



Co-funded by
the European Union

Learning Scenario 2 Engaging with Heritage Artefacts through Slow Looking tours and Storytelling



Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of their community (Article 27, UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

Heritage Ireland 2030 strategy recognises that cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past that form the bedrock of a country's identity. These resources have an intrinsic role in the well-being of individuals and society.

AIDA slow looking tours and activities offer meaningful engagement with heritage, arts and culture in a way that is accessible to people living with dementia and their families. Slow looking tours are a journey of discovery shared by participants, their family members or carers and the facilitators at heritage sites. These activities can provide a path to connect with a person's heritage and culture through play and freedom of expression. Even where cognitive decline is present, creative artistic activities are still important and meaningful.

Slow looking tours and storytelling activities are a unique opportunity for people living with dementia and their family members to reset the relationship from patient/carer back to family members enjoying a playful activity together. They can participate in cultural life together.

Storytelling activities encourage creative personal expression. The stories are created in the moment as a response to the stimuli of the slow looking tour and the prompts offered by the facilitators. This activity improves social engagement and personal confidence.

The benefits of these activities include: assisting people with communication skills, feelings of social inclusion and improving their quality of life.



Castletown House,
Co Kildare, Ireland.



VIBORG
MUSEUM



OPW
Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works





Aims:

- A feeling of 'being in the moment' with heritage and art.
- A sense of happiness that comes when people engage with heritage, culture and art.
- An opportunity to engage all the senses and connect on an emotional level.
- An opportunity to engage in a group activity.

Outcomes:

- Participants will have taken part in an engaging exploration of heritage and art works using slow looking techniques.
- They will have the opportunity to explore the ideas and express their views about the artefact or image during an storytelling session.
- They will form a connection to their heritage that will spark an interest in engaging further with heritage sites.

The strengths of using slow looking tours and storytelling activities:

No prior knowledge of history, heritage or art is required. The tour and activity focuses on curious enquiry and open discussion.

Storytelling activities are an open ended activity with no specific end goals. The focus is on the process of creation rather than the final output.

Participation in storytelling activities promotes psychological well-being and improved communication skills. Participants feel more socially engaged.

During the slow looking tours and storytelling activities, participants have the opportunity to exchange ideas with facilitators, other participants and carers.

Play is at the heart of human activity. It does not mean we treat people living with dementia like children. But rather that we deploy play as a way to find new paths to personal engagement with heritage.

As participants play with the prompts and images, they can explore new potentials for personal expression, meaning making and making connections in their everyday lives. It can be a way to reclaim the person behind the diagnosis.

Storytelling activities draw on residual abilities, even where cognitive impairment is present. People living with dementia may not be able to remember, but they can imagine.

As participants formulate their story, some will take a trip into their own past. Others will take a journey into their imagination, describing their world in a way that makes sense to themselves.

As participants tell their story, it is written down accurately by a facilitator. Participants are invited to reflect further on their story by giving it a title. The story is read back to the participant at the end of the session. They are given the story to take home with them. Participants and carers are encouraged to try this activity at home.



In this activity, participants will take part in a slow looking tour looking at either a painting or historical artefact. The second part of the session is a storytelling activity based on the artefact that has been viewed. Participants will be offered a small range of prompts to get them started on their story. As participants tell their story, it is written down accurately by a facilitator. When the participant reaches the end of the story, they are offered the opportunity to give their story a title. The story is then read back to them. Later, the story is typed up and given to the participant to bring home. This can be used to share the activity with family and friends.



The writing bureau at Castletown House, Co. Kildare, Ireland.



The storytelling prompts relate to the object of the slow looking tour

The four elements of a slow-looking tour are:

- Observation** – spend time just looking at the art or artefact.
- Description** – ask the group to describe what they are seeing, colours, shapes etc. Build a visual inventory of the image. Spend time asking deepening questions to elicit as comprehensive a description as possible.
- Interpretation** – weave the story of the piece through the description the group have posed. Drop in interesting facts or interpretations to stimulate the discussion.
- Connection** – pose a question for each person to answer that helps them connect to the piece.

The slow looking sessions are based on the Meet Me methodology developed by MOMA:

<https://www.moma.org/visit/accessibility/meetme/>

Examples of deepening questions:

- What is it that makes you say that?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- Can you say a little more about that.
- Would you like to tell me a little more.
- What else do you see?
- Anything else?
- Use a gentle tone with the word 'why'

Acknowledge all contributions using the person's name.

For example: John sees the colour blue here and here (pointing out the places that he is referring to).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_xqCckKWg94 IMMA video demonstration of Azure tour for people living with dementia.

Preparations:

Select the historical objects or artworks to be used during the tour. Consider their location in terms of space for chairs, distance to be walked and comfort for participants.

Prepare the slow looking tour using the Meet Me at MOMA guidelines. Practice the storytelling methodology with the facilitators.

Gather some storytelling prompts, including both objects and pictures. Old postcards and photographs make great prompts. Limit your selection to those relating to subject of the tour.

Contact all the participants in advance with the session details and location map. Let them know if they need warm clothing.

Print off copies of the photograph of the historical artefact or art work that the group will be looking at. These can be used during the slow looking session and given to the participants to take home.

Considerations:

It is helpful if other staff onsite are trained in dementia awareness as it is likely that they will be interacting with participants at the point of arrival or departure.

In deciding how many facilitators will be required for the session; keep in mind that you may need additional staff to assist the group moving through the heritage site.



facilitators practicing the storytelling facilitation in advance.

How far will the participants be expected to walk during their visit? Consider the distances from the car park or public transport and the distances onsite. Leave time for the group to assemble before moving off to the site of the slow looking tour. Leave time for bathroom breaks.

