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*A Starter Pack*  
– an  
innovative  
approach to  
story-making  
for all ages



LOTTERY FUNDED

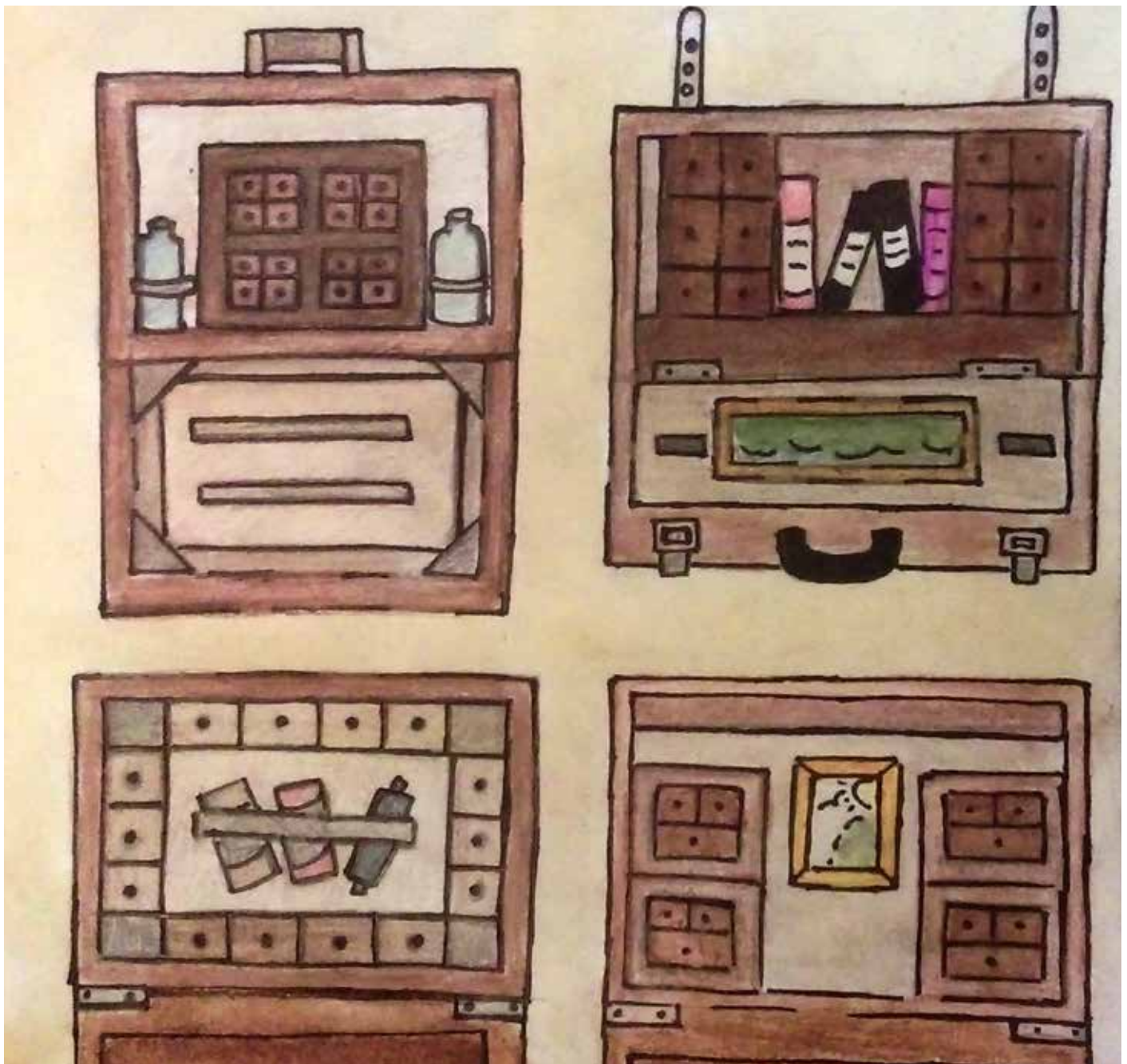


## Welcome to The Imaginarium

The Imaginarium begins with a simple suitcase ... but this suitcase holds the unexpected. The contents are the starting point for community story-making sessions with countless benefits for all ages and abilities. Here we outline some of these, share with you our experience of working with this amazing creative tool, and encourage you to set up and run your own

Imaginarium sessions. This starter pack is designed to instruct, to suggest, and also to inspire – with visual encouragement and extra inspiration should you need it.

