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a ____ and a ____

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How can generative short story workshops be used as a method to express and deal with an issue?



a Master Thesis by Clara Gradel

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On an *introduction*

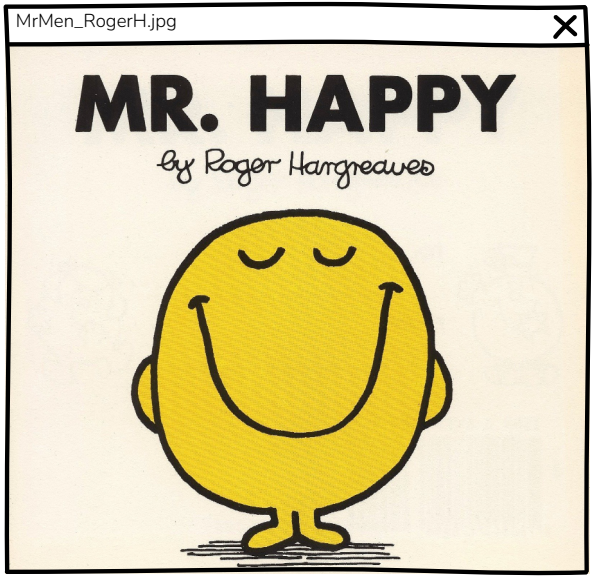
The books of Mr. Men and Little Miss, by Roger Hargreaves, are the short stories that impacted my view of children books' design. I will always remember their simple square shape with a white glossy hardcover and a simple, colourful drawing of the character and their name as the title. Mr. Happy, Little Miss Trouble, Little Miss Whoops, Mr. Grumpy, Mr. Clumsy... They stood out from other children's books of my childhood. They were simple and clear. Other children's book covers were filled with colour, not allowing blank and unused space. These other covers are mixed in my memories and leave only the impression of colour as they overwhelmingly tried to get my attention and stand out in their similarities. However, Mr. Men and Little Miss, stay clear, and I can always remember what the cover looked like and how the book felt in my hands. They were books with a specific character with its own trait and a simple moral. Mr. Happy helped Mr. Miserable find happiness. Little Miss Trouble learns that the misery of others is no laughing matter. They utilize small morals which are sometimes funny as well as meaningful.

That was where this started. And it only kept going from there. I started my own short one-liner stories called "Tiny's Adventures", where Tiny, a yellow heart character, takes on daily life. When these came about, I was struggling like many others with the restrictions of the pandemic. Being stuck inside and only seeing people

tinys_adventures.jpg



MrMen_RogerH.jpg



digitally made my anxiety worse, and I was looking for an output. So I gave life to Tiny. A character that brought me happiness and made me smile. Tiny would make everything sound light, no matter how simple or heavy the topic was. Tiny was relatable. And so, in a way, Tiny was created to appease my anxiety. The inspiration behind Tiny was clear to me. I wanted to play with the construct of a children's storybook, from the simple white book with an illustration to the short moral. The important element in "Tiny's adventure" is simplicity. It was about having a one-line story and one illustration, that's it. It's to the point one look, and you've read it. It plays with short attention span because that's something that everyone behind the screen struggled with these past years. I wanted to give something quickly and allow for the rest of the story to be up to the reader. One line can say a lot. One illustration can say a lot. I felt that would be the strength of Tiny's Adventures. I didn't need nor want much to convey a lot.

As I grew older, I became more fascinated by fables that I had dismissed as a child. I remembered how the animals would talk and have problems like humans. I also found it interesting that they were written with complex language yet addressed to children. The adult perspective and input really influenced the construct of fables. Adults knew talking animals would appeal to children. Thus by using something that children would be attracted to and listen to, adults aimed to share their perspective on behaving in society. Children grow up listening to adult's perspectives on how to live life. They are taught the reality of life through imaginary stories.

I often think about when a child's imagination starts and stops. As we know, it is determined by the age of the child. It could start before the child can even speak; it can spark from the child's environment. And it stops



when a child reaches the teenage years and is no longer perceived as a child by society. However, I believe a child's imagination is only buried inside us at a certain age so that we can be perceived as adults. We all had a child's imagination at some point in our life. Some keep it visible longer than others. I believe there's a child's imagination in all of us that's craving for attention. An imagination that won't be stopped by overthinking and just wants to get out. That's when some of the most beautiful stories come to life. Whether they make sense or not.

And from all these puzzle pieces, my short story workshops emerged. I started to wonder if I could create a method that could enable people to open up to their imagination. I started this project because I wanted people to feel their unique locked imagination. I am a dreamer sometimes held back by being realistic. I know not everyone will be impacted by my method but I hope I might at least change something for someone and make them feel seen as they unlock something in themselves. I want to give people a space and environment where they can let go and embrace what might seem like being ridiculous, and laugh about what they create. I believe that's why I created my method which is constantly developing and in this instance became workshops. I started with trying to come up with healing stories for myself through Tiny's Adventures. And opened it up to others in the form of stories with blank spaces they can fill with their thoughts.



