

FREE
VERSION



THE IMMERSIVE LEARNING TOOLKIT
**A Beginner's Guide
for Teachers**



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Foreword

I am sure that any teacher would hope to provide the children in their care with profound learning experiences; by facilitating moments of awe, wonder and delight that produce important educational outcomes and leave lasting memories. If this is your aspiration, then *The Immersive Learning Toolkit* is for you.

After 24 years as a teacher, and a further 18 years as a headteacher, I have come to believe that children should be educated through a broad and balanced curriculum with the Arts at its core. Education is most effective when it is experiential rather than theoretical; when it is embodied in physical reality rather than abstract and page-based; when it requires active participation rather than mere observation, and when it harnesses the power of surprise, intrigue and drama.

Observing the impact of Punchdrunk Enrichment's work strengthened these beliefs in me. In 2008, I had the privilege of hosting and collaborating on the very first of the company's productions - *Under the Eiderdown*.

Early on in the process, Peter Higgin (newly appointed Artistic Director of Punchdrunk Enrichment) and I agreed that the focus should be on raising standards in two specific areas of the curriculum: Speaking & Listening and Writing. This theatrical experience would function as a stimulus for its audience's own creative expression.

The school buzzed with excitement as word spread - teachers, parents, governors, cooks, premises staff, and headteachers of other schools all came to see. As well as the impact on the children (including those with Special Educational Needs and disabled pupils), these projects have also had a remarkable benefit on our teaching teams. Having seen the energy that could be stimulated by an experience of theatrical immersion, they were inspired to be more imaginative and more daring when planning lessons. Their practice was suddenly infused with a spirit of invention, and the results were noticeable. Enthusiastic teaching is a crucial requirement for enthusiastic learning.

Over the next ten years, we hosted a series of original and ambitious productions devised by this transformational company. **I can honestly say that the best thing I ever did for my school as a Headteacher was to bring in Punchdrunk Enrichment.**

Now you have in your hands the toolkit for achieving similar results. It is an important and welcome resource because of the emphasis that it places on creativity in education. It is full of innovative ideas and has the potential to make learning intensely exciting. Be brave, be enthusiastic, and take risks. Your pupils won't forget the experience of going on the journey with you, and they'll be having so much fun they won't notice how much they are learning in the process.

Good luck!

Elizabeth Booth MBE

Your Immersive Learning Journey

Immersive learning will be a valuable tool in many areas of your school. Depending on your role, you may use this toolkit in many different ways for a variety of desired outcomes.

If you are a **class teacher**, this pack can help you to unlock your own creativity by providing a variety of immersive learning projects for you to deliver in your classroom. Further to this, you will learn about how Punchdrunk Enrichment creates immersive narratives, and be provided with a framework for you to create your own immersive learning experiences.

If you are a **subject lead**, this pack offers the opportunity to redefine your department's approach to the curriculum by offering alternative ways to approach your subject.

If you are a member of the **senior leadership team**, guiding your school in an immersive learning approach will not only transform your student body's engagement with learning, but will help build a whole school community ethos. Camaraderie, collaboration and teamwork are major elements of all immersive learning projects. Immersive learning also stands as a development opportunity for your staff body especially teachers who are looking for ways to challenge their own practice.

"It gave teachers licence to think 'We can do this. We can do more of this.' There are exciting and amazing ways in which children can learn that stay with them for a very, very, very long time."

Norma Hewis, Headteacher
Jubilee Primary School



Route 158, photograph by Nina Photography.

Punchdrunk Enrichment

Punchdrunk Enrichment makes immersive theatre for schools, families and communities. You'll find us in classrooms, theatres and warehouses across the UK and beyond, sharing joy and wonder.

In a complicated world, we believe our imaginations can help us create change. Our projects and productions unlock creativity. We motivate children to get writing, reading and sharing their experiences.

In schools, our immersive learning projects take the principles of immersive theatre into education settings, driving learning, boosting engagement and opening up a world of possibility in pupils. Not only for children, we also give teachers the chance to re-fuel their own imaginations with approaches that will raise standards across the curriculum.

"The evidence shows that this approach to immersive learning produces joy in teachers and pupils. By making school a more joyful place to be [...] pupils have more positive associations with school and learning."

Centre for Education and Youth
Punchdrunk Enrichment Impact Report

In 2008, we created *Under the Eiderdown* and schools were introduced to Weevil's Bric-a-Brac Shop - a magical shop that found its way to a primary school in search of children with fantastic imaginations. The impact was amazing.