So to start with ... just what is The Imaginarium?





***‘Fun’***

**‘Accessible to all abilities’**

**‘It can create whatever you want it to’**

**‘Intriguing’**

**‘Flexible’**

*‘Thought-provoking’*

**‘Each “outing” is unique’**

**‘Mysterious’**

*‘A collection of artefacts’*

*‘Helps adults and children tell stories about community and identity’*

**‘Delightfully unpredictable’**

**‘An English village of the imagination’**

**‘Brings a little imagination back into all our lives’**

**‘A travelling story-making workshop for use in various community settings’**

*‘A special suitcase filled with meaningful objects on a particular theme’*

**‘An interactive participatory environment’**

**‘Sparks creativity and imagination’**

**‘Participants invent, write, draw or tell stories based on connections they make between the objects’**

*‘A suitcase fitted with numerous drawers’*

**‘A creative, storytelling project which uses objects as its starting point’**

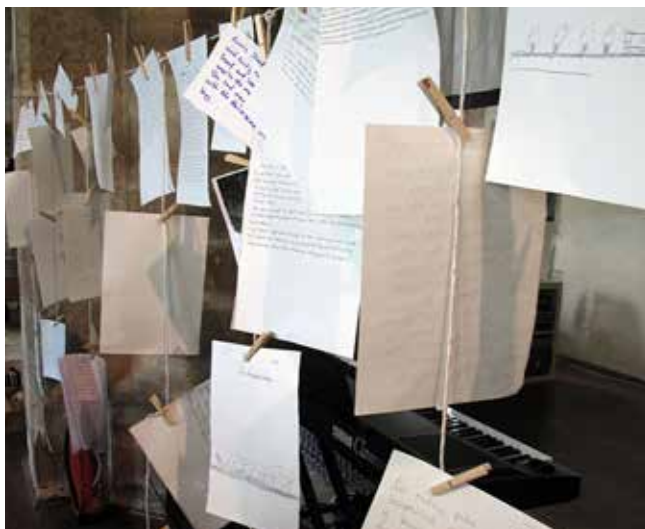
**‘A social and educational project to inspire story-making by people of all ages’**





# The Story of The Imaginarium

In 2012 CREATE developed the idea of a travelling story-making workshop called The Imaginarium which we took to local fetes and fun-days. It was based on an imaginary English village that needed life breathing into it – by populating it with characters from its past and having its history written. Visitors were given



objects to help unlock their imaginations, and costumed facilitators helped to get them into the spirit. Their resulting stories were the history of the Village, and this was added to by different visitors over time – sparking yet more stories.

As The Imaginarium began to be used in different settings, from schools to community groups, it was clear it had a broader scope than we first thought – with therapeutic and educational benefits, as well as entertainment value. In 2014 we applied for, and secured, some Big Lottery funding to develop the concept further and to identify groups to work with.

As a result of public consultation we relaunched a more refined version of The Imaginarium. A local artist developed our beautiful iconic

‘suitcases’ – the starting point for story-making – filled with objects chosen by the participants themselves.

Stories are now on any theme (although The Village does remain a favourite!) and workshops are shaped by the needs and interests of the group at the time.

The next step is for The Imaginarium to be self-led, and we hope that this starter pack will show you how!



The Imaginarium Project would particularly like to thank the following individuals and organisations and everybody else who has made it what it is.

Gillian Blaydon  
Abbi Bradford  
Sara Browne  
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Nell Mellerick  
Jon Oram  
Dave Prodrick  
Kate Sergeant  
Jan Wright

Hospice in the Weald  
Books beyond Words  
The Alzheimers Society, Kent & Medway

Here's to the future.

