

A Journey Through the Eye

A storytelling and creative writing activity for groups

This activity is for people of all ages and can be done in the gallery, at home or outside.

'A Journey Through the Eye' is a surreal story written by the artist Eileen Agar. This activity uses Agar's story as a starting point to get you thinking about the artworks on display in the exhibition and to create surreal stories and poems inspired by your own experiences and the imagery within Agar's work.

For each activity all you will need is a pencil and a piece of paper or a device to take notes with, like a phone or tablet.

We have included extracts from 'A Journey Through the Eye', as well as collages made up of small sections, lines and shapes found in Agar's artworks, to get you started.

If you are not in the gallery you can use these prompts, along with the video and image resources on our website, to guide you on your journey.



Whitechapel Gallery



“Fancy marrying a tadpole!”

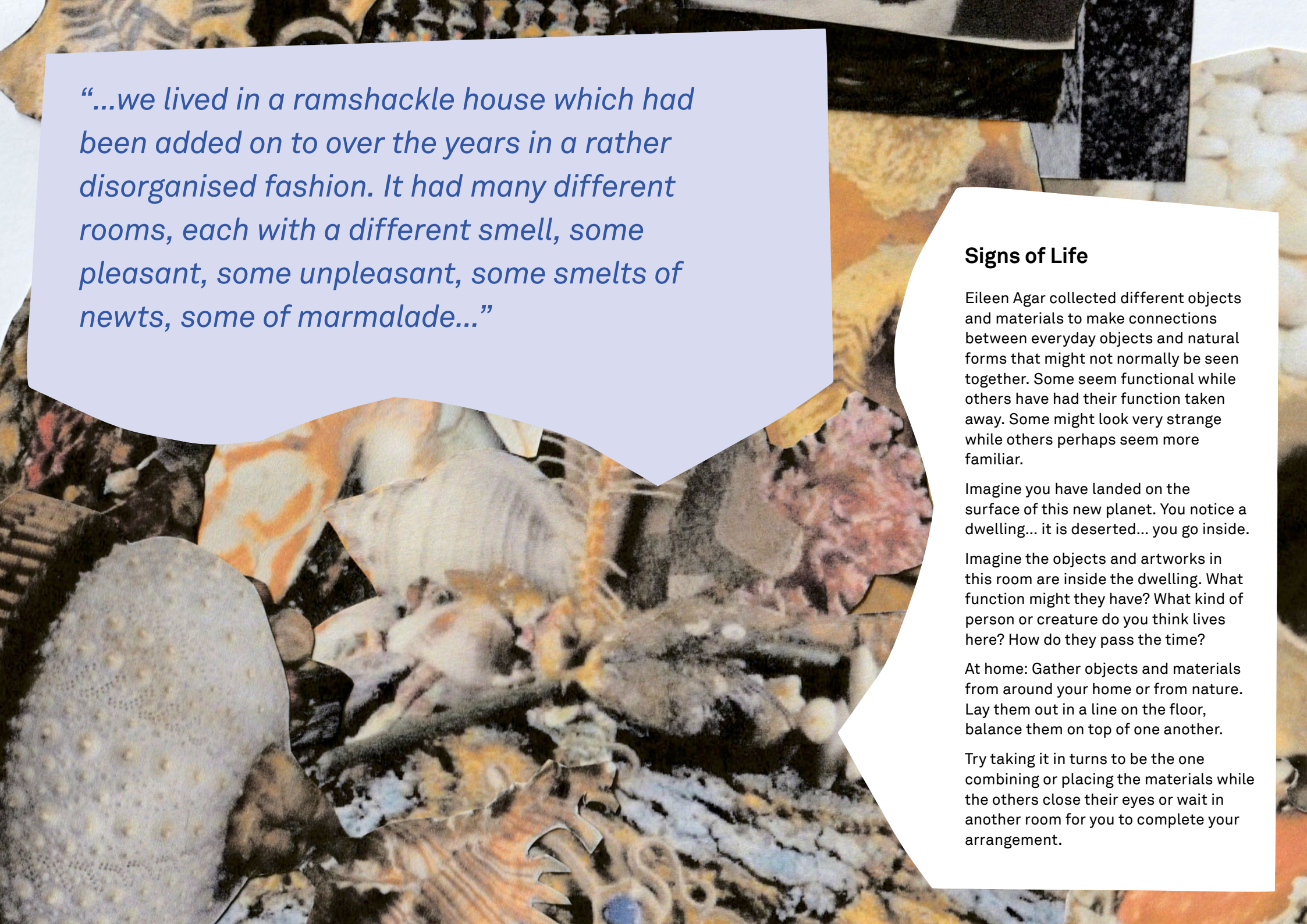
I exclaimed as I struggled through the Milky Way. What a fete! How audacious and instinctive, how bizarre and how beastly. I wonder if the tadpole thought it fun to wear white tie and tails and drink champagne or did he swim in the primeval soup I pondered as I wandered along a path in the wood strewn with dead leaves lying like forgotten ghosts of my remembered friends.”