Appeared my fairy tales

In this chapter I will look back at fairy tales I grew up with and analyze them to better understand the structure and elements that drive a story.

The French written literature called “Contes” and known in English as Fairy Tales, was originally destined to be read by adults and the wealthy, and emerged in 1697. (Besson, n.d) Being French, I grew up with contes and fables which were meant to be sweet and targeted at children. Still, I was also introduced to a book that had old contes with the original unfiltered stories. This book that my mother read to us had stories which were harder to understand as a child because some of them addressed adults. The book she read from was called “L’oiseau d’or” and was published by Flammarion in 1970. It contains various stories from authors such as the Grimm Brothers, Edouard Laboulaye, Rene Jacquenet, and more. What is interesting in this book is how you can see the content of the stories change depending on the intended audience. It shows a clear switch in the audience of fairy tales. But it also highlights what is needed for the basic structure of a story: intro, who, where, what, why, how, and if each of these questions is answered, then the story is clear. What is it about these structure questions that works, and what if that was the base I used for my generative story workshops? If I use these basic structural questions I could work with adults and children. They would bring

LesDouzesMois.jpg



Noel_petite_pomme.jpg



the structure to life with their own content, and the target group could thus adapt.

The book “L’oiseau d’or” has two sections “contes d’hier” meaning fairy tales of yesterday, and “d’aujourd’hui” meaning of today. One can clearly see the switch in the audience these fairy tales were written for by reading “Les Douze mois” in the section fairy tales of yesterday and “Le Noel de Petite Pomme” in the section fairy tales of today.

“Les Douze mois” meaning The Twelve months, as can be seen in the previous page on the left, was originally a Slavic fairy tale then re-written by Edouard Laboulaye. I will now go through the structure of the fairy tale to better understand its strengths and appeal.
The first section gives a long introduction to the characters as well as the setting of the story

> **Intro & Who:** This is a story about a peasant widow with a stepdaughter and her own daughter.
>
> **When & Where:** On a snow-filled day in January, in a small house near snow filled mountains.

The second section is about the struggles of the main characters attempting to complete the multiple repetitive tasks given to them using magical events to complete them

> **What:** The stepdaughter is repeatedly asked to go collect things, first, a bouquet of violets, second, strawberries, and lastly, apples.
>
> **Why:** Because the daughter of the peasant widow wants them and if she doesn’t get them she will be beaten

How: She goes into the snow-filled mountains where she encounters the Twelve months who help her by growing what she needs.

Last section is about the reward they get for all their suffering and quickly unfolds to a twisted happy ever after

End: The daughter is greedy and wants more but is rude to the twelves months, so she loses her way in the snow, her mum goes to look for her, and they both die, and their bodies are found only later in the year when the snow has melted.

Older fairy tales tend to have the main character do tasks and be rewarded only in the end for their effort and suffering. This older fairy tale takes time to describe the setting and is repetitive in the beginning to set the tone of the story. The story truly unfolds at the end quickly when step daughter is rewarded. As for the audience, you can see from the brutal deaths and finding of the corpse that this fairy tale was for adults. Whilst the fairy tale “Le Noel de Petite Pomme” meaning The Christmas of Little Apple, as can be seen in the previous page on the right, is a French fairy tale written by Rene Jacquenet. It is in the second section of the book and is more modern and utilizes a basic structure. It leaves behind these three sections and focuses less on reward but rather lessons as it is aimed at a different audience.

Intro & Who: This is the story of a six-year-old little boy named Jean that everyone called Little Apple

Where: In a small house in the forest



When: On Christmas Eve as the night is almost there

What: Little Apple gets lost on his way to try to meet his parents

Why: There was a lot of snow, and it was cold, and Little apple could not see the clear paths he normally took in the forest

How: With the help of the talking trees, animals, and Santa Claus, Little apple is kept warm until his parents find him.

End: Little apple had the best Christmas story, but no one at school believed him.

This fairy tale is more sweet and concise in the story structure spending a similar amount of time to go through all the structure questions. And compared to the other story, this one tells a kind and heartwarming story clearly aimed at children.

The story of “The Twelve months” is brutal, highlighting how fairy tales were written for adults, whilst “The Christmas of Little Apple” shows how fairy tales started to have cuter, more child-appealing elements. This was also to help achieve the goal of teaching children how to behave in society. These two stories highlight the different ways a basic question structure can be used, depending on the goal of the story. It also shows how the content can obviously change the target audience. This gives me a great base to proceed in how I will create a structure for my workshops, which I will talk about in the chapter “And the fables could structure creativity”.

They found themselves in changing tales

In this chapter I will be looking at the changes of well known fairy tales through the years and their ingredients. I will thus look at how a story can be rewritten and interpreted yet stay coherent because of the same important ingredients the stories keep.