# How to Set Up The Imaginarium for Your Group



## The Group

The Imaginarium is best used in small groups so that everyone has a chance to be heard and doesn't feel intimidated. In 'led' sessions groups of six to eight participants seemed to be about right – plus additional helpers to meet your needs.

## The Space

You will need a table to put 'the suitcase' on, plus space for your group to sit around. Ideally the space will be somewhere a bit discreet, where people will feel comfortable saying their ideas aloud, and be able to concentrate on what they are doing/creating. Familiar surroundings works best, especially for the first session.

## The Duration

The ideal time-frame for Imaginarium sessions is about an hour, depending on the attention span and engagement levels of the group. Sessions can be a one-off activity, but are sometimes used by practitioners as the basis for a series of creative activities, each leading on from the last.

## The Suitcase

To start off with you will need your own Imaginarium suitcase. You can find out how to 'convert' one into an amazing storytelling tool very cheaply and easily in our illustrated guide on the centre pages.

## The Objects

Next you consider what objects should go into your Imaginarium suitcase. These objects will be the starting point or props for lots of stories, so let your imagination run a bit wild when choosing them. You can be as random as you like: a key, a toy car, a tape measure, a map ... but we recommend choosing items which are fairly small, robust and portable. Alternatively you may like to ask the group to bring in objects of their own for the session, perhaps something which is meaningful to them? If you have a small budget you might choose to meet before your first session in a local charity shop – picking out small, inexpensive objects as a group activity. We would suggest placing a small number of objects in each compartment of the suitcase – the number should be appropriate to your group.

Remember to supplement the objects that you pick with images, maps or bits of printed text ... everything can go into the mix.





## The Theme

Objects can be completely disparate or on a theme. Mostly The Imaginarium works best when there is a common thread tying things together, and we have created 'mood-boards' of our most popular ones to give you some inspiration further on in this booklet.



## How to

We would recommend that a facilitator helps to 'lead' the session: introducing the Imaginarium suitcase and the theme; inviting participants to take part one by one; bringing together everyone's ideas and summarising or recapping on stories as the session goes along.

You might also like to ask a helper to come along to take a note of the stories generated by the Imaginarium, so that they don't become forgotten.

Begin the session by inviting a participant to open up a compartment of the case and retrieve the objects one at a time. Encourage them to describe the objects out loud to the rest of the group as they go along, and put them somewhere where the whole group can see them and think about them.

Encourage the participant to create a story for themselves using the objects as reference points, thinking of a creative way to weave them all together. For example if the object is a shell and the theme is the seaside perhaps you could ask them 'Who found the shell?', 'Why did they pick it up?' or 'What used to live inside the shell?'

The most important part of the process is the sharing of stories with others, and you may find that each story becomes a collaborative process – with other members of the group offering ideas and helping the participant to shape things. Each member of the groups







needs to take their turn to open a drawer and construct a story from the objects inside, perhaps working in pairs if this helps them to be more confident or inventive.

An alternative format for the session is to use one object for the whole group and to construct a story together, telling a section of the story each before moving on to the next person. You will be amazed at how creative your group can be, and how productive, in just one short session!

### What happens next?

This is completely up to you of course. Many groups like to make an exhibition of their work, or you can add your stories to our Imaginarium archive at [www.createimaginarium.org](http://www.createimaginarium.org), so that others can enjoy them and get inspiration for their own stories.

You may like to take your stories as the starting point for other creative work – for example if you decided to write stories about an imaginary village, you could base your next session on the characters your group has written about – use your imaginations to draw them, make masks of their faces, or take on their characters to make a play. The next time you use the Imaginarium case you could use different objects on a completely different theme. There really are no limits to the possibilities for your group.



For hints and tips and to see how the Imaginarium develops visit [www.createimaginarium.org](http://www.createimaginarium.org) ... and we'd love to include your ideas and plans.

