

**The Box of Photographs
Storytelling Resource
Pack**

INTRODUCTION

This spring, there's a brand new production on Polka's Main Stage, *The Box of Photographs*, which is the culmination of a story writing competition for 8 – 11 year olds, run by Polka Theatre in association with The V&A Museum of Childhood.

The project was a unique opportunity for children aged 8 - 11 to have their ideas, stories and characters included in a brand new professionally staged Polka production.

Children looked at a selection of photos from the V&A Museum of Childhood's archive and then wrote a story inspired by one of the pictures. *The Box of Photographs* competition was about using imagination and creativity to bring a still image to life and reveal an original story behind the photo.

We received over 500 entries to the competition. Our judges were very impressed with the wonderful ideas and creative writing and thoroughly enjoyed reading all the stories. From these, we had the difficult task of choosing just 22 stories for the shortlist. **Award winning playwright Daniel Jamieson has woven these stories into a brand new play, *The Box of Photographs*, which will be on Polka's main stage from 22 April – 15 May 2016.** The play is perfect for Key Stage 2, and there are more details on our website, www.polkatheatre.com/whats-on

The shortlisted stories are:

The Mysterious Museum by Abbie Richardson
Magic 4 Life! by Blessing Acquah
Paper House by Celia Allaway
The Box of Photographs by Cordelia Sutton
The Garage Hole by Daniella Mbachu
The White Cloaked Girl by Emilis Jurasius
The Monsters Beneath Us by Ishaal Mahmood
A Box of Photographs by Jesika Sivanesan
Finding Yourself by Jess Ansbro
The Boy that Nobody Knows by Joel Macrohon
The Shadow Stalker by Johnny Segrave
Magic Playground by Joseph Marchese
A Light Shining Out of Darkness by Kate Zhao
The Climb by Kimberley Campbell
Ben the Sweet Lifter by Lero Browne
Mine Cart Boys by Louis Saez
Lilly the Homeless Woman by Mariyah Rahman
Box of Photographs by Oliver Singh
The Mystery of Miss Lieban by Rosie Kaniewska
Cob is Master of Building a Treehouse by Visalan Sathiyarupan
Barney by Yasmin Bradshaw
Box of Photographs by Zofia Grzelczyk

CONTENTS

This pack includes drama games and exercises that will help you mirror the story writing process with your class. Chelsea's story (below), and the photographs at the end of the pack, provide a framing device to spark a creative response. The focus is on creating and exploring ideas through drama, which can then be followed up with creative writing. Perhaps your class would then like to come and see the show at Polka to see how other children responded to the same brief.

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CHELSEA'S STORY

***The Box of Photographs*, written by Daniel Jamieson in response to the shortlisted stories, tells the story of Chelsea:**

"I'm Chelsea and my friends call me Chels, but never mind all that because I'm going to tell you something weird that happened to me last summer when I was ten...

Me and Mum had to move into this tiny flat in Mitcham with no garden, just cars and dustbins everywhere. But at least I had my own room, so when we arrived I ran straight in there. I was a bit freaked at first because it had this weird wallpaper with clocks on and it was dark and none of my stuff was there yet, so the only thing in the room was this strange old bed. It had a little curtain on the side so I opened it and there was a hole where a drawer used to be. I s'pose it looked kind of cosy in there, so I climbed in and shut the curtain, and that's when I saw this old chocolate box tied up under the bed with string...

Then Mum came in my room but I didn't tell her about the box. She'd been saying hello to the woman next door who was called Marie. Apparently, Marie said a strange old lady lived in our flat before us ever since 1955, called Miss Lieban. She used to wear an old boiler suit and push a pram round the streets with bits of plank and rope in, and one of those big, old-fashioned cameras... But one day she'd just vanished. Marie reckoned her relations had put her in a home or something.

Then our phone rang and soon as Mum was out of the room I was straight back under the bed, because I knew Miss Lieban must've left that box there for me to find. And when I got the lid off it was full of old photos - these old photos..."

