

**Small Things**

# **A CREATIVE STORYTELLING RESOURCE**

BASED ON *THE STORYBOX PROJECT*

*Written by Liz Postlethwaite of Small Things Creative Projects  
for Bury Art Museum*



This resource is published by and copyright to  
Small Things Creative Projects and Bury Art Museum  
January 2017

---

## HELLO!

We are Small Things Creative Projects. We are delighted to have been invited to design this resource for Bury Art Museum, based on THE STORYBOX PROJECT, our creative communications methodology for people living with a dementia, and the people that support them.

THE STORYBOX PROJECT creates themed, sensory, fun experiences where games are played and stories are made up to encourage togetherness, improve concentration and lift mood. It uses imagination, stories and poetry as a starting point to inspire a range of creative activities that are accessible for all including music, creative writing, drama and art. Central to our philosophy is the belief that creative participation can improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation for people with dementia, and that everyone should have the opportunity to try new things and be culturally active throughout their lives. Alongside this is the desire to explore the way that creative engagement can empower people living with a dementia to take the lead and express their own ideas and personality.

In this resource we want to share with you some simple ways that you might be able to incorporate our ways or working into the work you do for groups of people living with a dementia, using art from Bury Art Museum's collection as a starting point and inspiration.

[www.smallthings.org.uk](http://www.smallthings.org.uk)

## ABOUT BURY ART MUSEUM

Welcoming, warm and friendly Bury Art Museum is the perfect place to enjoy art and find out more about the rich history of Bury and the surrounding area. Showcasing the best of international and local art and with the addition of Bury Art Shop, Bury Art Museum can truly offer something for all interests. The collections and exhibitions are supported by a range of activities and events that allow visitors to explore and enjoy the Gallery and Museum further. All housed in a distinctive Edwardian building that is a work of art in itself.

[www.buryartmuseum.co.uk](http://www.buryartmuseum.co.uk)

---

## HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE PACK

Included in this pack is a sample session plan, a list of suggested resources and some tips on how to run a successful STORYBOX session.

The ideas included are simple and use two artworks from Bury Art Museum to stimulate creative conversation and activity. All of the ideas are easy to elaborate and adapt, and are accessible to lots of different people.

We like to think of the plan as a guide, rather than something that you must stick to rigidly. You might find that different groups / individuals take to particular exercises more than others. If this is the case, do feel free to allow that exercise time to run its course, or to expand, or to evolve into something else entirely. Don't feel pressured to get through everything on the sample plan within one sitting. If the people are engaging in creative activity and conversation, then your session is a success!

Feel free to elaborate or change the activity ideas when you feel like it. These ideas are intended as starting points and are only limited by the scope of our imaginations!

There are some top tips at the end of this resource, but there is one point that feels crucial to the STORYBOX philosophy: we never focus on memory or reminiscence in our work, as we've found that this can be difficult and frustrating for people living with a dementia. Instead, we use imagination; we focus on being in the present moment and allowing everyone to respond in their own way. You might find that the exercises in this pack do prompt memories and personal stories, and if so, that's fine. But the aim of the ideas here are to allow everyone a way in to engage and not as a prompt for reminiscence.

**Good luck!**

**Small Things Creative Projects**

---

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

### Visual Artworks

Fred W Elwell – *The Fish Stall*

Mark Le Claire – *Mother and Child*

### Playlist

*Oranges and Lemons* – Vera Lynn

*Money Money Money* – ABBA

*Big Spender* – Shirley Bassey

*On The Street Where You Live* – Vic Damone

*Can't Buy Me Love* - The Sunny Cowgirls

*Money Honey* – Clyde McPhatter and The Drifters

*My Boy Lollipop* – Millie Small

*How Much Is That Doggy In The Window* – Lita Roza

*Peaches* - The Presidents Of The United States Of America

*Blues in the Air* - Sidney Bechet and his New Orleans Feetwarmers

### Materials

Coloured pens/ pencils

Small squares / rectangles of paper or card

A selection of plastic carrier bags

Big Spender Song Sheet

Copies of the two artworks

Play money

Oranges or other fruit – get whatever is seasonal and cheap!

