2.2 for more guidance on this. The aim is to anticipate and avoid any negative responses to the sessions. For example:

- if you know that participants struggle with confidence around literacy then start with spoken or visual activities. You should encourage contributions without forcing anyone to share.
- If you know participants have suffered from a particular trauma, you should avoid activities that connect to or reference related topics.
- If your participants suffer from anxiety, spend some time putting them at their ease. You can do 'discussion'-based storytelling without explicitly framing it as storytelling, for example.
- Recognise that participants may get bored and frustrated if elements of activities are exclusionary.

Manage expectations

It is really important that you are clear from the outset about what you hope to achieve. This could be something basic like, 'An opportunity to be creative and tell stories in a friendly group environment' – although, re-visit [section 1.1 | What is storytelling] and [1.2 | Why is storytelling important?] if you want to gain further insight into why you might want to run the sessions.

It might also be useful to ask the participants what they want from the sessions. This could be done at the end of the first session, once they understand the process and approach. This would allow for a greater sense of agency for the participants.

By managing expectations, participants will feel more comfortable when they first start and there is less scope for disappointment as the sessions progress. You may want to consider sharing session activities in advance to give a flavour of what you are going to be doing and setting some parameters for what the sessions won't be doing.

4. Safeguarding

Importantly, one thing to make clear is:

Storytelling sessions are not counselling and should not replace other support systems.

Though sharing stories can, undoubtedly, be a therapeutic process, the sessions described herein are not designed to facilitate therapy or act as a form of counselling. Participants will often divulge personal information through storytelling. Our participants reported cathartic and positive wellbeing effects from doing so. It is your role to support participants in their storytelling, encourage them to be creative but not attempt to provide additional emotional and psychological support. This puts an unfair burden on you as a facilitator and unrealistic expectations on what the participants will achieve in the sessions. Even if your role within your organisation does involve counselling or similar wellbeing support, we would recommend demarcating between creative storytelling sessions and more therapeutic activities to manage expectations around outcomes and ensure participants do not replace or withdraw from appropriate support systems.

Respect Boundaries

It is very important to ensure all members of the group, including yourself as the facilitator, respect boundaries. Don't push for contributions or ask people to write on a topic that they may be uncomfortable with. This extends to group dynamics; don't allow other members to pressure each other into sharing; allow participants to decide what, when and how they want to contribute.

During the project, one of the groups got very involved in the role of storytelling as a means of processing personal trauma. When one member of the group expressed discomfort about sharing a particular story, other members of the group, with good intentions, strongly encouraged the participant to share their story, believing this to be a means of facing and overcoming traumatic experiences. The participant was fearful of doing so. It is the role of the facilitator to recognise this and mitigate any pressure from the group so that all participants feel safe and know they only need to share if they are comfortable.

Remember, you may have participants who have:

- Engaged in criminal activity, for example drug use.
- Fled dangerous and chaotic locations.
- Experienced trauma.
- Suffer from ongoing mental health issues.
- Be wary or untrusting of perceived authority.
- Experienced trauma, such as abuse.
- Suffer from ongoing mental health issues.
- Stepped out of their comfort zone to take part
- Been ignored or mistreated by society
- Have a visible or invisible physical or mental disability /alternate ability

While we should seek to create environments where people feel comfortable sharing, these issues and experiences should not be viewed as grist for the mill of storytelling. Our project worked because it took an asset-based approach to storytelling, focussing on the positive elements of participants' lives, the skills and experiences that could contribute to storytelling, rather than their negative experiences and trauma.

Selecting Material

It is very important when selecting material or topics to try to avoid anything that might be potentially triggering for your group. Hopefully, this will be apparent from your work within your organisation (seek guidance if you are unsure) and through your assessment of participant needs (see section 2.2).

The advice we got from one partner organisation is to keep everything 'mainstream' as much as possible. For example, when selecting visual prompts, you can try and stay generic or select stimuli that participants would probably come across in their lives: for example, landscape images. We do not want to stifle creativity, but you may decide to err on the side of caution at least until you are more familiar with your participants.

While we don't want to censor participants, you also want to make sure that any shared contributions are appropriate for other participants. It is important to be attentive to all members of the group and suggest whether there is a better venue for sharing information that is making other members of the group uncomfortable.

