

Telling migration stories through graphic narratives

Graphic Lives was a joint project between Manchester Metropolitan University and Hyde Community Action. It was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and saw a group of women from the Bangladeshi community in Hyde, Greater Manchester exploring their own life stories, and the historical narratives of their communities, to create digital comics using photographs; drawings; and text in any language.

This booklet outlines the main workshop activities of the project. These took place over approximately four months and, in addition, the group visited local museums and galleries. The final comics created by the women are available [here](#).

You can use this pack in a number of ways:

1. Use all the session plans to replicate the project and create digital comics
2. Use session plans 1-6 (and 10 as appropriate) to create paper comics
3. Use individual session plans as one-off activities with groups.

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Session 1: Introductory workshop

Activity 1: The Arrival

Look at extracts from Shaun Tan's wordless graphic novel, *The Arrival*. If you don't have a copy, there are extracts on [Shaun Tan's website](#). Extracts with several frames on the page work best, for example, 'Inspection' or 'Ticket' available on the website.

Discuss as a group what you think is happening. How do you know what is happening without words? Can you interpret the story in different ways?

Resources required: Copies of *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan, or extracts from his website

Activity 2: Storytelling using pictures

Think about something you did yesterday. Working in pairs, draw something to tell your partner about what you did. You can't talk to them or write any words. Once they have guessed what you did, swap and they draw what they did yesterday while you guess.

Resources required: plain paper and pens

Activity 3: Communicating in words and pictures

Think about a time when you found it difficult to communicate (for example because you didn't speak the same language as someone you needed help from). Draw a series of pictures to show what happened. This time you can use *a few* words as well as pictures if you want to.

Swap comics and try to understand your partner's story.

Resources required: pens and either plain paper or comic grids like those available [here](#).

Session 2: Exploring comics

This session is about looking at examples of different types of comics, graphic novels and picture books and thinking about how they tell a story effectively.

If you don't have many comics of your own, your local public library may have a graphic novels collection you could borrow from or visit for this session.

Some questions to think about when you look at the comics, graphic novels and picture books:

- Which do you like best? Why?
- Which do you like least? Why?
- Does the author use colour? If so how? (For example, do colours suggest different moods?)
- How much writing is there? Can you understand the story without the words?
- How are different characters represented? Do they have their own font, colour, motif etc?
- Does the comic tell a single story, or does it interweave several different stories?
- What ideas does the comic give ideas for your own story?

Some comics, graphic novels and picture books we particularly liked in the Graphic Lives Project are:

- *The Arrival*, Shaun Tan: Using only pictures, this tells the story of a man who migrates to a strange land.
- *Ms Marvel*: Kamala Khan is a teenage Pakistani American. The series is not only about her conflicts with supervillains, but also explores her home and religion.
- Asia Alfasi's comics, including [Beginnings](#) and [The Non-Savy Non-Commuter](#): Asia is a Libyan-British author. Many of her stories explore what it means to belong to more than one culture.
- *American Born Chinese*, Gene Luen Yang: We liked how this graphic novel combines present day stories and traditional folk tales.
- *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears*, Emily Gravett: This picture book gave us lots of ideas for different ways to use images.
- *Voices in the Park*, Anthony Brown: This story is told by four different characters. Each has their own voice written in a different font.
- *Embroideries*, Marjane Satrapi: Another graphic novel from the author of *Persepolis*, but this one focuses on the stories told by the women in her family.

Thanks to [Mel Gibson](#) who shared her collection of comics and graphic novels with us.

Session 3: Personal and community heritage

Activity 1: Responding to oral history accounts

For this activity, we used oral history transcripts of Bangladeshi women from our local archive in Tameside and from a project by Legacy WM called [Bangla Food Journeys](#).

We took short extracts from these transcripts and added images. There is an example in [Appendix A](#).