STORYTELLING GAMES

The following games are great for getting children's imaginations working and helping them to gain confidence in their story ideas. You could choose two or three to use as a warm up before embarking on the longer exercises further on in the pack.

Set Up: A school hall or classroom with chairs and tables pushed back.

Labelling the Room:

Time: 5 minutes.

This is a very quick exercise to get the group moving and get everyone's brains warmed up!

First, tell the group that, on your command, they should move around the room, pointing to things and saying the name of those things out loud. Tell them that they should be very clear what they are pointing to. For example, a child might walk around the room pointing at, and saying:

- Floor, door handle, piano, painting, Mrs Balham etc.

Bring the group back together and ask them to repeat the exercise. This time, however, they should give each object the name of something completely different. For example:

- Giraffe (pointing at window), sausage (pointing at fire extinguisher), pen (pointing at floor), igloo (pointing at ceiling) etc.

Bring the group back together and ask the children about the experience. Was it difficult to think of random words for the objects? Did they fall into patterns e.g. food, types of plant?

What's in the Box?:

Time: 5 minutes.

Ask the group to sit in a circle. One person volunteers to be in the middle. In front of them is an imaginary box. They must pretend to pull items from the box in quick succession, naming each one as they go. Anything can be in the box, and the items don't have to be related. For example, they might say:

- An elephant, a teacup, some trousers, a pot of paint, a banana etc...

As soon as they hesitate or repeat a word, everyone else in the group must shout, 'What's in the box? What's in the box?' and the person in the middle should try to carry on. It's harder than you might imagine!

When the person in the middle has had enough, or completely run out of things to say, somebody else can have a go.

Note: The two exercises above serve a similar purpose; to warm up everyone's brains and to encourage children to be willing use the first ideas that spring to mind. I would suggest choosing one or the other.

The Window Game:

Time: 5 to 10 minutes.

In pairs. Each pair is asked to imagine a large window in front of them, which they are both looking through. The leader gives an opening line to an improvisation; about something that could be seen through the window. For example:

- Is that Mrs Miggins coming down the road?

The partners then take it in turns to add something new to the unfolding story, imagining that they're watching it through the window. Every new sentence should begin 'Yes, and...' For example:

- Is that Mrs Miggins coming down the road?
 - Yes, and she's wearing the vicar's pyjamas!
 - Yes, and she looks very angry.
 - Yes, and she's waving her walking stick at the postman.
- Etc.

Note: This exercise is great for encouraging children to build the story on what has already been said. Listen to the pairs as they work and help them to ensure that each new sentence takes into account what has gone before.

And Better... / And Worse:

Time: 5 to 10 minutes.

This game can be played around a circle or in pairs. Choose whether to play the 'And better' or the 'And worse' version.

The leader starts everyone off with a simple story opener, e.g:

- This morning I walked my dog in the park.

The next person must add something to the story, starting their sentence with 'And better' or 'And worse', depending which version you have chosen. For example, an 'And better' game might go:

- This morning I walked my dog in the park.

- And better, it was a sunny day.
 - And better, my best friend came with me.
 - And better, we found £20 on the ground.
 - And better, we bought loads of ice creams.
- Etc.

It's important that each new sentence builds on the existing story and that it makes the situation better, or worse, depending which version you're playing. The suggestions tend to get wilder and wilder; this is to be encouraged!

Note: Like 'The Window Game', this game is good for creating a sequence of events that follow on from, and build on, each other. It's also great for encouraging children to use their imaginations.

Fortunately / Unfortunately:

Time: 5 to 10 minutes.

This is a variation of the above game and can also be played around a circle or in pairs.

As before, the leader gives the group a story opener. This time, participants add to the story alternating between 'Fortunately' and 'Unfortunately' sentences. For example:

- This morning I walked my dog in the park.
 - Fortunately, it was a sunny day.
 - Unfortunately, my dog ran away.
 - Fortunately, a clown managed to catch him.
 - Unfortunately, the clown was evil.
- Etc.

