

New stories

Stories and poetry

**3 x sessions
of 60 minutes each**

You will need:

A selection of childhood books and illustrations

Notepad, pens and paper or post-it notes

Cut out paper dolls, a row for each participant (or paper and scissors to make them)

A small box for each participant

A range of nice envelopes and tissue paper

Creative
Reflective
Personal

Using remembered childhood books and illustrations as a stimulus, participants explore significant moments from their own life stories through a series of linked activities.

To prepare:

Ideally this activity requires two facilitators and takes place over three sessions. For all sessions, find a quiet space to gather together with chairs arranged in a circle.

Before the sessions, you will need to gather a selection of books and illustrations. These will ideally be items that participants might recognise or ones that will stimulate memories. They can be bought cheaply from charity shops or be donations/loans from families and carers. They can also be stories and images that have been found online and printed out.

Session one:

To begin, use gentle prompts to inspire general memories of childhood reading.

Questions you might ask:

What kind of reader were you as a child?

Do you remember any of the books you read?

Did you read at school?

Did anyone read to you or tell you stories?

This may lead to further general conversations about childhood, or about looking after children. Throughout, try to encourage further talk by asking questions and by inviting participants to elaborate on things that they share.

Throughout the activity the facilitator who isn't asking questions should keep notes of participants' responses. They can do this by writing down things people say and by noting some key phrases. If they are comfortable with drawing, they can also sketch some of the details of the discussion. For example, a picture of a toy that somebody mentions, or a building that is described.

Next, show the group a range of children's books and illustrations and encourage the participants to touch and look at them. Invite each participant to select the one that most appeals to them, and then as a group share the things that have been chosen. Leave plenty of space so that everybody can offer thoughts and reflections as you look through the items. If comfortable, the participants can read extracts from the books, or you could read extracts for them.

Credit:

Dr Alison Waller with Gemma Seltzer and Wallis Eates.
Developed in partnership with Holybourne Care Home in Roehampton.





To finish the session, you could summarise particular themes that have come out as you have talked, e.g. the people everybody had read with, types of books people were particularly interested in, etc.

Session two:

Share the same books and illustrations from Session one. It can be nice to start the session by reading full or new extracts to deepen or extend the experience and conversation. Your participants may also like to share favourite bits from the books and pictures.

As you read and talk, the facilitator who is taking notes can sketch the scene of reading and listening if confident, or jot down simple doodles from the stories (e.g. a cat, a blue hat), things that people say they like, or words that stand out.

Next, present the small boxes to the participants and tell them they will be filled with pieces of art and writing that represent the stories they have shared, and the conversations that have been had. Share the idea that you're "making something out of nothing".

Share the notes and drawings from the first session and look at them as a group. When people have had a good look, ask if they would like to add any of the items to their boxes. This process of sharing and reflecting can be a lovely thing to do together, so don't rush it.

After you have finished looking at the material from the last session, give each participant a set of cut-out paper-chain dolls. Talk about ways that the dolls could be connected to the conversations that you have had.

Perhaps they are dolls inspired by friends and families that people have enjoyed reading with? Or maybe some are characters from the books?

Invite the group to decorate their dolls by adding drawings or notes. Finally, invite the group to add the dolls that they have created to their book boxes.

After Session two, gather together all the papers, doodles, story fragments, crafted objects, poetic words and any other relevant items that reflect the sessions. Some of these can be slotted into nice envelopes and placed in the book box, while others can be placed in the box freely, padded with tissue paper. The contents represent imaginative 'pages' from the participants' lives and tell their stories in a non-linear and creative way.

Session three:

In Session three, participants are presented with their final book box. Facilitators can open the box and show each participant the contents, which is likely to prompt more discussion and reflection together.