If you have any questions or suggestions as to how The Imaginarium can develop, please email [info@createimaginarium.org](mailto:info@createimaginarium.org)



# Step-by-Step Guide to Making Your Own Imaginarium Suitcase

## YOU WILL NEED

- \* A Suitcase
- \* All-purpose glue and/or screws
- \* Fabric, paper, postcards/photos or paint for lining
- \* A collection of small, light storage units
- \* Artist canvas board
- \* Scissors
- \* PVA or fabric glue
- \* Two belts/4 metres of thick waistband elastic



1.

When starting off and looking for a suitcase, you want to find a case with character, a case that will help reflect your chosen theme. We recommend going to your local charity shop or ebay instead of buying one straight from a shop.

Breathing new life into a old suitcase and imagining where/who this case belonged to is half the fun in creating an imaginarium, it serves as good story writing material!

2.

If your suitcase is locked/unlocked with lost keys, you can make a new strap out of belts which can be glued to the outside of the case to keep it closed. If you have a suitcase like the one above, you will not have to worry about this issue.

If you have a nice fabric lining on the inside that you don't want to ruin, you can always make an elastic belt band instead! To do this, you just need two lengths of thick strong waistband elastic which is long enough to sit tightly around the outside of your case.

Pin and sew the top and bottom of one length of elastic to create one band. Repeat again and you will have your two elastic belt bands to go around your suitcase!







3.

Next step is to modify the lining! If your suitcase has a lining you would like to change, you can use fabric, decorative wallpaper, decoupage, paint, old photos, postcards or even leave it bare!



In order to prepare your suitcase for re-lining, remove the suitcase of all previous lining. All fabric can be ripped out using a pair of scissors and suitcases with paper linings in can be soaked in warm water, making it easier to peel off the paper.

For fabric and paper based linings, brush the inside or the desired area of your suitcase with glue and stick down your new lining, ensuring that your lining is pushed into all corners and crevices. Fabric glue is recommended for fabric linings and PVA glue is best to use if you want to go for a paper based lining.

If you would like to paint the inside of the suitcase, you can use either acrylic paint or spray paint to achieve your desired effect.

Alternatively, you can leave the lining bare, it's up to you!

4.

If your suitcase doesn't have any storage compartments, you can try experimenting with attaching cardboard drawers or trinket boxes to your imaginarium. Tea caddies, wooden spice racks, cardboard tubes and pin boards can also make a nice addition for storage within the suitcase. Try to avoid adding storage units made from heavy wood or metal as this will make your imaginarium heavier and harder to transport.

Most storage solutions can be glued into the suitcase using all purpose glue or attached to the inside by drilling some screws in through the back of the case and into the storage section to hold it in place.