Kitchen Roll



**Frederick William Elwell R.A, R.O.I, R.P (1870-1958)**

***The Fish Stall***

Oil on canvas, signed and dated 1934.

Purchased in 1937.

Fred Elwell explores social types in his painting ***The Fish Stall***. Each of the three women in the picture belongs to a different social class, a middle class woman, or perhaps housekeeper, purchasing a lobster from the stallholder, perhaps fisherman's wife or mother, who is manning the stall of the picture's title. The artist does not make clear whether the figure standing by on the right, with a bag on her arm, is the middle class lady's servant or another customer waiting her turn.

The artist has instilled into this commonplace event a powerful sense of drama. A dark and shadowy foreground contrasts effectively with a brilliantly lit background, lending an imposing sense of distance. Elwell uses this compositional device for pictorial reasons; it reinforces the impression that we are looking through a window onto a world he has created for us. A large part of Elwell's picture is taken up with the superb still life of fish and shellfish on the stall, on the realization of which he demonstrates his considerable skill.

When the painting was purchased the ***Bury Times***, in reviewing it, singled out for special mention, "*the mournful cod and the pink prawns*".

Fred Elwell lived most of his life in Beverley in Yorkshire. He was a painter of portraits, genre scenes, still life and landscapes. He studied at Lincoln School of Art and then at the Royal Academy Schools in London. He went on to study at the Academie Julian in Paris where he would have encountered the "naturalism" of artists like Bastien Lepage. He exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1895 and at the Paris Salon from 1894. He settled in Beverley and in 1914 married Mary Dawson Bishop (1874-1952) who was herself a painter of landscapes and interiors. His brand of traditional, academic naturalism was popular in the 1930s and he is represented in several public collections.



**Mark Le Claire (b.1951)**  
***Mother and Child***

Oil on canvas, signed at bottom right but not dated (1980).  
Purchased from the artist in 1983.

This is not the image we might have expected, had we been given the title before seeing it. The staple theme of Renaissance art is reinterpreted here in a radically new way. This could be any mother out shopping with her child. In a frozen moment the child is talking and she is listening, but a wide and expressive gulf separates the two generations. The artist quite literally shows us the “generation gap”.

The picture is a somewhat late example of “*photo-realism*” and reminds us of the difficult relationship between photography and painting. Ever since the early days of photography in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, artists have been influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the camera. Early “snapshot” photographs affected the way the French Impressionists composed their paintings with their dizzying angles and the arbitrary cropping of figures by the edge of the canvas.

In the 1970s as a spin-off from “*pop art*” there was a vogue for an extreme form of realism, known as “*photo-realism*”, which was nothing less than a de-

terminated attempt by the painter to outdo the camera. Prior to this, artists liked to pretend that they did not rely on photographs at all, even if they had done. At first glance, this painting actually appears to be a colour photograph. The artist has unashamedly based his picture on one and has lavished all his art, not on pretending that he hasn't, but on making it blatantly obvious that he has. Although it may not be immediately obvious, this painting by Le Claire tells us a lot about 20<sup>th</sup> century attitudes to children.

The Gallery purchased ***Mother and Child*** from an exhibition of the artist's work held at Bury Art Museum in 1983, called ***Images of Reality***. The purchase was grant-aided by the Purchase Grant Fund administered by the Victoria and Albert Museum. We do not know much about the artist, other than that he was born in Peterborough in 1951 and went to Stourbridge College of Art, exhibiting regularly throughout the 1980s. Mark Le Claire did not think of himself as a photorealist, which is interesting, because it is the most obvious way of describing his work. Photorealism as an art movement flourished in the 1970s, so this painting, done in 1980, comes at the end of this movement's most important phase.

---

## **SUGGESTED SESSION PLAN**

### **Pre-session**

Lay out “example” market stalls on tables on tables.

Lay out pens / pencils / paper.

Play the soundtrack as people are arriving.

As people are sitting down ask them if they would like to draw their own shop market stall.

When everyone is settled, introduce the session.