We showed each image to the group and read the extract before asking:

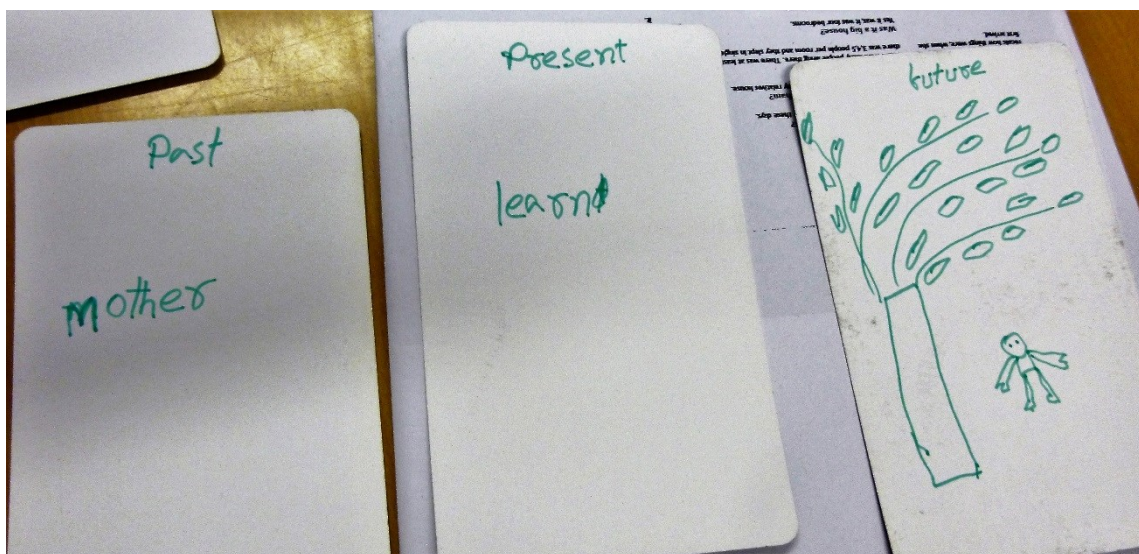
- How is this the same as your experiences?
- How is it different from your experiences?
- What else could you write about these images?

Activity 2: Past, present and future

For this activity, we used the [‘Ghost Lab’ picture cards](#) created by Jim Medway, but any selection of pictures would work.

- Take three cards and put them in a row in front of you.
- Turn over the card on the left. What does this picture make you think of from your **past**?
- Turn over the middle card. What does this picture make you think of from the **present**?
- Turn over the card on the right. What might this picture mean for you in the **future**?
- Now create your own set of three cards with words or pictures showing what is important to you from the past, present and future.

This is an example of one of the sets of cards created by Graphic Lives group.



Session 5: Characters and themes

Activity 1: Snakes and ladders

In a game of snakes and ladders, there are ladders that help you to move forward, and snakes which set you back. Thinking about your own life, what things have been 'ladders' (positive things) and what 'snakes' (negative things) have you faced?




Write or draw your answers on the sheet in [Appendix C](#).

Activity 2: Story characters

Use the sheet in [Appendix D](#) to plan which characters to include in your story. For each character, use words or pictures to show:

- Their role
- A motif you could use to represent them (e.g. a colour or an object)
- Where they are at the start of the story
- Where they will be at the end of the story.

Here is an example of how a Graphic Lives participant developed one of her characters.

Role in story	Motif (e.g. font, colour, object)	First impressions	Unexpected characteristics
Mum		Sad 	

Session 6: Storyboarding

Using the [blank comics pages](#) plan out your comic on paper. You don't need to include every detail. This is just to give an overview of your story.

Resources required: printed comics grids, pens, pencils

This is an example from the Graphic Lives project.



If you are planning to create paper comics, you would then develop these further to produce your final comic. If you are creating digital comics, you should use these as the plan for your digital version.