This led to more creativity, more stories, more imagination. Suddenly, Weevil's Bric-a-Brac Shop was appearing in more schools; opening up a world of possibility, positivity and purpose to the pupils it encountered.

Since then, we have made it our mission to connect exciting stories and characters with the people they need most - children with extraordinary imaginations.

To find out more about our work, please visit: punchdrunkenrichment.org.uk

The Lost Lending Library, photograph by Paul Cochrane.



Punchdrunk Enrichment's Immersive Learning Manifesto

The work of Punchdrunk Enrichment has grown and developed over many years. We have made it our mission to make strange and surprising, magical projects in schools. Bringing joyful and awe inspiring immersive learning into school communities. Engaging, growing and nurturing pupils' and teachers' imaginations and creative spirit. Making school feel more positive, giving purpose to learning and opening up a world of possibilities. Taking schools and teachers on playful immersive learning journeys.

Immersive learning can manifest itself at all levels of school life. From short rituals to small interventions; from single class projects to whole school endeavours. From the transformation of school sites to embedding the practice as a school-wide pedagogical approach. Our practice has been informed, developed, delivered and grown by a huge amount of people. Whether teacher,

director, writer, designer, performer or child. This practice is housed in the minds, hearts and memories of all who have experienced it. We thank them for being part of this journey.

All Punchdrunk Enrichment projects require input from teachers and therefore have training embedded within them. Sometimes, this training is embodied in the experience itself; to experience immersive learning is to know and understand the impact of the work. Other times, this training is offered as CPD sessions or masterclasses. We construct this training with care and attention. We like to think that all who train with us enter into 'The School of Enrichment' a metaphorical space in an imagined world of Weevillania through which teachers and practitioners pass to access and deliver our work. With even this framing speaking directly to our practice.



A Small Tale, photograph by Stephen Dobbie.

We love to deliver immersive experiences but know the most sustainable way for this practice to proliferate, is for schools, teachers and creative practitioners to embed it as an approach.

Creativity and creative approaches are always needed in schools and now more than ever. At a time when the focus of school life is narrowed, both in scope and the value of what is measured, Punchdrunk Enrichment offers an alternative approach.

We want to grow our immersive learning movement and offer our manifesto to all who wish to join us or continue on this journey. We invite you to take these statements on board, embody them in your approach to school and learning whether immersive or otherwise and to join the growing number of teachers and schools who value the transformative potential of immersive learning.



The Oracles, photograph by Paul Cochrane.

Immersive schools believe that children can't be what they can't imagine themselves to be.

Immersive teachers let children see themselves in roles, and exercise their own imaginations too, allowing them to imagine the future possibilities for themselves.

Immersive schools treat teachers as creative practitioners.

This creativity should be nurtured and developed. Teachers should be given space and time to do so and be bold in their creation without fear of failure.

Immersive schools know that enjoyment and entertainment are as valuable as knowledge acquisition.

Neither is mutually exclusive. Exciting learning takes place when they are in the service of each other; increasing motivation to learn and making the acquisition of knowledge and skills entertaining, enjoyable and purposeful.

Immersive schools believe manifestation is powerful.

Magic is real to those who believe it is real. The more you believe the more real the magic becomes. Investment in a belief in something increases your chance of manifesting it. This can be exercised through creative practice and extends beyond the realms of magic.

Immersive schools recognise arts education and arts based learning is a fundamental human right.

Therefore, they should be embedded at the heart of school life and allow this approach to transcend traditional subject boundaries. Immersive schools seek to create whole school immersive projects that raise standards across the curriculum and engage your whole school as a learning community.

Immersive schools value the shared experience of whole class and whole school learning.

When we learn as communities, we grow as communities. We strengthen bonds between learner and teacher, and the communications between homes, schools and the wider community.

Immersive schools know that children learn with all their senses and with their bodies too.

Being part of a story helps you embody and remember physically and sensorily the narrative and associated learning. Immersive schools create experiences that actively engage our mind, body and senses. The experiences are at their best when this is built intentionally into a learning experience and is integral to it.

Immersive schools are ripe for transformation.

Spaces can be reimaged physically, figuratively or mentally: classrooms, cupboards, playgrounds, corridors and more. The limits are only that of your imagination and immersive teachers make space to open up their minds to these possibilities. This changes the relationship with school for all involved. When school becomes a place of wonder, it becomes a wonderful place to be.

Immersive schools value play as a fundamental part of child development and that children are at their best when they are playing.