Charles Perrault was the first to publish famous fairy tales such as “Red Riding Hood” and “Cinderella”. (Besson, n.d) These stories have now been transformed and diverted from their original morals. Red riding hood by Charles Perrault was originally written as a warning for young girls. Charles aimed to bring awareness about how one should be careful of sweet-talking men as they might not be as nice as they seem.

> *"I say Wolf, for all wolves are not of the same sort; there is one kind with an amenable disposition – neither noisy, nor hateful, nor angry, but tame, obliging and gentle, following the young maids in the streets, even into their homes. Alas! Who does not know that these gentle wolves are of all such creatures the most dangerous!" (Perrault, 1697)*

He really aimed to address the danger of men by giving a warning to young women. In his fairy tale Red Riding Hood, which had been fooled and lured by sweet talks, ends up dead.

> *"Watch out if you haven’t learned that tame wolves/ Are the most dangerous of all" (Perrault, 1697)*

The original fairy tales did not have the happy ending that you might find in the new ones out there nowadays. They have been changed over the years and reinterpreted in a way that has almost completely erased the original intent, and moral they had been written with. The Grimm Brothers are also famous for their fairy tales. They too had originally quite gruesome fairy tales, in German “Märchen”, which meant little stories. The Grimm tales, along with many other fairy tales, changed through the editions. In 1812 the Grimm brothers came out with the first edition of fairy tales, and a few years later, in 1815 they came out with a second volume. Over the following years, they published six more editions that adapted with the time, edited to become more fit for children, and incorporated Christian references. And so the most spread-out edition being the seventh, contains the fairy tales we are most familiar with nowadays. (Flood, 2014)
In 2014, Jack Zipes was the first to fully translate into English and publish the original first edition of the Grimm tales. Zipes really wanted to give light to the original fairy tales that were almost unheard of. In an interview with Micheal Miriam in 2015, he goes on to explain how the original stories were short and gruesome and have notably been changed over the years.

> *“Many of the tales are shorter in the first edition. They’re more blunt. Rapunzel gets pregnant in the tower with the prince, there’s a little hanky-panky going on there. There are vivid depictions of children slitting each other’s throats, where a mother wants to eat her daughters because they are suffering from hunger, and she says, “Listen, I’ve gotta eat you, otherwise I’ll die.” The mothers in “Snow White” and in “Hansel and Gretel” are the biological mothers in the first edition, but they changed them in later editions to make them stepmothers. I wouldn’t call them monumental changes, but the tales are closer to the oral tradition. This is because Wilhelm really wanted, over the years, to make them into artful tales, which he did. But they’re not that way in the first edition. They’re rough.” (Zipes, 2015)*

Tales have changed through the years. What once was a warning to women is now a cute story for children, thus society changed towards adapting stories to entertain more than teach. The essential parts or one could say ingredients of the stories remain the same. In Red Riding Hood, there is still a little girl, a wolf, a grandma, a hunter, a cabin, and a forest. The ingredients of the fairy tales stay the same. It's that they are reinterpreted, and their context changed over the years. This transformation is interesting and highlights one of the notions I aim to bring in my workshop. If one is given a set of ingredients, what would it take for them to utilize them in a way they would not have normally done before. I want to work with the idea that an object can take many forms and be used in many ways in a story if I can trigger quick imagination in the participants. I developed this idea further in what I called "the random object method" which is explained at the end of the chapter "They were there to anthropomorphize".





They had brought with them Fables and objects

In this chapter I will introduce Jean de La Fontaine and his work which greatly contributed to the use of fables as educational materials. I will look into the use of objects including animals to drive a story and teach.

Jean de La Fontaine is a French poet famously known for his fables. He was born in 1621 and, in his later years, moved to Paris like many other aspiring poets of the time. In 1668 he finally published his first book of fables which was dedicated to le Grand Dauphin, son of Louis XIV. At the time, the Dauphin was only six years old, and so La Fontaine instructs in the preface that this book was intended to entertain him but also teach him to reflect intellectually about the ways of life. La Fontaine wrote his fables with the intent to entertain but also educate. La Fontaine admired many such as Aesop, but in his later books, he also drew inspiration from all over the world. (De Courtivron, 2018)

With his fables, La Fontaine aimed to teach his reader universal morals. His desire to teach about the structure of his society is what led to his fables being incorporated into the French education curriculum. He took a different approach in his fables as he got rid of the length and obscurity fables originally contained. (De Courtivron, 2018) He did so by taking a more poetic approach and keeping in mind that he wanted to incorporate morals. His fables could be targeted to children considering his first book was dedicated to a six-

year-old. La Fontaine made a big step in changing the audience of fables.
Through his fables, La Fontaine used animals to represent different ranks in his society and thus used his fables to critique and address its flaws. The representation of animals and their references in La Fontaine's fables is what brings strength and quality to them, as De Courtivron (2018) states in her essay:

> *"In the animal allegory of the Fables, the animals present there are symbolic, physically and by their words. They all have a very specific role because each represents a stereotype: the lion is powerful, cruel and proud, the ant hardworking, the fox is cunning, the lamb gentle, the wolf bloodthirsty, the rabbit fearful, but it's only by closely analyzing their words, their attitudes and their actions, one realizes that the lion represents tyrannical royal power, or that the lamb represents the weakness of the poor in the face of this tyranny. Some of the animals like the fox evoke courtiers who revolve around royal absolutism and whose greatest fear is being banished from court, others demonstrate the qualities, sacrifices and wisdom of the weakest and most humble. Through their words, these animals illustrate the often laughable and harmful behaviors of their contemporaries." (De Courtivron, 2018)*

The fables of La Fontaine portray the ranks and behavior of his society as he aims to educate his readers and bring them to think further. All brought to by the need to spread around his critique and possibly hope for a change. The use of animals appeases the viewpoint he brings forth in his fables, and also, the new format he developed gives the opportunity to teach children. After all, his first book was given to the heir of the throne maybe in the hope of getting him to bring the change society needed.

But why do we relate to animals? Is it because, over the years, we have given them human attributes? We

detach ourselves from them because they are not human, but we relate to them because we give them human attributes and relate their behaviours to human behaviours.

“Je me sers d'animaux pour instruire les hommes” {I am using animals to teach men} (La Fontaine, 1668)

La Fontaine started a new teaching method in France. Being a writer and poet he used his craft and developed it to make an impact on society. Fables were the start of teaching children that things are not what they may seem. A lion is more than a lion, a Lion can represent a tyrannical royal power. La Fontaine used animals as well as insects and imposed roles onto them. He created his own meanings of what they were capable of and stood for to represent his society. And so children, like the Dauphin, learned the inner workings of their society through them. The Fables of Jean de la Fontaine have since been incorporated in the French public school mandatory curriculum. I myself learned from a very young age to recite some of his fables by heart. That is how I was taught French literature and its ideals. Through them we learned how things in stories could be more than what they were bound to be in the real world.

We have for a long time used animals, objects and things and given them human attributes and thus anthropomorphized them in our stories. We have done so to teach and give perspective on our society. In doing so we are able to detach ourselves from the characters of the stories yet still empathize with their human attributes. La Fontaine used his talent and imagination to make an animal more than what it was. We can make an object do or be anything, and that is a notion I bring into my method during the workshops.

They were there to anthropomorphize

In this chapter I will go through anthropomorphized childhood characters to show how we are taught to empathize with anything. I will also introduce the random object method and how it relates to that and how it can be used.

We are brought up by things that can't talk, talking in the books, movies, and tv shows we see around us. If I think of my childhood and the books, tv shows, and movies I have watched, there was always a character that had the ability to talk, which would not have been possible in real life. That's what I want to highlight, why do we anthropomorphize animals and things? To anthropomorphize is a term I learned about recently when I read Brinkman's thesis. Brinkman's thesis is titled "TOTO TO TOTORO: Can talking animals save the world?" in which she brings forth characters and animals to have conversations and debate topics. She is not the only one to utilize this; all the books, TV shows, and movies I will show you also use animals to convey stories and meanings. It is fascinating how humans give human characteristics to animals and things to bring forth a story and ideal.

The aim is not to go into depth about each character so you can relate to them because I believe that can only be done by experiencing the format they were a part of. I merely want to show how children are exposed to anthropomorphized characters in books and TV to experience and learn something much like fables did.



Jiji the cat in the Ghibli Studio movie “Kiki’s delivery service” is Kiki’s companion. Jiji is there for Kiki, always giving her advice and helping her out. However later in the movie as Jiji finds love and Kiki struggles to become a witch both characters stop understanding each other. Kiki can no longer hear Jiji talk as she becomes busy making her own life and decisions. Jiji helps portray the hardship of a child’s transition into adulthood yet Jiji is just a cat.



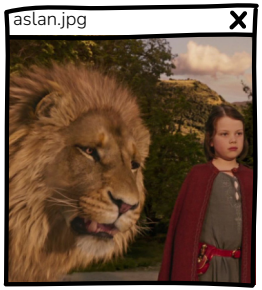
The Rainbow Fish is a special fish that has beautiful special scales. The Rainbow fish is lonely because he is not sharing so he decides to share his scales. He encounters many fish and goes around giving each of them one of his shiny scales. Which in the end makes them and him happy. The Rainbow fish aims to teach children about sharing through giving parts of oneself away. A twisted story now that I’ve read it again as an adult.



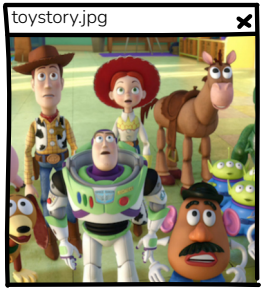
Elmer is the only elephant that is covered in patchwork colours. Everyone knows him and everyone greets him when they see him. Elemer always makes everyone laugh and he brings them happiness. However Elmer would like to fit in and be like the other elephants. So one day he decides to paint himself grey. But he feels sad as everyone around him stays quiet. So he decides to embrace his difference and realizes there’s no point in hiding his true self. Still a beautiful story about celebrating differences.