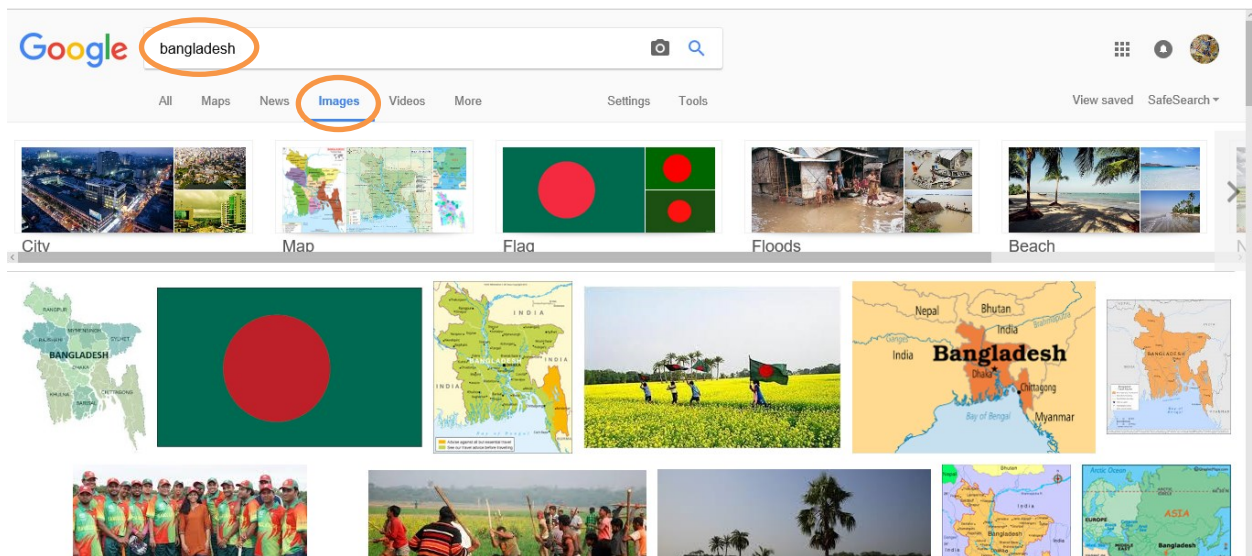
Session 7: Digital skills

Depending on the skill level of the group, this may take more than one session.

NOTE: We used Windows tablets. If you have iPads or Android tablets, there may be slight differences.

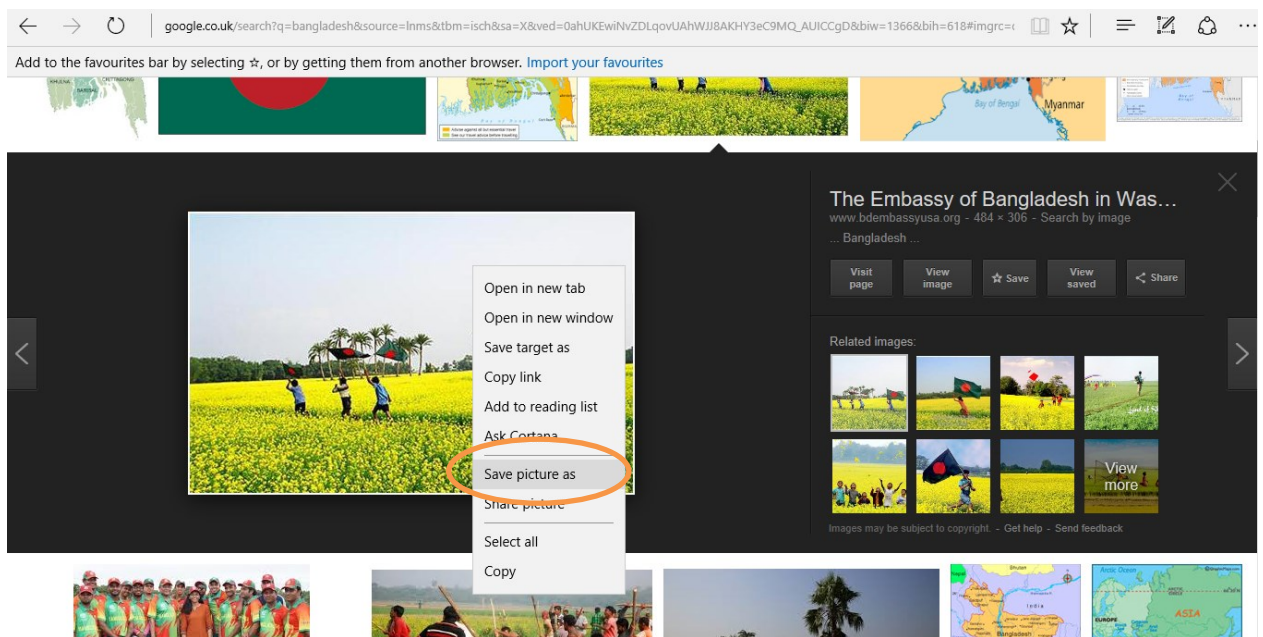
Activity 1: Finding online images

You can search for photos on the Internet by typing what you are looking for in the search box and clicking on 'images'



Tap the picture you want, then choose 'save picture as'.