Note: Good stories need to have problems in them. This game helps to illustrate this. If children are stuck for story ideas, encourage them to give their main character a problem and work out how they will solve it.

The Rumour Mill:

Time: 5 to 10 minutes.

As you explain this, you will need to enlist the help of one of the children, or a TA, to demonstrate. Tell the group that you are going to work together to make up stories about a character called Bob (or let the group choose a name). Everyone should think of a rumour, or story, that they've heard about Bob. Now demonstrate how the game will work with your assistant.

First, you tell your assistant something that you've heard about Bob. For example:

- I heard that Bob was seen running down the street wearing a pink, tiger striped onesie.

Then, they should tell you something totally different that they have heard about Bob. For example:

- Well I heard that Bob went for tea with the Queen.

Next, the two people who've shared rumours should merge them together somehow, embellish them if they wish and pass them on to someone else. For example:

- I heard that Bob went to tea with the Queen, wearing a pink, stripy onesie and one of her corgis bit him on the bum.

Now it's the group's turn. First, everyone shares their made up Bob rumour with a partner. Next, they should keep switching partners, merging rumours together and embellishing them along the way.

Once the group has had time to swap lots of rumours around, come back into a circle. Allow some volunteers to tell their final version of the Bob story. Are there lots of similarities? Are there any surprises? What are the most interesting rumours about Bob?

Note: This is a good way to encourage children to share their ideas and take inspiration from others. Sometimes when you're writing a story it's good to discuss it with other people and allow them to make suggestions.

GENERATING IDEAS

The next exercises provide creative ways to generate and develop ideas for stories and characters from the photographs. You should begin with 'Exploring the Photos' and can then pick and choose from the exercises that follow. You might want to allow time in the classroom between some of the practical exercises so that your class can start to rough out their stories.

Exploring the Photos:

Set Up: Use masking tape to mark out rectangular 'rooms' on the floor (approx. 1 metre by 2 metres each if space allows).

Time: Allow up to 5 minutes per 'room', longer if the group remains focussed.

Equipment: Print outs of the 15 photographs, plus spares. As many shoeboxes as you have 'rooms' marked on the floor. Divide the photographs between the shoeboxes and place one in the centre of each 'room'.

It is helpful to play some quiet, relaxing music whilst this exercise is underway.

Note: If you choose to read 'Rachel's Story' (page 3) to your group, it is better to do so after this exercise.

Ask the children to imagine that they have just moved to a new flat. The flat is in an old house. Explain to them that each rectangle on the floor is a room, and that in each room a box of photographs has been left by whoever lived here before. Explain that they are a curious child, who wants to investigate what they find.

Divide the class into as many groups as you have rooms. Assign each group to a room and, when you are ready, tell them that they can open the box and look at the photographs inside. Encourage the children to focus on their own thoughts and ideas (though you might want to allow them to share these within their small groups). There are no right or wrong answers. Ask them to think about who the characters in the photographs might be, what they could be doing, where the photographs might have been taken, who might have taken them.

Ask them to think about whether any story ideas start to come to mind as they look at the photographs.

When the groups have had sufficient time in their first 'room', ask everyone to put the photographs back in their boxes. Now, get the groups to move clockwise to new 'rooms'. Repeat the process until everyone has seen all the photographs.

Note: It is helpful to give a lot of prompts as the children explore the photographs. Keep the questions open; 'who *might* that be' 'what *could* happen next', 'where *might* this story take place?' There's likely to be a tendency for the children to say what they see, rather than thinking about what stories could emerge. Reassure them that there are no right or wrong answers; this is all about imagination! It's good to ask the children to think about what problem their main character will face, and what they might do to solve it. Each time the groups move to a new room, you should feed in something new for them to think about.

At the end of this exercise, lay the photographs on the floor, spaced around the room. Explain to the children that they should choose one photograph that particularly appeals to them. This will be the photograph they base their story upon; perhaps it contains the character that they've found most interesting.