They recognise that teachers must be given agency to facilitate a playful environment as guides and passengers into playfulness. They are led by child curiosity and unafraid to be changeable and adaptable.

Immersive schools create learning experiences that put children at the centre of the experience making them the protagonist or hero of a story that happens to them. They create experiences where the learning of children is embedded within a narrative and where learning directly impacts the progression of experiences and narratives.

Immersive schools see the inherent value in creating beautiful and complex experiences. This takes creative energy, a level of artistic enquiry and time. Immersive schools make time and space for this. This speaks to their care and attention to children's education and a knowledge that this investment creates a high quality of experience.

Immersive schools put stories and narratives at the heart of education creating experiences where narrative and learning intertwine and interplay in the service of another. They make children's learning the driving force of the progression of a narrative; giving children a sense of agency and palpable engagement. Immersive schools understand that the impact of this can be powerful and transformative.

Immersive schools uphold that the quality of learning is just as important as quantifiable measures of success of the learning itself. The benefits and impacts may not be easily measured or defined. This leads immersive schools to look outside and beyond the standard metrics.

Immersive schools understand that learning shouldn't be about a fixed destination rather a preparation for an ongoing journey. Your mind is a map, your curiosity your compass, and your imagination the limits of what you can discover.



The Wishing Cupboard, photograph by Stephen Dobbie.

Immersive Learning

"Children were more motivated to write and had better vocabularies within Punchdrunk Enrichment sessions compared to everyday activities."

Immersive Learning
Journeys Evaluation Report
i2 Media



The Oracles, photograph by Paul Cochrane.

Immersive learning is a pedagogical approach that places learners at the heart of an exciting narrative. Educational and curricular benefits are wrapped into a story that delivers children's learning as a byproduct of taking part in an adventure.

In all immersive learning work, children are the protagonists of the story; the centre of the action and the driving force of the narrative. Events cannot move forward without the children; they will be offered a mission, their actions will impact the narrative and ultimately they will be successful in their quest.

Whilst all immersive learning narratives are created with key learning outcomes in mind, the children are never made aware of this.

We have observed the positive impact immersive learning has on children's learning and overall development. Our work is infused with learning and social outcomes leading to Purpose (feelings of empowerment), Positivity (feelings of happiness) and Possibility (motivation to change).

Immersive learning involves children in mission-critical tasks that need to be completed successfully, which enhances their self-perception and appreciation of their own expertise. Children are enthusiastic about these tasks and often want to do more than they are assigned.

Immersive learning also breaks down social barriers among children in a class, as they interact and collaborate with each other. Teachers tell us that children are more engaged and willing to participate, particularly reluctant learners. Parents and carers have reported that children are motivated to read and write more at home.

A recent report, written by the Centre for Education and Youth, details the impact of Punchdrunk Enrichment's immersive learning pedagogy. The study highlights that immersive learning has a particular impact on children's positive attitude towards learning, themselves and their role in society.

"Participation in immersive learning programmes is associated with improvements in pupils' happiness, wellbeing, positive attitudes towards learning and pupils' ability to learn from mistakes.

Pupils participating in immersive learning show [...] promising improvements in their sense of agency, motivation, self-efficacy and positive attitudes towards their local community."

Centre for Education and Youth
Punchdrunk Enrichment Impact Report



A Small Tale, photograph by Lizzie Henshaw.

Immersive learning projects come to life as a combination of three core elements:

- Learning Objectives
- Narrative Choices
- Design Elements

This unique combination helps to build powerful alternative worlds that inspire both children and adults while holding learning objectives at their heart.

Learning Objectives

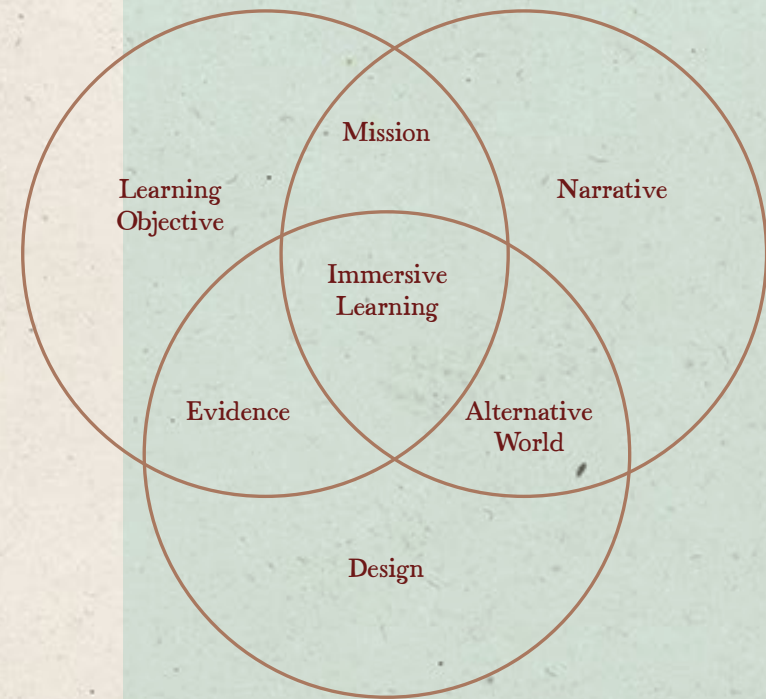
A brief and concise description of what learning will be achieved by the end of the project.