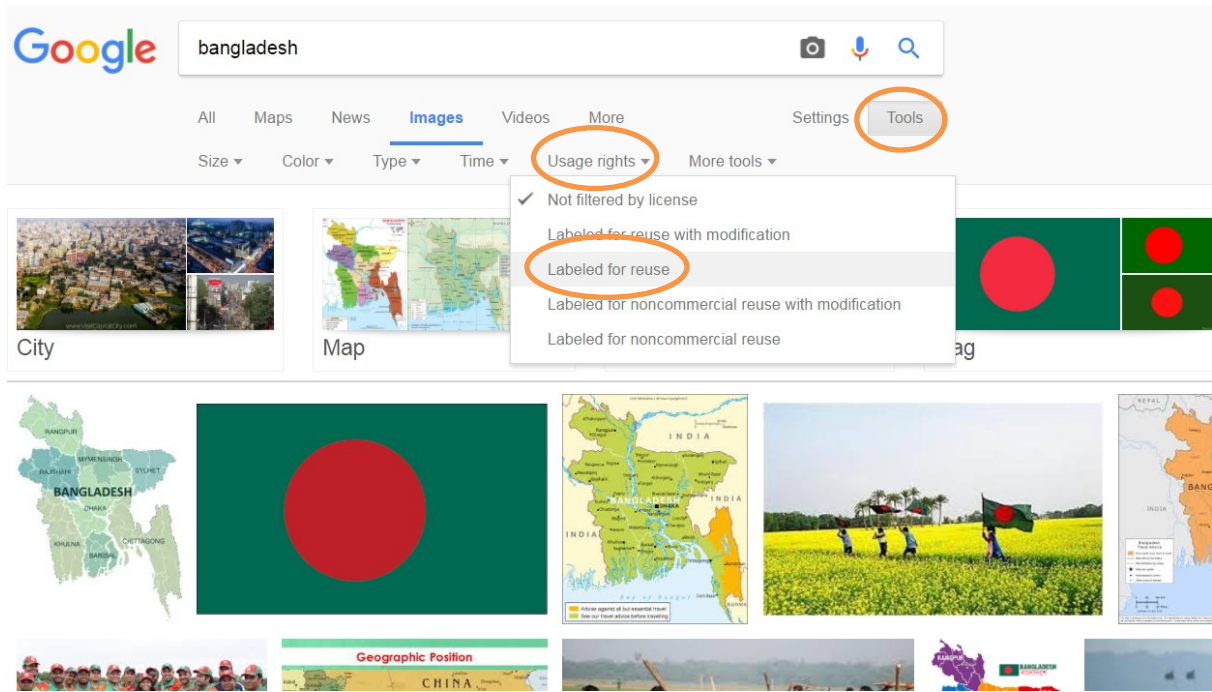
The easiest place to save pictures is in your 'camera roll'.



Because of copyright law, you should only use photos that are licensed for reuse.

To find these, tap 'tools' then 'usage rights'.

Tap 'labelled for reuse' (or 'labelled for reuse with modification' if you want to make changes to the photo).