Invite the children, one group at a time, to stand next to their chosen photograph. It's fine to choose a photograph that someone else is already next to (this is why it's useful to have spares so everyone can have their own copy) but discourage the children from simply standing next to their friend. The next exercises will be based around the photograph each child has chosen.

Character Actions:

Time: 10 minutes.

Ask the children to take their chosen photograph into a space; they will work alone. Explain that they should choose one person from the photograph to be the main character in their story. This next exercise relates to that character.

Ask the children to think of an action that their character could be doing at the beginning of their story. It might be something that gives a clue about the location of the story, or about the character's personality. For example, they might mime climbing up a ladder or kicking litter along a street. Give the group a few moments to practise repeating this action over and over.

Next, they should choose an action that their character could do in the middle of their story. Remind them that the character should face a problem; something that a reader would be excited to read about. They might need to imagine other characters who are present. Is the location the same, or has the character gone somewhere else?

Lastly, everyone should choose an action that their character could be doing at the end of the story. Has the character solved their problem? It doesn't matter if it's unclear how the beginning, middle and end will fit together; this can be fleshed out later.

Once the group has practised all three actions, ask everyone to stand in 'neutral' (feet shoulder width apart, arms by the sides, standing up straight and ready to work). Explain that when you clap your hands once, everyone should do their first action, repeating it if necessary. Clap your hands twice for the second action, three times for the third.

Note: You could split the group in half so that the children can watch each other's character actions and offer feedback about what could be happening.

Character Words:

Time: 5 minutes, as an extension of the exercise above.

Following on from the character actions above, ask the group to add a short sentence to each action. Explain that this could be something the character is saying, or something they're thinking. It can be a very short phrase, but it must contain real words, not just sounds.

Signal for action with a single, double or triple hand clap (as above). This time, everyone performs their actions and words together, repeating both as necessary.

The Story Mill:

Time: 5 minutes.

Note: The exercises above should have given all the children the opportunity to think about a character that interests them, and a basic story idea. If you have used The Rumour Mill exercise, you could return to this adapted version of it here. It provides everyone with an opportunity to vocalise their story for the first time.

Ask the group to think about their story ideas. Explain that, like The Rumour Mill, everyone will get the chance to share their stories with each other. On your command, the children should find a partner and take turns to tell each other their story.

Allow enough time for everyone to swap partners once or twice. Remind the group that it's fine to add to, or change, their ideas as they go; that's the joy of making things up!

The Interview:

Time: 5 – 10 minutes.

Note: This exercise will help the children to flesh out their main characters. It's important to encourage everyone to say the first things that come to mind, rather than think too hard. This is all about generating ideas, which can be used or thrown away later.

Ask everyone to stand in a space; somewhere that they can work without being distracted by anyone else. Tell the group to imagine that their character is being interviewed for a newspaper or magazine. Ask the children to stand in a way that their character would stand. Explain that you will ask questions and that everyone should answer at the same time, in character. This way, everyone talks together and

nobody is exposed. They should try to keep talking until you ask the next question. Encourage the children to say whatever springs to mind, even gobbledegook is better than silence!

Here are some good questions to ask, but feel free to invent your own:

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- Where do you live?
- Who do you live with?
- What do you think about the people you live with?
- Who is your best friend?
- Who is your worst enemy?
- What do you like to do with your spare time?
- What do you want more than anything else in the world?
- Who, or what, stops you from having it?
- Where do you feel safest?
- What place do you feel scared to go to?
- What scares you more than anything else?
- How would your friends describe you?
- How would your enemies describe you?
- What phrase are you most likely to be heard saying?

It is good to go through the questions twice so that everyone can practise their ideas, then solidify them. Remind the group that it's fine to change their ideas between the first and second go around; it's good to try things out, and not everything works first time.

Note: This exercise can generate some useful ideas for story building. You might want to remind the children of these questions later, as they put their story onto the page. Here are some story elements that you could talk about:

Protagonist (Hero): Their main character.