Meowth from Team Rocket is the only talking Pokemon to exist. Meowth decided to become as human as he could to win the heart of a female Meowth. But even that does not impress her and so he is left broken hearted. He then decides to join Team Rocket because the first word he learned when he became as human as he could was “rocket”. (Kelley, 2021).



Aslan is the King of Beast in Narnia by C.W. Lewis. In “The Lion, the Witch and Wardrobe” which is the first book and movie, Aslan, a talking lion, helps support four siblings who have come to save Narnia. Lewis revealed that Alsan represents Christ as he saves Edmund, one of the siblings, by sacrificing himself on an altar and later being resurrected.



The toys in Toy Story all come to life when the humans are not around. Buzz Lightyear the brand new toy thinks he’s a real astronaut and Woody the cowboy is jealous because he could lose his favourite Toy position. And even worse the family is moving houses. Woody and Buzz struggle to work together to be able to reunite with their human boy Andy.



The Giving tree is about a Tree and his favourite boy. As the boy ages the tree tries to keep up and gives the boy everything he needs even if that means becoming nothing but a tree stump that the old boy can rest on.



The Missing Piece is about a circle with a missing piece who thinks that finding his missing piece will make him happy. He finds the most varied forms of things that he desperately tries to claim as his missing piece. He tries again and again, rejection after rejection. But maybe he was whole all along.

It is not about how deeply the characters move you but that they are anything but what they would be in the real world. Some see themselves in them and some relate to them because we humanize them. They talk like humans and are the very notion of anthropomorphization. They become more than they otherwise could by their gain of human attributes. Anything, if given space, can become something that can be utilized to be part of a story. I could write a story about a table and anthropomorphize it, and people might empathize with it. Anything can be used to drive a story if we give it capabilities it otherwise did not have in the real world.

Using that notion, can we make a story if we're given objects and animals? What would it take to get someone to create imaginary capabilities for these objects and animals?

Let me introduce the random object method. An object to be clear is anything from a lion to a carpet. It is an animal, an insect, a thing, a letter, a thought as long as it can be imagined it is an object. The random object method is simple, it is inspired by a child's imagination. The method allows any object to be anything. This method can be used in many ways for different objectives. The first step is to think randomly of an object. The next is to be faced with an objective. And the last is to give your object the ability to overcome this objective. Let me create an example, my object will be a potato, the objective is to travel and so I decide I will use my potato to grow more potatoes and then mash all the potatoes and fry them in the shape of a boat which will take me on a journey across the sea. The hardest part is about thinking of how to use the object in what might seem unrealistic. It is about giving your object the capabilities you desire and need. That is the random object method used in a simple form but this method can be used further. It is used in the structure of my generated story workshops. The essence of it is not complex, it is rather simple. All you need is an objective, such as the ones set in the generative story workshops I create, which I talk about in the chapter "So Clara used that for story making". This whole random object puts into practice the way a child might solve things. It's about triggering and in a way practicing borderless imagination. A tree is not just a tree just as La fontaine teaches us that a lion is not just a lion.



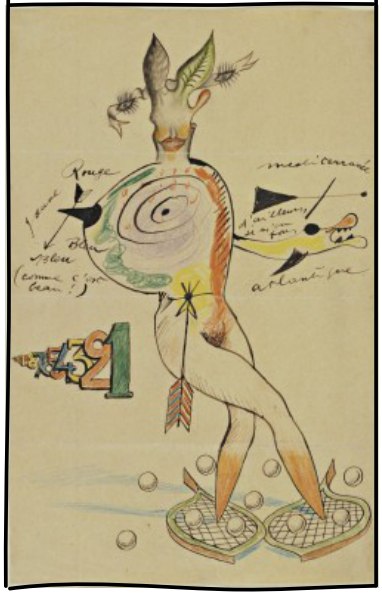
The objects could trigger imagination

In this chapter I will be looking at different works that play with triggering imaginations. I will also be looking at the variety of these methods and how they take triggering imagination further into a certain context.

From the historical Surrealism art movement of the 20th century emerged methods such as surrealist automatism. The Surrealist movement was driven by the idea of breaking away from the rules of society and letting go of rational thinking. Whilst as the Glossary of Tate Museum (2022) states, automatism which comes from physiology, refers to “bodily movements that are not consciously controlled like breathing or sleepwalking”. This automatism notion was later used in psychology by Freud as part of a method to explore and trigger the unconscious mind through the form of automatic writing and drawing. (Tate Museum, 2022) Thus, surrealist automatism is an art method that triggers the unconscious mind to take over creative making. I aim to reflect this idea in the method I have created for my workshops.

