



ROMANI  
CULTURAL & ARTS COMPANY

# The 'Missing Manual'



Jack Price and his donkey at  
Aberystwyth, 26th September 1952 ©  
NLW, Geoff Charles Collection

A user's guide to working with the  
Romani Cultural and Arts Company

## Who are we?

**The Romani Cultural and Arts Company** was formed in September 2009 as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee (No. 07005660) and is a registered charity (No. 1138150). Working through the arts and culture, the RCAC raises funds to take community development, advocacy and educational projects into Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and *gorgio*, *gadjé* and *country-folk* (non-Gypsy, Roma or Traveller) communities across Wales. We are a Roma, Gypsy and Traveller community development organisation at heart. We are led by Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, we are about Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, we are for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. We believe that the communities we represent and work with can be supported and strengthened to become fully realised and active participants in wider society, as part of a diverse, inclusive Wales, whilst retaining their distinct identities, cultures and heritages.

**A recent Arts Council** Of Wales report cited the significance and high quality of the work we do with Gypsies and Travellers: <http://romaniarts.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Beyond-the-Stereotypes.pdf> In the above report, they made the following statement and recommendations:

“Team up with the Romani Cultural & Arts Company in addition to providing project funding. This review has uncovered nothing but praise for Isaac Blake - his work is universally acknowledged by academics, Gypsies, Travellers, politicians, public bodies and international organisations. This is a unique Welsh-based company that should be supported in every possible way.”

## Mission Statement

**Racism** is born of ignorance, fear and prejudice, combined with the institutional power to enact those prejudices, through systems, organisations and institutions. The Romani Culture and Arts Company exists to promote a better understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture within and beyond these communities.

## Aims and Objectives

**The objectives** of the Romani Cultural and Arts Company set out the changes that we are trying to bring about to make the world a better place:

- To advance the education of the majority population in gaining a better understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, in particular but not exclusively, through promoting cultural and arts-based community activities, showcasing Romani and Traveller achievements and contributions to majority society, in the context of historical developments in Wales and England, and celebrating the rich diversity of identities, ethnicities and groups that make-up the complex cultural mosaic of the U.K. in the twenty-first century;
- The promotion of social cohesion for the public benefit by promoting knowledge and mutual understanding between different communities, advancing public education, raising awareness about Romani and Traveller groups to promote social cohesion and sustainable societies by establishing good relations between individuals and groups from differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

We sit on national forums such as:

- The National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups
- Race Council Cymru
- Cross Party group of the Welsh National Assembly for Gypsies and Travellers

## Public Benefit

**Our work** is designed to challenge discrimination and overcome the exclusion, prejudice and stereotyping regarding Roma, Gypsy and Traveller people living in Wales, and the U.K.

Racism, intolerance, prejudice and discriminatory attitudes towards minority ethnic communities, from the majority community are legislated against by U.K. government (such as in the 1976 Race Relations Act and the 2000 Race Relations [Amended] Act), the Human

Rights Act (1998), the various international protections (such as the Council of Europe's Framework Conventions on the Protection of National Minorities, 2000), and other measures. Discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity (like all discrimination) is now widely recognised as anti-social and detrimental to community cohesion, social stability and the well-being of future generations. However, there remains plenty of evidence, gathered from the testimony of Romani and Traveller people, in their everyday lives and in academic research, that racism towards these communities, in public, in the populist press and media and in political discourse, is *still* perceived as socially acceptable. The following quotes explain why and what affect this has

“Go to most museums, libraries and schools and nothing about their history and culture is kept or taught. The result is a widespread ignorance about who they are, which sometimes turns to hatred, fear and misunderstanding. In schools, children learn more about the Romans, Vikings or even fairies than they do about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures and what they have contributed to this world. As a result they are misunderstood, feared and loathed”

*Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month, www.grtbm.co.uk*

“Nearly 9 out of every 10 children and young people from a Gypsy background have suffered racial abuse and nearly two thirds have also been bullied or physically attacked”

*This is who we are, Children's Society, 2007*

The Welsh government's own report on the accommodation needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people (Niner, 2006) recognises Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people as having ‘...distinct demographic and economic characteristics’ and being one of the most socially excluded groups in Britain. It also spoke of the extent to which social exclusion was reinforced by their experiences of discrimination. The report writers noted the tendency of the settled community to stereotype and lump together all Gypsies and Travellers, and felt that Gypsy,

Roma and Traveller groups are the one segment of the population against whom it is still ‘acceptable’ to make racist remarks.