It is impossible to be fully aware and account for all potential triggers within a group. People are complex and have varied histories. For example, the professional storyteller used a widely available set of storytelling cards as image prompts during a writing session. However, one of the participants felt that they were slightly occult and, due to their religious background, found this triggering. (Others in the group really enjoyed the exercise).

While you should make sure to avoid materials that are obviously or explicitly triggering, situations like this may arise, so it is important that time is taken at the start to create a comfortable and safe space where participants feel comfortable raising objections and you can moderate your materials as appropriate.

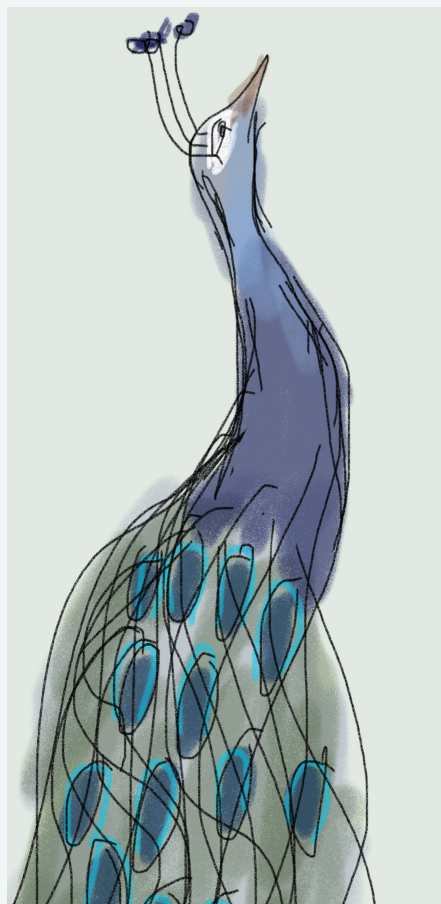


Illustration by Richard Neville

4. Safeguarding

Providing Feedback

You may, at points, be called upon to provide feedback to participants about their storytelling. While there is a component of skills development, and some groups may be more focussed on improving their writing ability, it is important to remember that these are not creative writing workshops. We suggest that you frame all feedback as positive responses. Remember that participants may suffer from anxiety or lack confidence, and even constructive criticism may be perceived as criticism. Storytelling should be seen as a means to improve individual and community lives, and this is achieved through the sharing of experiences rather than focussing on form.

Creating a safe collaborative and supportive environment is more valuable, in this instance, than critiques of work. This also extends to the group dynamic, so try to mitigate any negative feedback shared between participants. (During the project we found participants to be overwhelmingly positive in their support and praise of other participants and their work.)

During a storytelling session with a mixed language-ability group, a participant became very anxious about their perceived lack of English, heightened by the fact that they were asked to contribute after another participant with more experience in creative writing. It was very important to provide lots of positive feedback to the anxious participant and offer additional support. The storyteller reiterated that everyone one's experiences were of value and all the group had something to offer, regardless of their level of English. They also provided additional individual support, helping the participant to articulate ideas and translate and transcribe them.

It is important to remind participants that they should focus on the process of storytelling rather than the judgement of outputs.

5. Presenting Creative Outputs

Storytelling can give a voice to the voiceless (Pearl Project Participant)

During our storytelling project, it quickly became apparent how much value participants saw in lasting creative outputs. There was pride in seeing their work physically produced, adding to a growing belief that their stories and experiences were important and worth sharing.

One of the most important outcomes from the project was the sense for participants that they had been given a voice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they wanted to share this voice, whether among friends and families or to a wider community audience. All the groups, in some form, had felt overlooked or marginalised and presenting their creative outputs was a small step towards redressing this balance.

We provide suggestions for three avenues you may want to pursue in sharing work: through performance and sharing work at events; by creating physical records such as books and pamphlets; and through archiving and presenting work using digital methods. To provide some inspiration, you can look at examples of work created by the participants from our storytelling sessions. Their stories have been collated and formatted by the professional storyteller and can be found on the project website:



Another important element to remember is the potential importance of creating a record of work to support or promote organisational aims. Collecting and sharing stories can have a powerful and profound effect for organisations. For example, during the storytelling programme, one of our partner organisations discovered that they would have to close the residential centre that housed the participants. The book that came out of the sessions contained work by both residents and staff sharing their experiences, becoming a memorial to the centre and a record of the positive impact that it had.