Some participants may have mobility issues. How will they move through the site, what are the floor surfaces, are there stairs or slopes and will they need the use of a lift?

Some of the participants will have visual or auditory issues. Some may have issues with depth perception or shaking hands. These are not reasons to exclude someone, but rather an opportunity to consider if any adaptations need to be made to include them as fully as possible.



Storytelling is an imaginative process in which the past and the future can blend in a re-imagining of the world around us. Participants have the opportunity to be creative with their personal experiences. They can dig into their own memory or launch themselves into their imagination. The story is a place to talk about life's emotions and to start to understand what they mean to us.

This activity is an opportunity for the person with dementia to be creative with no requirement for memory of past events. This activity focuses on freedom of imagination (rather than finding memories). We are seeking to connect in the 'here and now'.

The session starts with a demonstration; one facilitator leads another through the storytelling process using a prompt from the collection on the table and a series of leading questions.

Getting started:

1. Ask the first participant to pick up one or two objects and say something about what they are holding. Prompt them to describe the object – colour, size, texture.
2. Use their response, prompt them with another question, so that they are encouraged to go a little deeper into the description of the object.
3. Each time address the person by name and acknowledging what they have said. Echo and Affirm.
4. Allow silences, it may take time for the person to assemble the next sentence in their head before speaking.
5. Write down all their answers verbatim. We will be reading them back to the participant at the end.
6. Use open ended questions... 'If you had the ability to fly, where would you go?'. Use, 'Yes and.....'
7. Use prompts that show this is a shared path of discovery.
8. Use prompts that relate to where they are at now 'Where do you feel at home?'
9. 'If you had a superpower, what would it be?'. 'How would you use your superpower?'
10. 'What gift would you give the next generation?'
11. 'If you could close your eyes and when you open them you were somewhere else, where would that be?'
12. Once they have started the story, delve deeper – 'What is this character saying?', 'What happens next?' 'What sounds can they hear?' 'What is the character feeling?'
13. At the end you can ask them what they want to call their story and write it on the top of the page.
14. Finally, you are going to reread the story back to the person and they can take it home with them.



Participants: This activity is suited to groups of up to 4 participants plus their carers or family members, a total of 8 people per group.

We partnered with **the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland** to recruit participants to the sessions. They announced the project on their Team up for Dementia database, in their newsletters and by word of mouth through their community care staff. Building relationships with professional staff working with people living with dementia works well in spreading the word about the sessions.

Resources:
The AIDA website:
www.artzheimer.eu



<https://www.moma.org/visit/accessibility/meetme/practice/>
MOMA Training resources for running dementia friendly art looking tours.

<https://imma.ie/learn-engage/art-and-ageing/armchair-azure/> IMMA Gallery, Ireland, tours and resources for running dementia friendly art tours.

<https://www.timeslips.org/> Creative storytelling skills for running sessions with people living with dementia.

Set up the slow looking tour:

1. Participants should be seated during the slow looking tour. Set out the seats in a semi-circle around the object paying attention to whether everyone can see the object and hear the facilitator. Chairs should have a back for safety and comfort.
2. Choose an art work or historical artefact that would be suitable for the session. It needs to be large enough to be clearly visible. It also needs to be distinct from other art works or artefacts in the surrounding area, so participants are clear about what they are looking at. A photograph or print of the artefact can be useful for participants.

Set up the storytelling activity:

1. The studio space for the storytelling activity needs to be furnished with tables and chairs. Ideally, seat all participants around one large table, as this will assist with building a positive group dynamic and feelings of social inclusion.
2. Set out the storytelling prompts in the middle of the table. Use enough to give people choice, but not too much as this may overwhelm some people. Be mindful of the size of the prompts, are they easy to hold and examine?

Staff requirements:

Between 3-4 facilitators trained in giving slow looking tours and storytelling sessions for people living with dementia. Where the heritage site is complex to navigate, you may need additional staff.

Refreshments:

If you are offering refreshments during or after the session, plan how you will manage the space, whether people can have refreshments while they work and how to manage the transition from the social aspect of the session back to the activity.



Running the slow looking tour and storytelling session

The session takes about 2 hours.



Step by step guide:

1. Welcome the participants to the venue. Introduce yourself and ask the participants to wear name badges (staff will all be wearing name badges). Answer any initial questions people have.
2. When the group is assembled, lead them into the gallery. If the area is not sufficiently heated suggest that people keep their coats on. Ensure that everyone is sitting comfortably. Introduce yourself again and welcome everyone, giving them orientation information.
3. Start the slow looking tour. If you have prepared prints of the art or artefact hand them out at the outset. Use the Azure or Meet Me at MOMA methodology to ensure everyone is engaged and contributing to the discussion.
4. Immediately following the facilitated tour, participants are brought to the well lit studio area.
5. Introduce the activity to the group. Show them the storytelling prompts and give them time to examine the objects. Three facilitators can give a demonstration of the storytelling session. One facilitator is the participant, one is the person leading them through imaginative prompts and the third is the scribe, writing down the story.
6. The first participant is invited to select a prompt and describe it. Then, using encouraging open questions, the participant is encouraged to develop the narrative using the questions on slide 5.
7. The participant is guided through imaginative questions to create a story. Some participants may tell a story from their past, while others will create a whole new story from their imagination.
8. The story is written down exactly by a facilitator. At the end of the story, the participant is invited to give the story a title. The story is read back to the group.
9. The facilitator then moves on to the second participant. Depending on the time available, family members or carers can also be invited to create a story. Sometimes, the participant may work together with their family member to create a story.
10. Where digital devices are used to create a gallery of the stories, the participants should be introduced to the digital platform at the outset. They will also have to give consent to their creative work being uploaded to the platform.
11. The participants would then be encouraged to take their story home with them.