Narrative Choices

Your narrative choices build the story of your project. These may be in the form of character, backstory, setting and the structure of the overall plot. Your narrative will always hinge on children's actions to drive the story forward.

Design Elements

Design interventions form the aesthetic world of your project. The design of your project helps the audience to create a more tangible understanding of the alternative world of your project. They could be in the form of transforming spaces, introducing boundary objects or creating communications from a character.



The Vanishing Land, photograph by Paul Cochrane.



The Lost Lending Library, photograph by Paul Cochrane.

Alternative World

The alternative world of your project is a combination of narrative and design elements. The alternative world is the home of your project

Mission

The audience's mission is formed by weaving a learning objective into the narrative of the project. Children's attention is drawn towards driving the story forwards and learning objectives are achieved through their participation in the adventure.

Evidence

From the very beginning of an immersive learning project, design elements introduce the children to a new and exciting adventure. The world of your project and its characters is evidenced in the details of the objects, communications and spaces that the children encounter.

As children take part in the mission, design is crucial to proving children's impact on the narrative. This may, for instance, take the form of evidence being left by characters. These design interventions feed back to the children the impact of their actions and help drive their sense of purpose in completing their mission.



Route 158, photographs by Nina Photography.



Pedagogy

Although immersive learning was borne by adapting theatrical principles for an educational setting, much of our approach is aligned with the theories and principles of history's most pivotal educators. As a company, we value the graft of educators who have come before us and have fought for child-led and creatively-driven pedagogy to be pushed to the forefront of education.

Aspects of Dorothy Heathcote's *Mantle of the Expert* approach are recognised in all immersive learning projects: by placing children at the heart of a narrative, we ensure that children are in control of their own learning journey. They are offered the agency to solve problems independently; the space to work collaboratively towards a common goal and the freedom to learn how powerful their instincts and choices can be. Children's learning is active and meaningful, rather than repetitive and constrained.

Immersive learning subverts the traditional hierarchy associated with classroom based learning. We offer teachers the chance to learn alongside their pupils, to follow their lead and collaborate with their cohort as equals through dialogue, exploration and action. Paulo Freire's approach of *Dialogic Learning* can be found in immersive classrooms; focusing on conversation and discussion based learning removes the need for adults to deposit information to passive students.



The Lost Lending Library, photograph by Paul Cochrane.

By handing agency to children, the classroom environment can nurture children's confidence to own their learning experience. Friere's concept of *Praxis* (the ability to reflect on a given circumstance and take the appropriate actions to lead to a desired outcome) is reflected in the action and impact stage of immersive narratives. As children acknowledge the impact their actions have on the alternative world, they are able to take this learning further and into everyday life. By allowing learners the space to reflect on their actions, the impact it has made and the successful outcome of this process, children are encouraged to become transformative thinkers, both in school and throughout life.

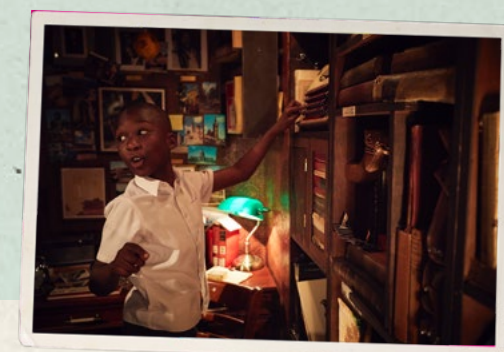
Children can reflect on a variety of possible actions, anticipate the impact and consequences of these actions and decide whether this is a fruitful path to take.