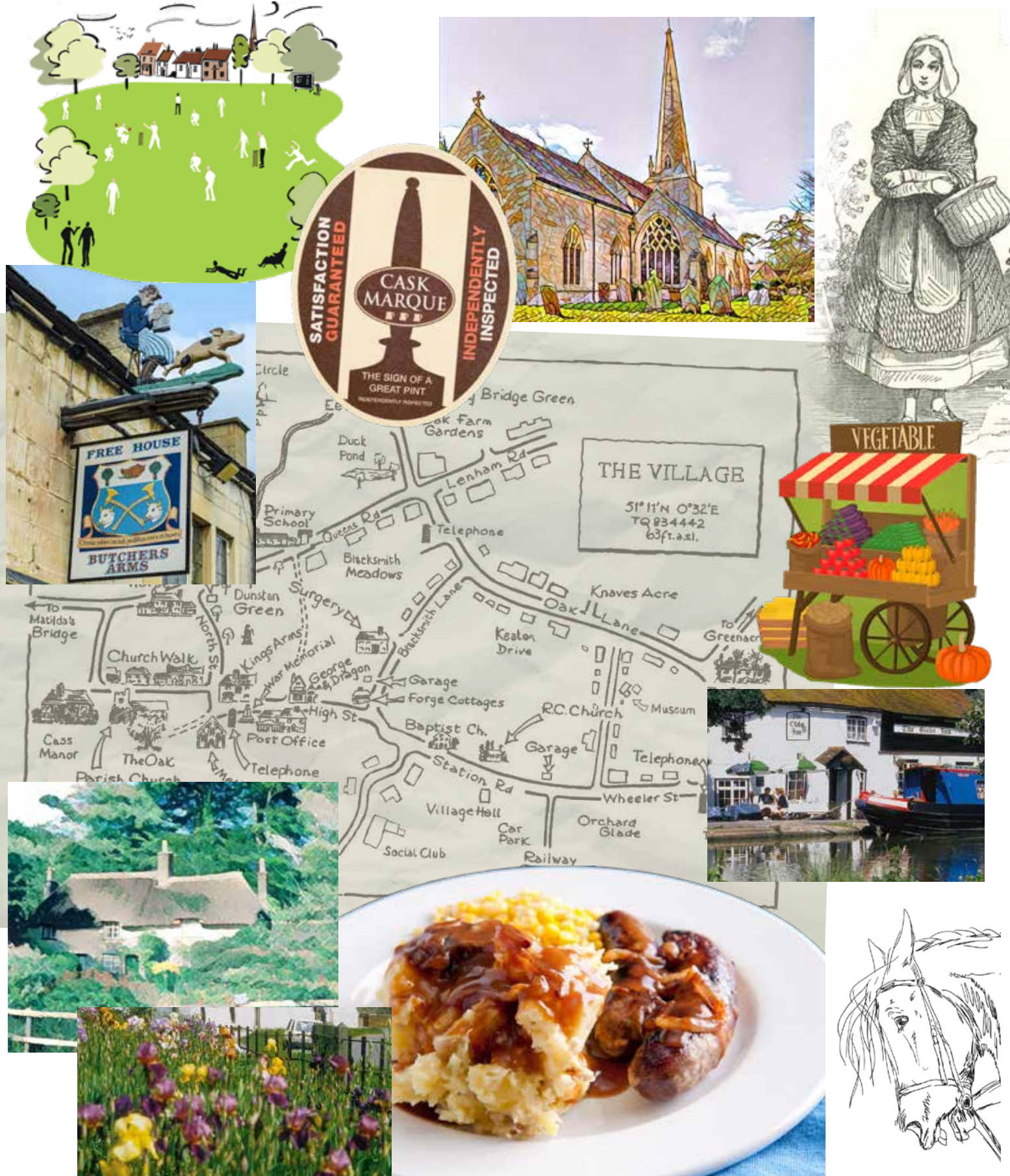
Another storage option is that you can include a document holder to your imaginarium. A document holder can be made by covering a artist card canvas board in fabric and attaching elastic to either side.





# Get in the Mood

Need an idea for a theme to get your group started? We've included mood-boards from two of our most popular themes 'The Village' and 'The Seaside' to provide a bit of extra visual stimulation









## Testimonials

### The Imaginarium as part of Hospice in the Weald Day Service in Tunbridge Wells

'First of all we used the Imaginarium in our weekly Craft Group. Patients engaged and created some beautiful stories and their own town and village was superb. The patients bonded as a group on their respective attendance days and they started sharing stories with each other.

'The creativity was astounding and everyone engaged well with the Imaginarium maps and case.

The case was filled with items from the staff who donated small objects, each bringing back memories and inspiration for the patients.

'I also decided to use the Imaginarium in our Creative Expression Group to inspire the patients to write. This was very, very well received and although a lot of time was spent talking about our stories rather than writing them down the engagement and imagination was incredible.

'The use of the Imaginarium in the Creative Expression Group has led to such inspiration that patients now want to set up a specific creative writing group in the evening. This is now being put into place. We plan to display some of the stories written in our gallery area for the rest of

the Hospice to see.

'As a health care professional the Imaginarium provided a great tool to be used to inspire patients and get them to "open up" more. They bonded and trusted much quicker in a group when they shared stories they had written. It was a pleasure to see

such joy and sense of achievement within the patients I work with.'