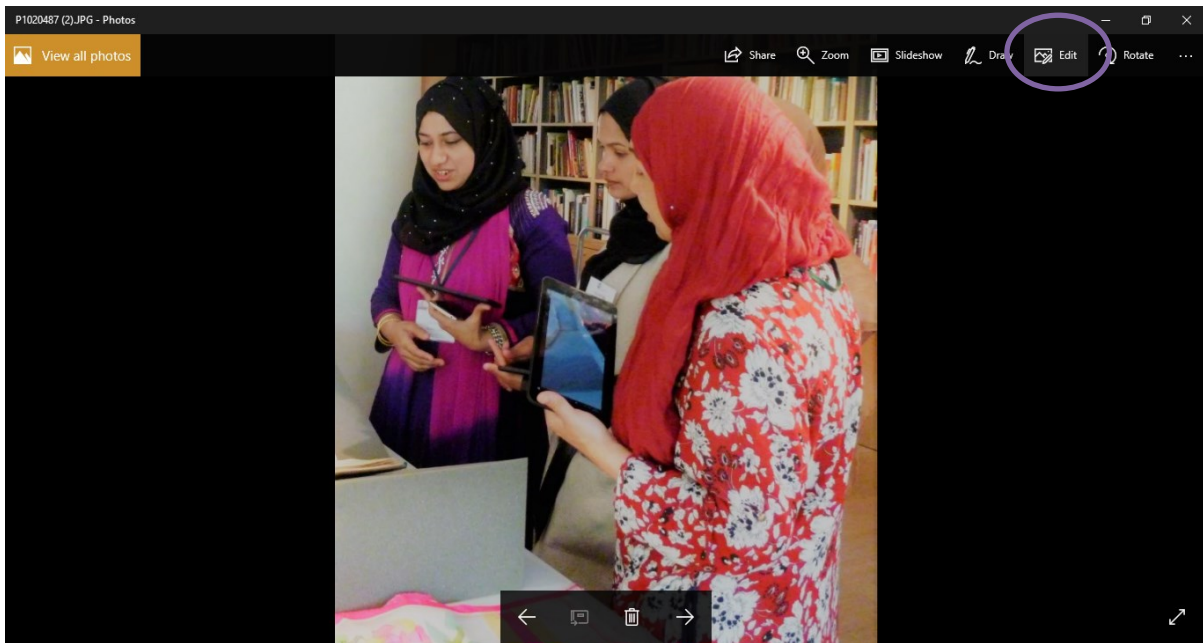


Activity 2: Taking and editing photos

Select the **camera icon** to take a photo.

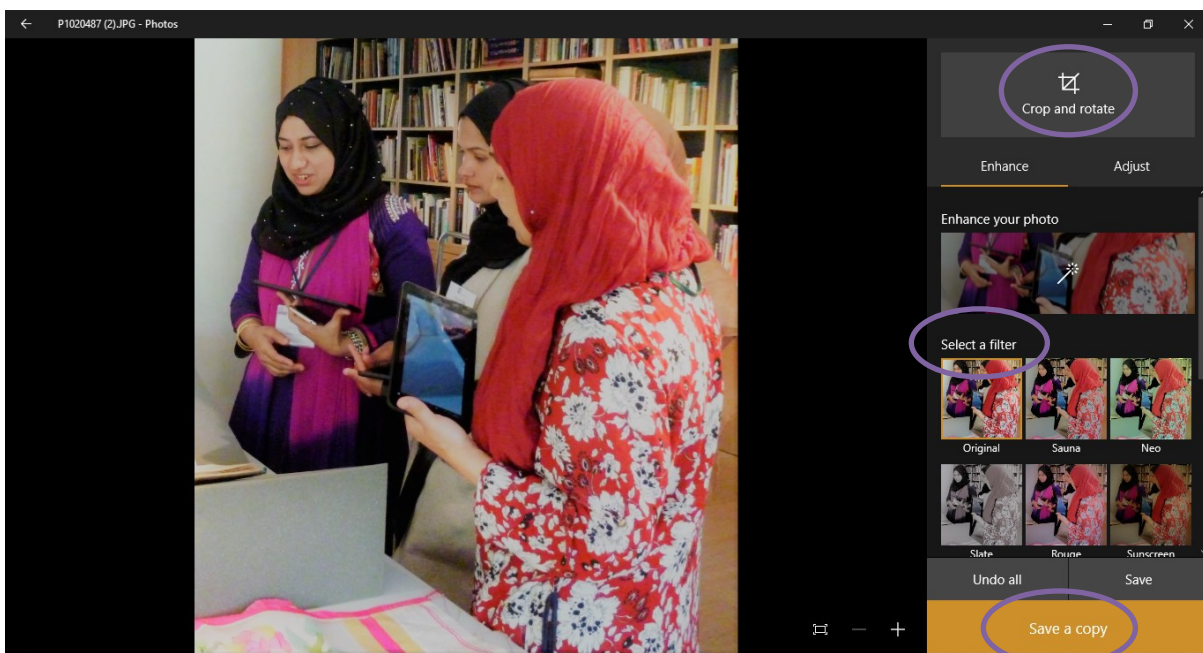
The photo you take will be stored in your photos. Tap on the **photos icon** to view and edit it.

You can edit your photos by tapping **'edit'**.



You can **'crop'** the photo and choose **'filters'** to change how it looks.

When you have finished, **'save a copy'**.