### **Welcoming Activity**

Discussion about drawings: What stalls have people drawn? What are their stalls selling? What stalls look interesting? Which stall would you like to buy something from? Which stall is your favourite?

What do people think the theme of the session is?

• *You could also try:*

Print out a selection of pictures of market stalls. Lay them out on the tables as a starting point. Ask people what stalls they like? Which ones look like they are selling quality goods? Which don't look so good? Which do people like the best?

### **Follow on - Map Exercise**

Using a long piece of paper (lining paper or the back of wallpaper could work) that is spread across the table – imagine that this is an area that has been allocated to build a new market. What do we think would make a good market? What are the things that people might like to see there? What could we add to make this one special? Where should our different stalls go? Any volunteers to draw a map of the market onto the paper as we go along (if not, you can do this. You don't need to be good at drawing for this. Just take suggestions from the group) Also, add the different stalls that people have created to the market plan

If anyone offers any stories or comments as you go along (either real or imagined), write them onto the map.

### **Physical Warm Up – Plastic Bag Ballet**

Explain to the group that now that we have an idea of our theme for the session that we need to warm up our bodies and voices – first we are going to warm up our bodies.

Hand everybody in the group a plastic bag. Put on a piece of shopping themed music and explain that you are going to use the bags to warm up in time to the music. Begin by leading the way demonstrating ways to move the bag and getting people to copy. For example, shaking the bag out in the air, scrunching it up as small as you can then throwing it across the table, moving it with your arms to fill it with air...etc... Then ask others if they have ideas of how to move the bag. Ask them to demonstrate their movement then get others in

the group to copy. If people are struggling to come up with ideas it can be good to use mimes as a starting point – “Can you mime packing the bag? Can you mime searching for something in the bag?” – or descriptive words – “Can you move the bag high up? Low down? Fast? Slow?”

### **Vocal Warm Up – Big Spender**

Explain to the group that you are now going on to warm up your voices. Hand everyone a song sheet with the lyrics for *Big Spender* on it. First ask if anybody recognizes the song.

First read through the song line by line saying the words as clearly as you can. No need to sing, just speak the lines and then the group can repeat them. This is a great way of making sure everyone is confident of the words, and that everyone understands the words as well.

The next stage after this is to have a go at singing the song. Taking the lead go through the song line by line. You sing the line first, then the group sing it after you. This is a really good way to ensure that everyone is confident with the words and the music. You don't have to be a good singer to do this! Just able to hold a tune so that others can follow. Once you have been through line by line sing the whole song together.

Next say that you are going to add actions to the song. Go through again line by line adding a simple action for each line. Read the line and then ask the group for suggestions of actions that you could do for that line. Anything goes, but it doesn't need to be complicated – just a simple action is sufficient. Once you have been through all the lines sing back the whole song accompanied by all of your actions.

### **Looking at Art**

Have a look at the two artworks. If you are in the gallery make sure you are in a position where everybody can see them. If you are somewhere else make sure you have sufficient copies for everyone to have their own.

Ask people to look at the pictures then think about questions to ask to lead people through a discussion: what do you think is happening in each of the pictures? Where are they? Who are the people in the pictures? What is the place like that they are in? What are they doing? What is the mood? What is the atmosphere? Ask the group which picture they prefer and why. What do they like about that one in particular? What appeals to them about it?

Explain to the group that you are going to write a poem inspired by their favourite artwork. Ask people to say what words they would use to describe the picture? What can they see? What do they think the people can hear? What can they smell? What are the feelings and textures of the things the people in the picture are touching? Do this as a group or go round and ask people one by one to say a word or sentence inspired by the picture. Write down everything that people say.

At the end read back the things that people have said in the form of a simple poem. Then ask the group to decide upon a name for their poem.

## **Role Play**

Hand everyone a small bundle of your play money. Make sure the bundles include varied amounts of money! Ask people to check how much money they have got. Who is the richest? Where did they get all that money from? Who is the poorest? Why are they skint?