Sidekick: A particular friend, or ally at home. A pet even!

Setting: The questions above refer to a few settings: home, safe place and scary place. Could one or more of these be the setting for the story?

Goal: What the character wants more than anything else. It is *essential* that the character has a goal in the story, even if it only relates to that specific moment in time, for example, 'I want to escape from these bullies.'

Antagonist (Villain): The person (or thing) that tries to stop the character achieving their goal.

Problems: As I've already mentioned, good stories have problems in them. Often, these are the hurdles that make it hard for the main character to achieve his or her goal.

A Day in the Life:

Time: Around 15 minutes.

Again, everyone should find a space. Explain that everyone should work alone for this exercise. They must do their best not to interrupt what others are doing.

Tell the group that they are going to act out one day in the life of their character. This will be the day that their story takes place. Explain that you will talk them through different times of day and that they should act out what their character would be doing.

Note: If any of the children have main characters who die in their current story idea, ask them to find a way for them to escape / survive for the purpose of this exercise. Ask them afterwards whether this version made a more exciting story.

Start the exercise at around 5 o'clock in the morning (this is your best chance that all the characters will be in bed!). You will need to talk the group through the day. Offer prompts at each stage, encouraging the children to think about all of the senses. For example:

'It's 5 o'clock in the morning. Find a space and get into the position your character would be in. Are you in bed? Are you asleep, or have you woken up already? If you're awake, what woke you? Where are you? Think about whether it's warm or cold, light or dark. Are there any sounds? What does the room smell like?

Now it's 6 o'clock. A few of you are waking up I see. How do you feel? Is this the time you always wake up, or is today special? What do you do now? Do you see anyone else? What do you have for breakfast?

It's 7 o'clock. Are you still asleep? What are you dreaming about? Maybe some characters are leaving their house already. What is the weather like outside? Where are you going? Do you want to go there? What can you smell and hear when you get outside? How do you feel today?'

It's 8 o'clock. Where are you now? etc.

Allow the exercise to go through a whole 24 hours. There will be times of day that you can skip through faster than others; when most people are asleep for example! Try to tailor your prompts to what you can see happening in the room.

When you have finished, give everyone the opportunity to give you feedback. Did they learn anything interesting about their character? Has the exercise given them new ideas for settings, action etc. Remind the group that you encouraged them to think about all the senses. Is there anything they could use in their descriptions when they come to write the story?

Story Boards:

Time: Around 30 minutes.

This exercise will help the children to structure their stories and practise telling the story to others.

Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5. Each group should choose one person to be the storyteller / director (everyone will get a chance to do this). Explain that the storyteller will use the other people in the group to create frozen images that tell his or her story. It is up to you whether to ask for 3 or 5 images; this will depend on time and the level of detail you can ask of your group.

The storyteller should then tell the rest of his or her group where to stand, which character they are playing, what facial expression they should do etc. to create tableau that tell the story. Encourage everyone to think about using different levels to make the images interesting.

Make sure everyone gets a chance to be the storyteller / director then ask each small group to show their work to the rest of the class. Can everyone guess what happens in the stories by looking at the frozen images?

Note: Here are some questions you might want to ask the groups as they work:

- What can you tell me about the main character (protagonist)?
- Where does the story take place?
- What is the main character's goal? What do they want?
- Who (antagonist) or what is stopping them for getting what they want?
- Does the character have someone who helps them?
- What problems does the main character have to deal with? Will the reader find them interesting?
- How does the character deal with the problem(s) he or she faces?
- What happens at the end of the story?
- What has changed by the end of the story?

We hope that these exercises will give your class space to invent and explore some interesting stories.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Below are the photographs we've selected from the V&A Museum of Childhood archives. They are presented one per page for easy printing. If you would like electronic versions to project in your classroom, please visit <https://www.flickr.com/photos/132905533@N04/sets/72157655699333181>.