Remember, participants own the copyright of any work they produce. It should not be shared in any form without their explicit consent.

We should also be mindful of any potential for harm in reproducing work, such as sharing the work to a wider audience than they are comfortable with.

5. Creative Outputs

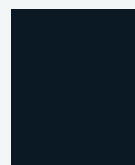
5.1 Events, performance and sharing work

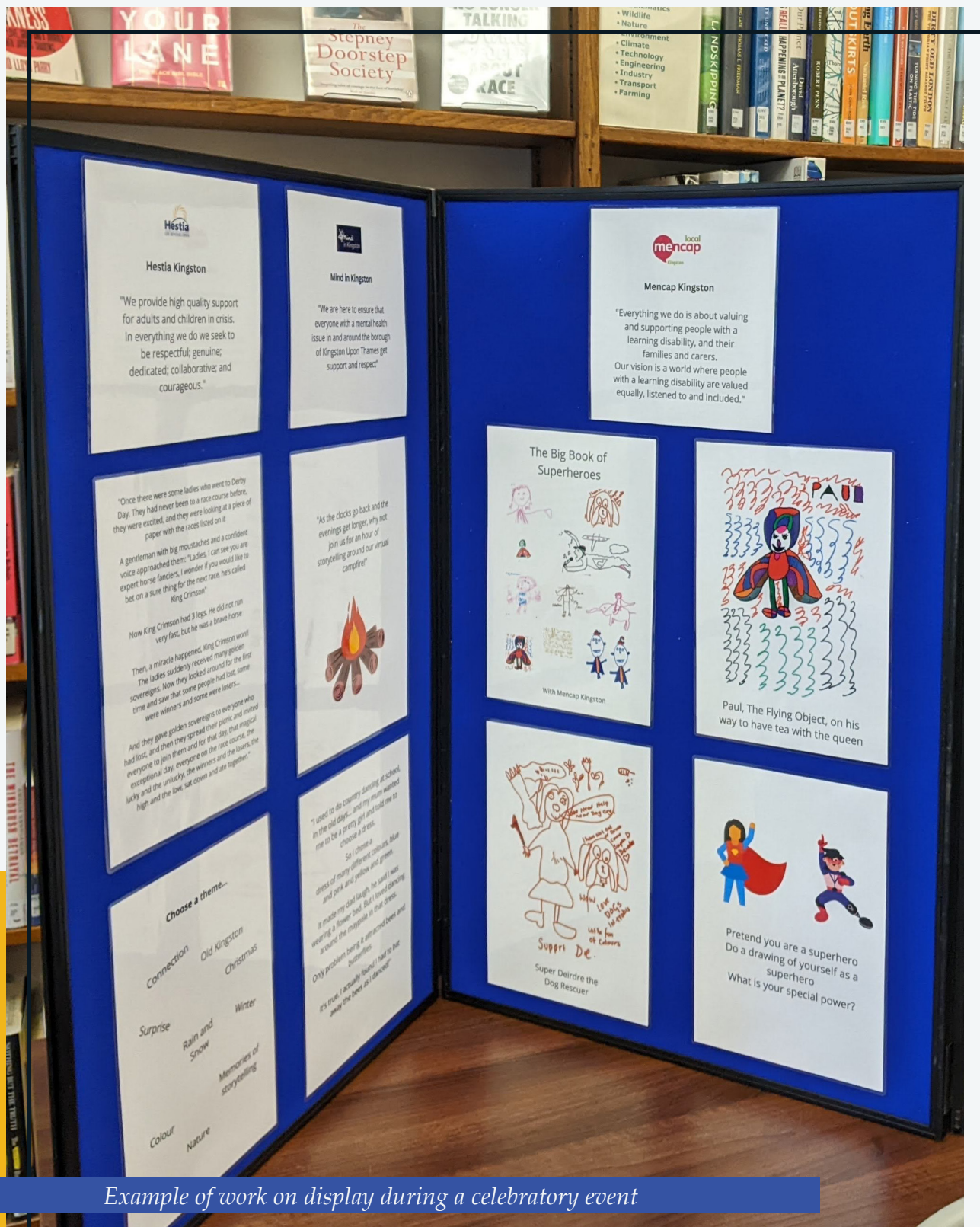
One relatively simple way of sharing work is through the performance or presentation of work at events. These don't need to be large scale (although they could be) but could involve a few invited guests or be opened to the wider membership of your organisation.