Setting the Scene

You are an intergalactic tadpole wiggling through space... Imagine each artwork is a planet, a meteorite, a moon. Which artworks do you feel drawn to?

Choose one and stay in its orbit for a while observing its curious new landscape. Look closely for signs of life...

On a piece of paper jot down words, or make marks, in response to some of the things that you and your group observe... They might be colours, shapes, textures, symbols...



“...we lived in a ramshackle house which had been added on to over the years in a rather disorganised fashion. It had many different rooms, each with a different smell, some pleasant, some unpleasant, some smells of newts, some of marmalade...”

Signs of Life


Eileen Agar collected different objects and materials to make connections between everyday objects and natural forms that might not normally be seen together. Some seem functional while others have had their function taken away. Some might look very strange while others perhaps seem more familiar.

Imagine you have landed on the surface of this new planet. You notice a dwelling... it is deserted... you go inside.

Imagine the objects and artworks in this room are inside the dwelling. What function might they have? What kind of person or creature do you think lives here? How do they pass the time?

At home: Gather objects and materials from around your home or from nature. Lay them out in a line on the floor, balance them on top of one another.

Try taking it in turns to be the one combining or placing the materials while the others close their eyes or wait in another room for you to complete your arrangement.




“What a marvellous structure a forest. I’m glad my middle name is Forrester, though I hope my ancestors weren’t charcoal burners and didn’t cut down trees. Fancy chopping a living tree in two, you can hear them whispering to each other in their own language, and then moaning and groaning and getting furious in a storm with a cloud overhead bursting into tears of rain.”

Creature Communication

In the distance you catch sight of a group of creatures, you quietly move towards them to watch what they are doing without disturbing them.

Pretend some of the artworks in this room or objects in your home are creatures, imagine they are communicating with each other.

Are the creatures the same or are they from different species? What is similar about them? What is different? What sounds do they make? How do they move? What are they saying to one another?



“Human beings become physically different with different kinds of experience, different conditions of air, different foods eaten, different learning situations. There are probably more differences in human brains than in any other animal, partly because the human brain does most of its developing in the outside world.”