You can access the link via our website, www.polkatheatre.com/editorial/box-of-photographs

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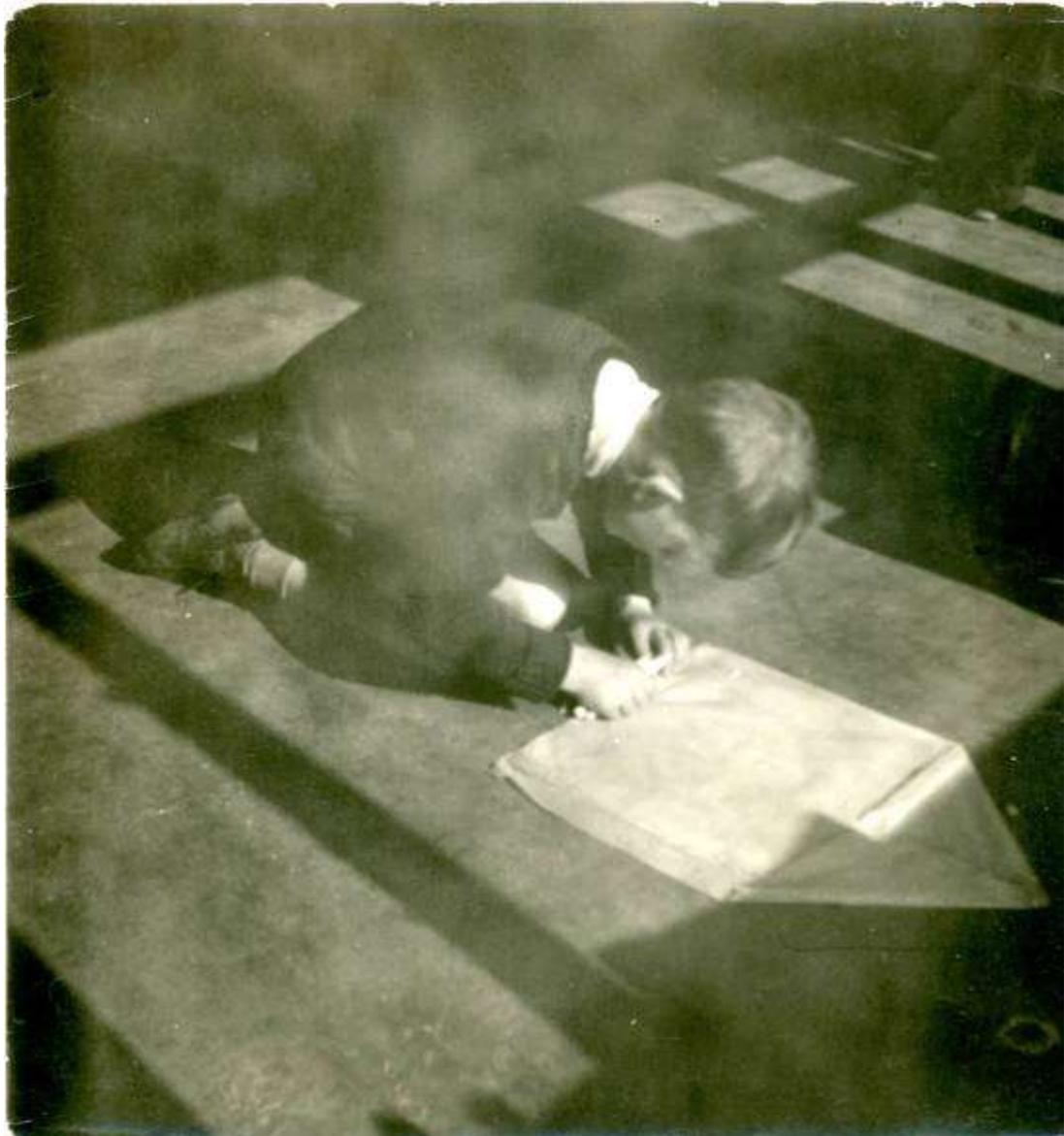
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POLKA

Where theatre begins...



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