**Nell Mellerick – Creative Artist & Day Service Manager, Hospice in the Weald**





## The Imaginarium at Tunbridge Wells Book Worms – a book group for adults with a learning difficulty

*'This was something very different from our normal meetings of reading books and enabled the group to use their own imaginations to tell stories of their own that could be about whatever they wanted them to be.'*

*'The stories from the suitcase have encouraged inventiveness, creativity and originality and the group have been inspired with the idea of being able to project their own imagination and come up with completely original tales of their own.'*



*'It is always interesting to see new concepts in use and the suitcase from The Imaginarium has unleashed a new way of thinking for the group. As well as stimulating their thoughts and exercising their minds, it has encouraged both individual and enthusiastic responses while opening up a whole new way of storytelling.'*

**Pam Lelew – Volunteer Group Coordinator,  
Books Beyond Words**

## The Imaginarium used by Alzheimer's Society support groups in Tunbridge Wells

'At the Dementia Cafe people with dementia and carers took part together, producing different stories from the same combinations of objects. The level of engagement was good and the small groups were supportive of everyone on each table, allowing all participants an opportunity to speak. A transcript of the Imaginarium stories that were created was read aloud at the next cafe and enjoyed all over again with great amusement and laughter.'

'At the Day Support Group we engaged people with the Imaginarium in ones and twos, supported individually by staff and observed by the whole of the rest of the group as an audience. This resulted in some very personal stories and some lovely interactions between individual members of the group. This approach generated a high level of engagement from the whole group throughout and support for one another within the group. Afterwards one of the service-users said "It really makes you think, doesn't it?"'

'All of the groups said that they enjoyed this activity and would like to do it again. Volunteers have created their own version and already worked with it. Staff were able to engage their understanding of each individual service-user, helping to draw out their imagination and creativity to the very best of their ability. The Imaginarium has brought intrigue, improbability, humour and spontaneous happenstance into the lives of our groups, enabling them to live well with their dementia.'

**Kate Sergeant – Services Manager,  
Alzheimer's Society, Kent and Medway**





## Who Are CREATE?

The Imaginarium is brought to you by CREATE (Camden Road Education, Arts and Theatre Enterprise), a community group from Tunbridge Wells in Kent. Our aim is to bring out creativity in people of all ages and to inspire! We are made up entirely of volunteers and generate all our income through fundraising and donations.

We formed in 2009 as the result of the Claque Theatre community play *The Vanishing Elephant*, in which a cast and 'crew' of over 200 local residents took the roles of historical characters



We have developed several initiatives to enable local people of all ages and abilities to experience art, drama and learning activities, including a popular community choir, a book group with a difference, and an improvisation group.



to tell the story of one of the most colourful streets in town. As part of the fundraising for the play a lantern parade was organised and the popularity of this has led to us to producing it as an annual community event. Free lantern-making workshops celebrate creativity and inclusivity and the Parade itself now draws thousands of spectators and participants each year.



We also act as a promoter for Applause Rural Touring theatre bringing professional performances to the locality. We are delighted at the success of The Imaginarium, and that it is now being utilised across the south-east. Help us to spread the word!



## Potential Benefits to Participants



Encourages inventiveness, creativity and originality

*Increases self-esteem*

Helps to develop memory skills

*Stimulates an interest in history, culture and creative skills*

Fosters a sense of trust within a group

*Increases capacity for tolerance towards those from other communities*

Stimulates thoughts and exercises minds

*Fosters the desire to explore ideas of community and identity*

Refines communication skills and social skills

*Enables people of different backgrounds to enjoy storytelling together*

Encourages individuals to open up

*Increases cognitive stimulation and well-being*

Stimulates communication, reminiscence and social interaction

*Provides a sense of achievement*

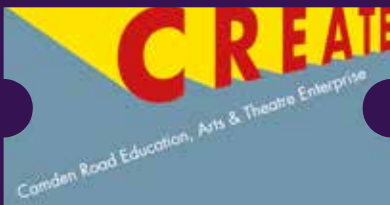
Enhances creative writing skills

*Enables individuals to discover a new way of storytelling*

Offers the realisation that everyone has the ability to come up with completely original tales of their own



**Produced by**



**Written and designed by:**  
**Abbi Bradford, Lucy Edkins, Paul Fulton, Matt Syms**

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