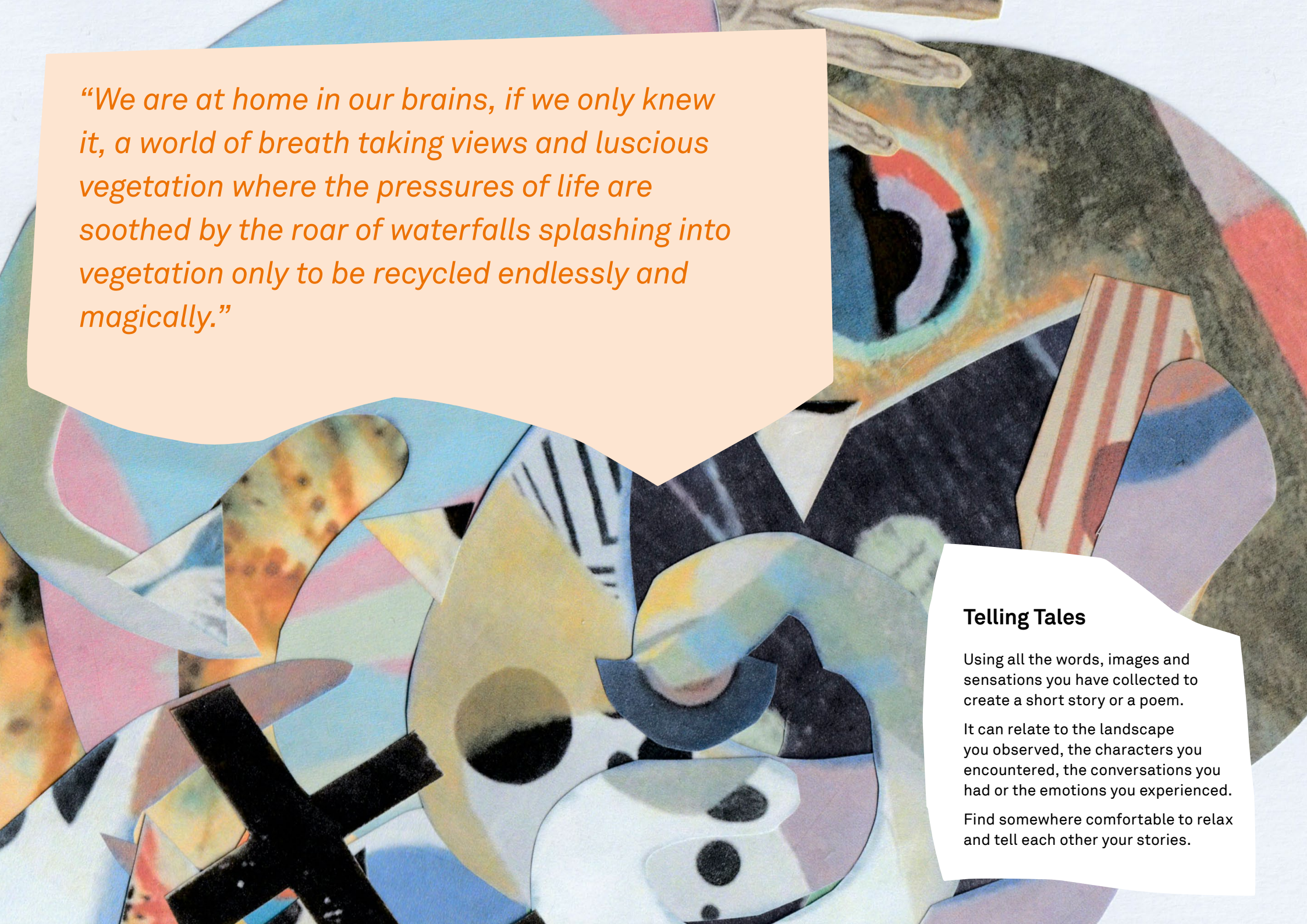
Making Contact

Sometimes we do not share a language or have the words to communicate how we are feeling or what we are experiencing. Often artists make artworks to communicate the things there are no words for.

Communicate with your body

Try choosing a small mark, line or shape. Mirror the shape using your fingers, hands arms or your whole body.

How does it feel? Take different shapes from different works and combine them as a group or on your own.



“We are at home in our brains, if we only knew it, a world of breath taking views and luscious vegetation where the pressures of life are soothed by the roar of waterfalls splashing into vegetation only to be recycled endlessly and magically.”

Telling Tales

Using all the words, images and sensations you have collected to create a short story or a poem.

It can relate to the landscape you observed, the characters you encountered, the conversations you had or the emotions you experienced.

Find somewhere comfortable to relax and tell each other your stories.