Keeping participant wellbeing in mind, you should always check what level and type of audience they are comfortable with. For some, having unfamiliar faces in the room will be an additional validation of their work, while for others it may be an affective trigger.

In our project, a closing event was held at Kingston Library to celebrate the stories and contributions of the participants. Examples of the work were put on display but there was no expectation for participants to deliver work live. Rather, members of the project team, library and council (including the mayor), gave short speeches celebrating the work and activities.

If you are looking to keep things low key, you could always organise a group only celebration where members of the group perform to each other. Signal to members of the group that you would like to take time during the last scheduled session to read out pieces of work. You can ask if there are any specific pieces of work that they would like to share. It is important to ascertain whether participants would like to read the work out themselves or if they would prefer you to do so. This is another great opportunity to provide positive feedback, focussing on any skills development participants have achieved through taking part.





Example of work on display during a celebratory event

5.2 Books and physical outputs

You may decide that the focus of the sessions should be the immediate impact of sharing and collaborating through face-to-face storytelling. However, depending on how many sessions you run, as your participants gain more confidence and skills, they may want to start considering how to preserve and share their stories outside of the sessions.

While not a pre-requisite for a successful storytelling programme, some form of collected and printed record of the participants' work can help maintain and extend many of the benefits experienced. For example:

- *it provides evidence of improvements and skills development*
- *any participant wellbeing generated through pride in work is enhanced*
- *physical outputs further validate beliefs that participant stories are valuable and should be shared*
- *it provides another means to share and disseminate stories internally within your organisation but also more widely with the community, something that is important for many participants.*

You aren't expected to develop typesetting and book making skills. While you can seek out professional printing and binding services, depending on the result you hope to achieve, it isn't necessary. You can find some different techniques for DIY simple hand-binding here (<https://www.wikihow.com/Bind-a-Book>), but folding and stapling the work together can still create an effective record of the work that has been done.

Alternatively, there are free software applications (such as Canva) that provide templates and guidance on how to produce smaller pamphlets. Pamphlets are traditionally just one double-sided sheet of paper folded in thirds – and so a much easier prospect to create than a book. They can still provide a valuable sample of work that has been done and have the advantage of being cheap to produce and easy to share if you want to promote and celebrate the storytelling sessions.

Our participants were often interested in the publishing process, so you could invite them to contribute art and images to accompany their stories or incorporate designing or making the pamphlets into one of the sessions, if you feel comfortable doing so.

You might want to consider buying an ISBN for any book you produce. It is an official identifier for publishers, libraries and others in the book trade. At a basic level, this again enhances the sense of value for participants by making the book "official". If you partner with Kingston Libraries in facilitating storytelling activities, it may even be possible to ask the Library to store a copy. You can buy ISBNs at this site (click or scan the QR code):



What The Hell are We Going to Call This? or He Who Dares, Writes



Poems, stories and thoughts from
the Joel Project

Cover of a book produced for Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness

5. Creative Outputs

5.3 Digital outputs

If restraints on resources means that producing a physical output is not possible, there are avenues for the digital storing and presentation of your work. These alternative solutions can bring a number of advantages as well.

As a simple cost-saving approach, you could collect participants' work and design a 'book' without printing it. You then have something that can be stored and shared quickly and easily that still represents the achievements of participants.

You might want to create a simple archive, using your own organisations digital storage or a freely available cloud storage platform (such as Dropbox or Google Docs). You can then create and share links to individual or collected work(s).

On that note, it is worth exploring what your organisation might be able offer to support you in creating a digital record of storytelling. For example, setting up webpages or sharing work via internal comms or mailing lists. If you are more tech savvy you could even explore setting up your own webpage.

You might also explore social media as a potential method of documenting and sharing creative outputs. Something as simple as taking a photo of each output and then posting the image to Instagram or Flickr, again provides a simple route to recording participants work and potentially exposing it to a wider audience.

Of course, even more so than with printed outputs which are relatively finite and controllable in terms of dissemination, you must be sure that participants are happy and comfortable with sharing work online and through social media, and gain consent to do so.



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Asset-based Storytelling



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