Many games and methods have been developed within this notion of surrealist automatism. The Exquisite Corpse is a well-known game that was used by the Surrealists. The game is most famous for using drawing. It consists of passing around a piece of paper, then folding it in order to hide your contribution, thus one by one drawing a part so that the result becomes a collaborative drawing. This was a method that was often

Exquisite_corpse.jpg



100000000poem.jpg



used by artists in Surrealism, as you can see in the picture on the left, which was created by Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, and Man Ray. This Exquisite Corpse method, much like the following ones, focuses on not overthinking and allowing the participants to unconsciously trigger their creativity. This notion is something I really focused on in the development of my workshops.

There are also versions of the game of the Exquisite Corpse that use writing. One of the most renowned one is by Raymond Queneau in his book is called “Cent mille milliards de poèmes”. The book was inspired by a children’s book rendition of the Exquisite Corpse game, where one could switch around the body parts of characters in a book. His book is made up of sentences, each separated on cut strands of a page. This format allows for the reader to shuffle and make up to one hundred million million poems. This work was created when Queneau was part of Oulipo, a French group of writers and mathematicians who were creating works using limited writing techniques aiming to create new structures and patterns.

A more recent example is a workshop called Serious Play by LEGO. It focuses on the triggering of creativity in a similar way as the previous example, but this time as a team-building tool in workspace environments. Serious Play has been developing for the past 15 years and was finally made open source in 2010. (Blair & Rillo, 2020) The method was republished in 2020 in a book titled “Serious Work: How to facilitate meetings and workshops using the LEGO® Serious Play® method”. The book describes “ a systematic method that enables people to use LEGO bricks to solve problems, explore ideas and achieve objectives.” (Blair & Rillo, 2020) Much like what I developed, it aims to trigger the unconscious to generate ideas through a method of restricting the possibilities of expression to only using LEGO bricks. These underlying workings show

similarities to surrealist automatism; the restrictions force the participant to utilize their creativity and subconscious, which can lead to surprising outcomes. The LEGO Serious Play uses the restriction of LEGO which enables different forms of language and communication. As the participants reconstruct their office space with LEGO, they are able to share their perception of the work environment and see the ways other team members experience it, thus creating a better understanding of each other. The aim is to bring people closer together. It is a method that facilitates by making use of a material for expression associated with playfulness: tactile building blocks that provide a direct way of communicating complex, internal experiences. This is what I want to do with my workshops as well. I hope to open people up to a different way of thinking about, and engaging with, a topic.

I have also discovered wonderful books which inspired me such as “Drawing as Therapy” by The School of Life. The School of Life is an organization spread around the globe which aims to help people lead more fulfilled lives. The School of life has a youtube channel, physical global hubs with workshops, lectures and classes, and it also obviously makes books. It tries to reach people in all the ways it can. In this particular book they target adults, because drawing is something most of us stop doing as we grow older. It is a book filled with creative prompts and exercises that introduce the curative powers of drawing. This book will not teach you how to draw but teach new perspectives and methods to help your mind.

From books to drawings to legos, there are many tools you can use to give shape to a method. The interaction with the audience should be the base of picking what tools to use in order to create a communicative method.



And the Fables could structure creativity

In this chapter I will be talking about the aims of the workshop and the development of structure to be adaptable to different topics and audiences.

I have developed generative short story workshops as methods to express and deal with problems. The aim of the workshops is not to realistically solve problems but rather to have a creative take on the problems. The idea is also to engage and deal with the topics by triggering child like imagination which gives shape to the unimaginable. The method aims to trigger quick responses trying to escape the adult way of overthinking and analyzing. And so this can let through child like imagination that is always in you. This method aims to be therapeutic. With a set topic and a set structure, the participants are taken on a story-making journey to solve and express the topic given to them. The workshop opens conversations as the participants are invited to discuss the story they created with their given problem. It aims to create a playful way to tackle serious topics. It also aims to open minds and create a new perspective on expressing and dealing with a topic.
The structure of generating a story was something that felt very important in order for these workshops to work. One cannot simply give a participant a blank page of paper and tell them to write a story and expect results. The structure had to invite the participant and make them feel like they had creative control but still

felt guided. The balance between guiding and creative input was very important because if the viewer felt the story was already written for them, they would feel the story was not theirs. And on the other hand, if the structure was too empty, the participant might feel more pressure to be creative. Thus the structure guides the participant with the inspiration from the six W's, which are commonly used in order to get a full, well-rounded story.

And the structure is as follows,

☞ Pick two characters
☞ How will your story start?
☞ Who are the characters?
☞ Where are they?
☞ What objects do they have?
☞ Why do they have this/Why are they here?
☞ How do they feel?
☞ How will it end?

And a blank story using this structure would be,

A ... and a ...
On a ...
Appeared a ... and a ...
They found themselves in a ...
They brought with them a ...
They were there to ...
Hoping to ...
And so ...