The goal-driven missions and feedback loops of our work chime with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's principle of flow: both are designed to aid learners to fully engage with the task at hand. By ensuring that learning outcomes can be met by pupils following their natural instincts to complete these mission-critical tasks, children are able to face a challenge head on and visualise their success; helping to free learners from the daunting prospect of failure.

From their position within the narrative, learners are engrossed in an adventure outside of the normal curricular structure. As the pressures of attaining assigned learning outcomes become less dominant, a state of flow builds; expression, vocabulary and writing come more naturally as purpose is embedded within the learning.

"Heathcote's approach to working with young people chimes with my beliefs. She had an underlying commitment and belief in the power of the imagined and the possible."

Peter Higgin, Artistic Director,
Punchdrunk Enrichment



Above - Enitan's Game, photograph by Ali Wright.

Below - The Lost Lending Library, photograph by Paul Cochrane.

Immersive Play

Dr Angela Colvert is a researcher with a longstanding interest in play-based learning. She has been involved in a number of research projects for Punchdrunk Enrichment. In response to observations of our project *The Oracles* she began to explore the significance of play in the company's work. This led to the development of her model of Immersive Play.

She presents a child centred approach that maps 'effect and affect' and the intensity of experience as related to the level of engagement with an experience. She explores the affective nature of creative choices: sense of place, sense of urgency, sense of purpose, sense of community. And, the effects on participants as a result: constructing stories, tackling challenges, performing belief and reshaping relationships.

Colvert's work explores the impact and pedagogical significance of immersive learning. In particular the power of reconstructing and reframing our understanding of the impact of learning environments and the relationship between learners and learning.



Route 158, photographs by Nina Photography.

Principles

Here are some principles that we adhere to when creating immersive learning work.

A Story that Happens to You

When inviting children to a world of imagination, there are a variety of different approaches.

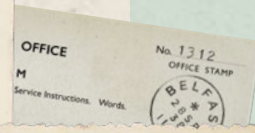
In theatre, the most common approach is to ask an audience to suspend their disbelief. With children, we might explain that we are going to a show, that there will be actors, expectations and ultimately the overall experience is pretend. In traditional theatre settings, children are taught to be passive; to observe the action and be entertained by the story.

Immersive learning takes an entirely different approach. We offer children an invitation to step into a world of imagination, creativity and adventure; a world where the decisions they make are crucial to the completion of the story.

Although children may recognise that the world they are being invited to enter is fictional, their role within the story is not; their real life choices serve a purpose and their actions directly impact the character or the alternative world they have been introduced to.

"We opened up a whole entire world."

Year 5 Pupil
Montbelle Primary School



A Curious Quest, photographs by Stephen Dobbie.

Education Wrapped Up as a Story

Whilst all immersive learning projects are created with key learning outcomes in mind, this is never disclosed to the children. Educational benefits are wrapped within a story that delivers children's learning as a byproduct of taking part in an adventure.

Sometimes pupils may start to recognise that the story happens to be taking them down an educational path but as these projects aren't framed in the traditional lesson format, pupils dive head first into learning, driven by a desire to fulfil the task at hand.

Although children may recognise that the world they are being invited to enter is fictional, their role within the story is not; their real life choices serve a purpose and their actions directly impact the character or the alternative world they have been introduced to.

"I have never seen the children as engaged in anything before."

Katie Morbey,
St Mary's Catholic
Primary School

Sustaining the Magic

Magic and the belief in imaginative possibilities is crucial to all of Punchdrunk Enrichment's work. Depending on the age group you are working with, it is likely that children will fully believe in the alternative world they are invited into.

For that reason, in order for children's experiences to be protected, it is essential that every adult in your school community is on board to sustain the magic.

Every adult needs to choose to believe - if a child overhears a conversation that breaks the fictional world, you can be certain that knowledge will spread through the playground like wildfire!

Further to this, children should not be made aware that they are part of a project; instead, an adventure has arrived at their doorstep and they are empowered to explore this offer further.



"When I grow up, I will be a librarian."

Year 5 Pupil
Heronsgate Primary School



A Small Tale, photographs by Paul Cochrane and Stephen Dobbie.

Children as Protagonists

In all immersive learning work, empowerment and engagement are paramount. The inversion of power hierarchies plays a large role in establishing children at the heart of the narrative: the children know more than the adults in our work and the story can only progress if the children take charge of their mission.

Often the sign of an immersive learning project getting off to a good start is the moment when a child interjects with **“I think we should...”** or **“Maybe we need to...”**

Our work is designed for children to take the lead role in an adventure; their instincts, their discoveries and their choices allow the story to move forward.