Look back at the market that you created at the beginning of the session. If you were visiting the market what would you buy? Where would you spend your money? Would you buy a treat for yourself, or are you buying essentials for your home? Which stall would you shop on? Who is the owner of that stall? What is the owner like? Would you bargain with them, or offer the asking price for the item that you want to buy? If the group are keen / brave you could try playing out scenes and scenarios between the different customers and stall holders – but be aware that not every group likes this kind of activity!

## **Sensory Activity – Tasting Fruit**

Explain that one of the stallholders is thinking of stocking some fruit on their stall (we often use oranges) Say that they would like the group to taste them before they order them to see if they would be a popular addition to their stock. Give everyone in the group an orange. Ask them how the orange feels – is it heavy? Smooth? How does it smell? Is it warm or cold? As they describe the orange write down all of the words.

Next peel the orange. What is the reaction when you break the skin? How does it smell? How does it feel? What is the texture of the fruit? Finally eat the orange. What does it taste like? Is it sweet or sour? Try to ask as many questions as you can to stimulate responses to the fruit. And remember to keep on writing down everything that the group says. At this point it can be useful to have kitchen roll on hand so people can wipe any juice off their fingers – also check everyone is alright to eat orange at the beginning of the session if it is a group that you are not familiar with.

When the group have finished and run out of ideas read back all of their words in the form of a poem. Once again, when you have finished ask them to come up with a title.

## **Ending the session**

Is there anything that anyone would like to say or add before you finish? Maybe re-read one of your poems (if there are photocopying or printing facilities, perhaps people could take a copy home with them). Thank everyone for their contributions. Play music as people leave. Let people take home song sheets and copies of the pictures too – often people really like to have a memento to take home.

• *You could also try:*

Holding hands around the circle and trying to pass a small wave or a squeeze all the way around the circle of participants (a bit like a Mexican Wave). You can make it more of a challenge by asking everyone to close their eyes. This can be a nice way of ending the session and connecting with everybody as a group.

---

## TIPS FOR SETTING UP THE SESSION

- Work in a quiet, private space if possible.
- Sit in a circle around a table so that everyone can see and hear each other.
- If a group will be arriving at slightly different times (even over a period of ten minutes), it can be a good idea to set up a welcoming activity for those who arrive first. This should be something simple linked to the theme, like the drawing activity we suggest. You can join in as the leader of the session, helping to start conversation around the theme as well as demonstrating the activity.
- If you are able to, offering people a tea or coffee as they come in and having biscuits on the table can help to put people at ease and feel welcome. We often bring a stack of cups, an urn of hot water, tea, coffee and milk into the room we'll be working in, so we can chat and make tea as everyone's getting settled and being introduced to the welcoming activity.
- Play music related to the theme as people are arriving. Create a playlist and press play before you open the doors to your first participants.

---

## TIPS FOR RUNNING THE SESSION

- If possible with someone else to lead the session. It can help to take turns leading each activity, giving space to bounce ideas back and forth. It also means that whilst there is someone leading the group, there is someone else on hand to offer any one-to-one support that might be needed.
- Allow space for memory and reminiscence, but focus on the present and on imagination.
- Take time to fully explore each activity. Allow time for people to respond in their own way, some people may need more time than others, whilst others may need more specific prompts.
- Encourage group conversation as you go along, asking questions of specific individuals can help to get this started.
- Try to be aware of where the focus is in the room, who is talking, who we are listening to now (this can be important if you are working with people with hearing problems). This can help to create a sense of group activity.
- See the activities as a prompt or a starting point for conversations and storytelling. The more that everyone is able to elaborate on the initial task, the more ownership the group is likely to feel over the session and its material.
- Feel free to mix up the order of the exercises in this resource, or to discard/ draw out for longer if something is going well/ not so well. Don't be afraid of veering off the plan. You can always return to it later.
- If your participants are enjoying themselves, then the session is going well! This is the main aim of the work, nothing more complicated. So have fun, relax, enjoy!

# Big Spender

The minute you walked in the joint

I could see you were a man of distinction

A real big spender

Good lookin' so refined

Say, wouldn't you like to know what's  
goin' on in my mind?

So let me get right to the point

I don't pop my cork for every guy I see

Hey big spender,

Spend a little time with me