The structure is filled in one line at a time, not knowing what the next line will be until you turn your page (or slide if the workshop is done online). The idea is that what you are filling out in the story should not be picked by knowing the full structure as that would influence the outcome and randomness of the story. This randomness aims to portray the way a child comes up with a story. Another important point is that the participants are not given too much time to fill in the blanks. This is to allow for quick thinking. This quick thinking, in my opinion, stops the adult and teenage way of overthinking and allows for more pure and child-like imagination. The whole structure and quick thinking also play on the idea of thinking outside the box. If you just ask someone to think outside the box, will they? Probably not. They'll overthink the box and rarely escape it. But if you give them a set structure and give them 1 minute to think of, for example, two characters that come to their mind then, bam! Quick thoughts could trigger a whole story that is completely outside the box.

My creative story-making method is adaptable to different audiences and, in turn, can help express and deal with relevant topics for these audiences. The development of this workshop is strongly inspired by the structure and methods used in children's stories and fables to teach morals and ways of behaving, as well as social media platforms that try to quickly convey information concisely and in short amounts of time. It gives short sentences in combination with illustration space to speak and convey more than what is simply written. It thus also accommodates to visual thinkers and gives space for more imagination. The method really aims to take steps in surprising the participant with their own triggered imagination. It is not the aim that the participant fully knows what they are writing in terms of structure and also that they will be illustrating. Of course, some can assume, but still, the quick thinking moment where the imagination is triggered will not be lost.





So Clara used that for story making

In this chapter I will explain how I used the structure I developed to create specific workshops as I will give examples of workshops I have done.

What also became important after trying out the structure was how to incorporate topics that fit the target audience but also adapt a topic depending on the given audience. Incorporating a topic and allowing for the participant to solve it within such a short structure was complex. It was again about finding a balance between guiding the participant and their creative input. The topic of housing problems in the Netherlands was the first tackled. The workshop on this topic was set in Mediamatic as part of an exhibition organized by the Sandberg master students of Disarming Design. This project became a collaboration between Jara, a close friend, and me. Jara has a background in giving problem solving methods workshops to children, and she was the best help to take my workshops further. She previously designed a workshop that was about How to cross the Palestinian Wall. The workshop focused on using random objects in innovative ways to cross the wall. It combined both text and illustration as a form to solve the problem.
We then combined both our creativity to come up with our workshop. We figured out early on that it would be about how to solve the housing problem in the Netherlands because, at the time, there were ongoing

protests. We then simply started by figuring out the variables we wanted people to fill in,

Intro example: On a rainy day
Character example: International student
Type of housing: Room
Location example: Amsterdam
Problem example: Living cost
Objects example: toad, sunglasses

And created a random solution,
Turns out, toad has a talent for looking cool. The International student goes out in the city and places the toad with his cool sunglasses next to the Dam square. The toad attracts people and so the student makes lots of money to afford renting a room.

We then tried out the story in a simple structure much like my previous workshop,

On a rainy day
An international student was searching for accommodation
The room had to be located in Amsterdam
The international student couldn't afford the living costs
They find a toad and a pair of sunglasses on their way
The toad and the pair of sunglasses can help them afford a room
Turns out, toad has a talent for looking cool.
The International student goes out in the city and places the toad with his cool sunglasses next to the Dam square.
The toad attracts people and so the student makes lots of money to afford renting a room.



And finally we had the final structure with blanks to be filled in by the participants,

a (thing) and a (thing) saved the day
On a (intro)
Appeared a (character) who was searching for an accommodation.
The (housing) had to be located in (city)
They had brought with them a (thing) and a (thing)
But the (character) couldn't (variable situation)
The (thing) and (thing) could help the (character)
It turns out the (thing) could (do something)
So the (character) used that to (do something)
The (character) could then (solve the variable)
And so (ending)

We had different versions of the books printed with each a different variable situations: couldn't afford rent, found GIRLS only, found DUTCH only, found ages 23+ only. This was to bring different problems to the table without having to completely change the structure of the stories in the books.

The workshop's format has taken multiple shapes. As of now it has been a small square book, a slide presentation, a foldable poster zine and a calendar. For each workshop, the fill-in story shaped the format of the workshop. Of course, after the story is filled in, the participants are asked to illustrate their stories. After

participants have their stories filled in, they will take turns to read out their stories. This process allows the participants to also start conversations and discuss the stories being read. The stories, which sometimes turn out to be very unrealistic, might make the participants laugh. This all creates an environment that enables them to deal and engage with the topic in a more indirect way.

I have had to adapt this workshop to be digital because of the pandemic. Before the winter break I did a workshop with EGI, which is a company that provides advanced computing services for research. The workshop I made was about working remotely as they agreed this was a relevant topic for them. They, like many others during this pandemic, had to close down the office and work from home, which has been challenging. This was my largest workshop so far, with over 30 participants through Zoom. To stay organized, I set up a google drive where each of them had a presentation with a blank storyline. So they all could work on it at the same time and try and follow with me as I was guiding them through. The outcome of the workshop was wonderful, and because this was a group that knew each other, they had great conversations around the stories. It really opened up a playful and engaging way for them to converse about something they were struggling with. It was also great to see adults who work in a serious and structured environment become so playful with their stories.