Albeit difficult, it's essential for adults to take a step back and allow children to pursue their instincts. Sometimes, they'll get it wrong. Allow time for them to go back to the drawing board and come up with a different solution. Being offered space to make mistakes, to self-rectify and to own this journey is an essential element of our work.

This principle is not just to empower the children you are working with, but for you to experience a new relationship with your pupils. One where you are able to take their lead and learn from their choices.



The Oracles, photograph by Paul Cochrane.

"They have taken to writing stories in a new way by using first hand experience, feeling like they are experts and to use imagination."

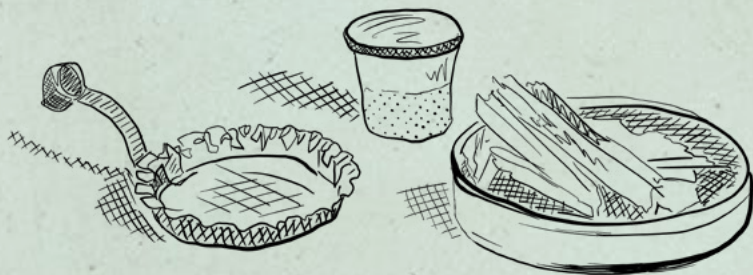
A Teacher, Year 5,
De Lucy Primary School

Detailed Design

The objects children encounter in immersive learning projects must always be made with a high level of attention to detail. That's not to suggest that in order to deliver immersive learning work teachers also need to be exceptional artists!

We often use the phrase *touch real* to describe the design elements of our projects. Touch real objects are items that can be handled and inspected by children to help solidify the belief in the alternative world of the project. Where possible, we use real objects (sometimes sourced from secondhand shops) and integrate them into our work.

We always encourage children to interact with the objects they find throughout the story, whether it be a letter, a precious or curious object or even something that has crossed through a portal from an alternative world.



A Small Tale, photographs by Lizzie Henshaw and Stephen Dobbie.

Immersive Narratives

Myths

Myths form the foundation of any immersive learning project. An imaginative alternative reality that offers an adventure into the classroom setting.

Here are a few examples from our Teacher-Led Adventure series. For more information on these projects, please head to the appendix.

The Wishing Cupboard

The Wishing Cupboard provides a home for lost objects to find their true purpose. A simple hair grip might realise its destiny as a frog's walking stick or a sunflower seed might realise its true calling - to become the scale on a dragon's tail.

A Small Tale

Some books hold a special type of magic that allows their characters to escape into our world.

The Creature Chronicles

Some imaginations are so powerful that they have the power to bring imaginary creatures to life.



The Wishing Cupboard, photograph by Stephen Dobbie.

After the myth of the alternative world has been established, we break up our narratives into four key stages:

PORTAL
MISSION
ACTION AND IMPACT
SUCCESS

Portal

A portal is a threshold from an alternative world into our world. This may be a physical doorway, but could also be an everyday item. In *A Small Tale*, two tiny people are able to escape into our world through the pages of a picture book.

Mission

The mission casts the children as the main character of the narrative. The mission will always link to a learning objective.

Action and Impact

In immersive learning projects, children's actions will always impact the narrative. This is the section of a project where children will complete activities or writing to help them achieve their mission and their learning objectives.

Success

It is essential that all learners are successful in their mission. They may receive a token of thanks from the alternative world for their role in the adventure.



A Small Tale, photographs by Stephen Dobbie.

Purchase the full Immersive Learning Toolkit

The Immersive Learning Toolkit gives teachers everything they need to start developing their own immersive learning projects.

Purchase the full version of the toolkit for access to:

- A step-by-step guide to creating classroom based adventures
- A thorough investigation of immersive learning practice, its principles and pedagogy
- A selection of mini immersive learning projects ready to bring adventure to your classroom
- Narrative and design exercises to support you in your creative journey

Acknowledgements

The Immersive Learning Toolkit references other Punchdrunk Enrichment resources, projects and characters, drawn from the work of creative teams including Katy Balfour, Matthew Blake, Tara Boland, Alice Devlin, Kirsty Harris, Kat Heath, Peter Higgin, Mia Jerome, Steve McCourt, Fran Moulds, Matt Odell, Daniel Richards, Kate Rigby, Joanne Skapinker and Livi Vaughan.

For more information regarding the creative and production teams involved in the creation of our projects, please visit our [website](#).

All black and white illustrations by Casey Jay Andrews.

The Immersive Learning Toolkit is written and compiled by Steve McCourt.



A Small Tale, photograph by Stephen Dobbie.