Activity 3: Manipulating photos

You can make your photos to look like paintings or drawings. This is particularly useful if you want to include pictures of people who might not want to be recognised by readers of your comic. There are a number of websites and apps which can do this; we used [Lunapic](#). Here is an example:

Original photo

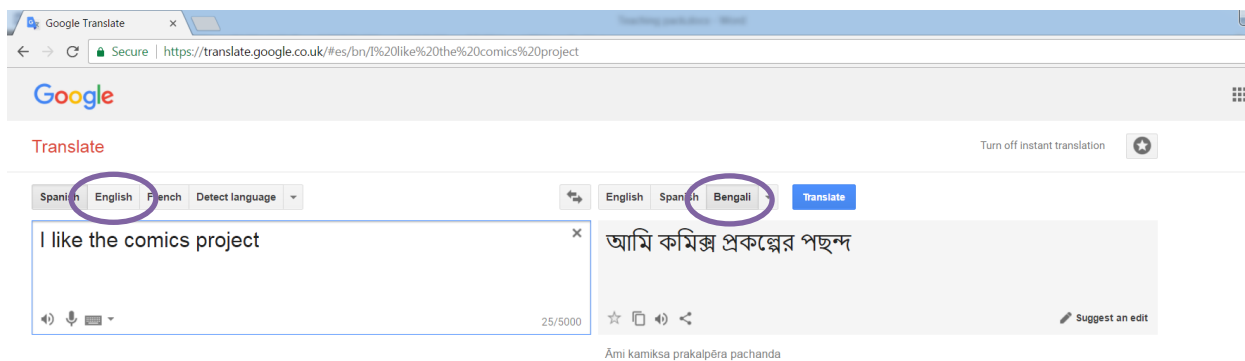
Edited photo



Activity 4: Writing in different languages

You can set keyboards for different alphabets on your tablet under 'settings'.

If you want to translate from one language to another, you can use [Google Translate](#).



Session 8: Using Book Creator

We used an app called [Book Creator](#) to make our comics. There are versions for Windows, iPad and Android devices. There are slight differences between these versions. The instructions in [Appendix E](#) were written for the Windows version. The advantage of this app for us was that it's easy to learn to use and doesn't need an internet connection to work.

Alternative tools

We found Book Creator was the best app for us, but depending on the technology available and the digital skills of your group, there are other options you might want to look at.

- [Pixton](#): browser based, although there is an app for iPad and Android
- [Comic Book!](#): iPad only
- [Comic Life](#): iPad, Mac and Windows versions

Session activity

The week before, each member of the group was told to bring an object along to the session. This should be an everyday object (nothing valuable), but something that was important to them.

- Use the camera on your tablet to take between 4 and 6 photos of your object (for example, from different angles, or close up and further away).
- Practise using editing features (e.g. filters, cropping) to create different types of images (Remember: you can't edit your images in Book Creator; this has to be done in Photos).
- Use Book Creator to tell a short story based on your images. On each page, add one image and some writing. You can write in any language.

Session 9: Comics workshops

This will probably take more than one session. We had 7 sessions to create our comics.

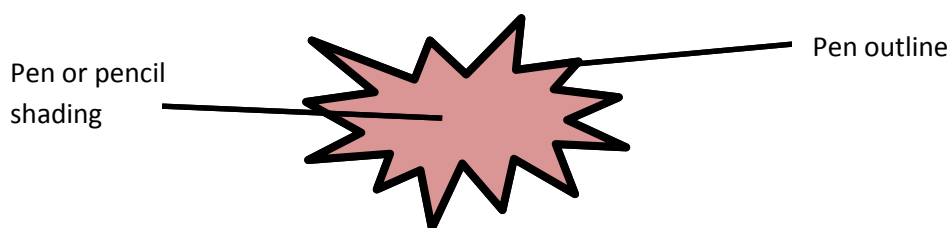
In these sessions, we drew together everything we had done over the previous sessions to create a story in Book Creator (see Session 8 for Book Creator instructions).

You can write in any language and use different types of images.

1. Drawings

Make drawings on paper, then photograph these using your tablet, or scan them for better quality copies.

It's best to use pen for the outlines, but you can colour your drawings using either pens or pencils.



2. Photos from the internet

See Session 7 for information about finding and using photos from the Internet.

3. Your photos (family photos, you as a child etc)

Scan these if possible. Otherwise photograph them using your tablet camera. You may want to manipulate these using a tool such as [Lunapic](#) so people are less recognisable.