I also did a workshop with young teenagers at the School Voor Jong Talent based in KABK, in the Hague. These students proposed many topics, amongst all the topics I selected “time”. I developed a Calendar-like format into which the fill-in story was embedded. What I noticed quickly was that the younger audience was more stuck on filling in the story. Their teacher had also told me that would be the case. He, however, saw

potential in my workshop to help them create something instead of being stuck in their head. The adults in comparison were eager and would often fill in the story easily without much thought. The workshop was also a success and the kids had questions on how they could benefit from this. I explained how they could reutilize the story I had created and put in their own problems and obstacles and quickly simulate solutions for them, which they seemed excited about. One of the students also pointed out that the use of illustration in addition to the text brought a different layer which allowed for another interpretation of the story. It was wonderful to see them open up and see potential in using this workshop method.



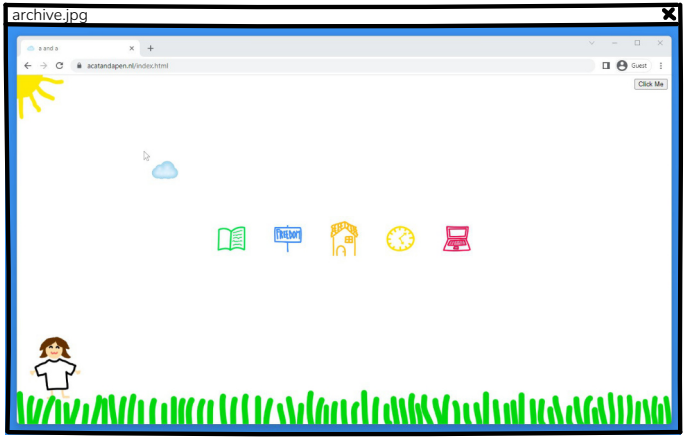


And so they archived it all

And finally in this chapter I will talk about what happens after the workshops and what will happen further.

This project is just starting and it will not end with my graduation show. I have decided that this graduation project is a stepping stone for me. It is just the first step of a long project and practice I aim to develop. For my graduation show, I have developed a playful and informative archive of all the stories created in my workshops. The archive allows the viewers to explore the different ways my workshops have adapted to audiences and topics. I have scanned and archived the workshops I have done from November until March 2022. I hope to be able to archive future workshops as well and also add them to the website. I however decided that scanning all the stories is not so important anymore. The website I have now is filled with enough of this first wave of workshops to understand what they enabled. I found that the importance of the workshop lies in doing the workshop itself. That's what I want to focus on now because I think there is a therapeutic aspect to my workshops that I need to develop further. The archive is practical to communicate what comes out of the workshops. The archive also let's people wonder about stories and by for example reading how an 8 year old gained freedom using bubblegum, the reader can start to wonder themselves and be impacted by the strength of these simple stories.

archive.jpg



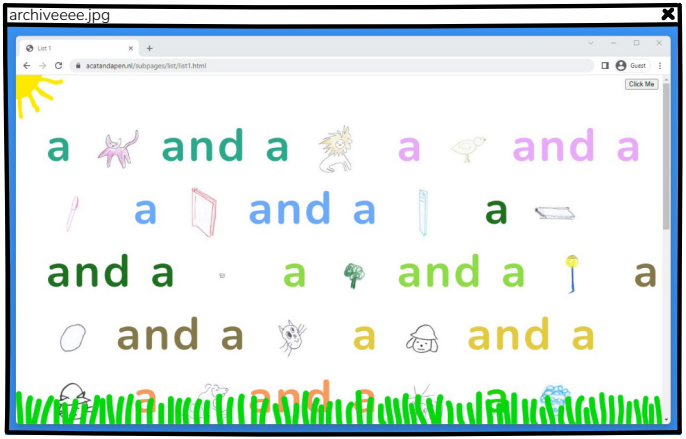
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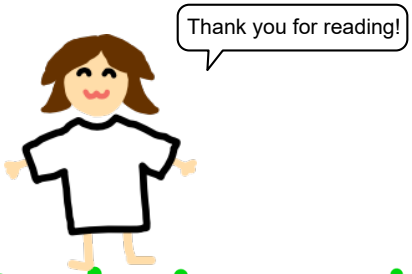
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For the future I would like to also work on the structure and method of the workshop and possibly create a toolkit for the workshops to come. I would like the work and method I developed to be able to stand on its own. As it is now it requires me to be there reshaping it for each audience and topic but I wish to take it further and create a toolkit that anyone can reshape and reuse by themselves. So my next goal is creating more workshops as well as a toolkit. I hope that people will leave the workshops thinking “This was useful, I could use this again”.





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