4. Staged photos (a group of friends, a person in an office etc)

It might be possible to stage everyday experiences with other members of the group and photograph them using your tablet camera. Again, you can edit these using [Lunapic](#) or a similar tool so people cannot be easily recognised.

10. Other activities

The following are ideas for activities you could use at the start or end of the session, or for participants to do between sessions.

1. Your journey to the UK

Print out an aeroplane like that in [Appendix F](#) for each participant.

Imagine this is the plane that first brought you to the UK. If you could go back in time and talk to your younger self, what would you say? What advice would you give yourself? What do you know now that you wish you had known then? Write this advice on the plane.

2. Luggage labels

Each participant has two luggage labels.

On the first label, write or draw what you expected the UK to be like **before you arrived here**.

On the second label, write or draw what the UK was actually like **when you got here**.

3. I wish I could bring...

What do you wish you could bring with you to the UK – it should be something that you *can't* fit in a suitcase!

Write your answer on a slip of paper, fold it up, then put it into the magic suitcase!

(You can buy little wooden suitcases from a craft shop – or you could just decorate an ordinary box.)

4. Where and what?

Everyone has a batch of post-it notes.

- a. First, write down the places that are important in your story (these might be countries, cities, buildings, rooms, outdoor spaces, vehicles etc). Write one place on each post-it.

Place your post-its on a large piece of paper to create a 'map' of your story.

- b. Next, write down the things that are important in your story (anything apart than people, for example, objects, plants, animals, food). Again, write each one on a separate post-it. Now add these to your story 'map'.

Appendix A: Session 3 example



We did not get shatkora in the UK, we used to get it when it was sent from Bangladesh with people's luggage...This food was available rarely, so this made it special and everyone was happy.

Possible comics storylines

1. Tell one story from start to end (e.g. your migration narrative)

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2. Tell a series of short stories (e.g. examples of times when communicating has been difficult)

-
3. Tell 2 or more overlapping stories

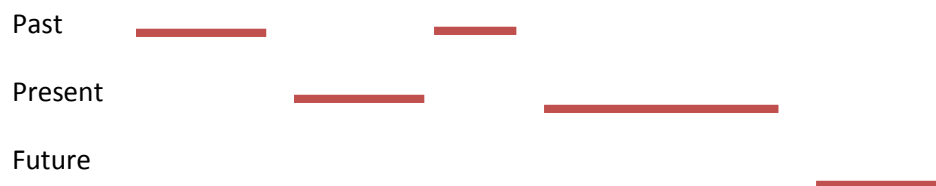
- a. From different characters' perspectives:



- b. In different places:



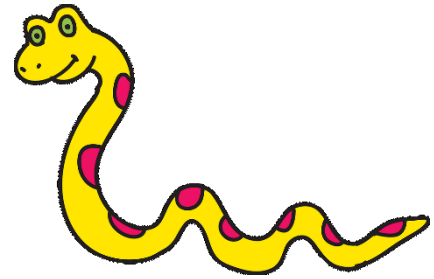
- c. At different times:



- d. Real and fantasy



Appendix C: Session 5, Activity 1



Appendix D: Session 5, Activity 2

Name	Role in story	Motif (e.g. font, colour, object)	Start of story	End of story

Appendix E: Session 8, Book Creator instructions

To start a book:

- Open the Book Creator app
- Choose the layout of your book (portrait, square or landscape)
- Press 'i' to select your page colour
- To add a new page, press the > symbol on the right.

To add a picture

- Press '+'
- Press 'photo'
- Press 'choose from file'
- Press the photo you want to add (a blue box will appear around it)
- Press 'Open'

- You can then change the size of your picture using the dots in each corner or move it different position on the page by dragging it.

To add writing

- Press '+'
- Press 'text'
- Type onto the page that appear
- When you have finished, press the '✓' on the left.

If you want to write in Bangla or Urdu, press **ENG** at the bottom right of the keyboard to change the letters.

You can then drag your text to the right place on the page.

You can change the size of the text, the font or the colour by pressing 'i'.

To add sound

- Press '+'
- Press 'sound'
- Press the circle with a microphone in to start recording.
- Press the circle again to stop recording.
- Move the speaker symbol to where you want it on the page.

To delete something

- Press the thing you want to delete until a blue border appears.
- Press 'i'
- Press 'Delete'

Appendix F: Other activities, aeroplane