*Accommodation Needs of Gypsy-Travellers in Wales, Niner, 2006*

The Welsh Government's *Single Equality Scheme* (WAG, 2009), identifies, in the ‘High Level Statement 29’, the need to enable voluntary sector organisations that support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people to access services and encourage service—providers to improve planning, programming and delivery.

## Management

The RCAC is led and managed by Romani and Traveller people, whilst its Board is predominantly made—up of community representatives from the Romani and Traveller groups.

All The Romani Cultural and Arts Company programmes that are directed at working with Romani and Traveller families and children (and others) are aimed at introducing elements of Romani and Traveller culture, history and language, strengthening self-confidence and identity through the arts, and encouraging pride in the community.

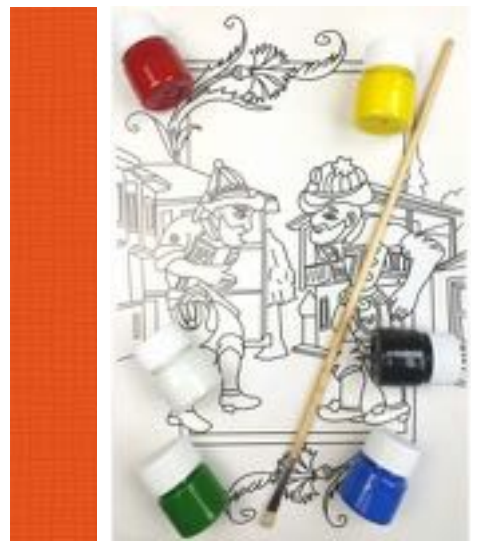
## Romani and Traveller

Romani and Traveller are terms we use to describe the communities we work with and include Welsh and English Romany, Travellers, Irish Travellers, Scottish Gypsy Travellers, Roma from Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe, all of whom are in Wales today.

## Activities

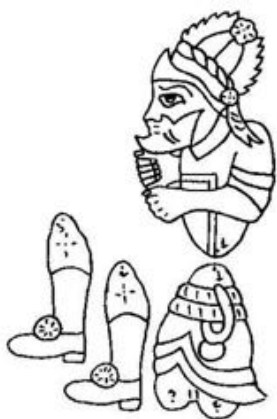
In this ‘manual’ you will find ideas about activities that you can do with Romani and Traveller children, on-site and in schools, and the preschools or during events celebrating Gypsy, Roma, Traveller culture and history.

From story-telling to mask-making and puppetry, these activities have been carried out with children and are ‘proven’; most importantly, they reflect aspects of Romani and Traveller culture, through the arts in different lands.



# Karagöz and Hacivat

## Making Turkish Shadow-Puppets



Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Shadow Puppets from Turkey, activity, 2 hours

Karagöz and Hacivat are two traditional characters from Turkish puppet theatre; they were originally Romani Gypsies living in Bursa in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and their adventures took them to many wonderful and magical places.

You will need thin sticks, tape, scissors, colours (felt-tipped pens or water-colour paints), templates for the puppets, paper-fasteners, a background scenery or cardboard box for the puppets to perform. Cut out the parts of the puppets, fasten the limbs of the puppets together, colour and decorate the puppets, tape them to the thin sticks (or garden canes), fix the background to the 'puppet theatre' (large cardboard box).

Encourage the children to create a story and dialogue around the two characters, with a story-arc (ask them to think about how their favourite television series is structured in each episode), and create a short, three or four minute story, working in pairs.





## Drama Games

### Warm up (younger group) 10 minutes

Hot Potato. Tell the children you've brought something with you, but it's in your hand and you need some magic to make it work. Ask who is good at blowing bubbles? Get one child to blow into your hand and make your hand slightly bigger. Ask for someone else to blow too and make your hands slightly bigger with some shaking. Tell the whole class you will need all their help to blow into your hand and reveal that in your hand is your magic potato, but it's really hot! Get the whole class to pass it around, all acting as if they're holding a hot potato! Then tell them it's changed into a fluffy little mouse. Repeat exercise, and for final time make it a slimy frog!

### Warm up (older group) 10 minutes

Zip Zap Boing. Get the children in a circle standing up. Explain that they pass the 'zip' around the circle by pointing to the person next to them and saying 'Zip!' one at a time. They can send the Zip the other way by jumping and saying 'Boing!' when the 'Zip' gets passed to them. Practice. When they point to another child across the room they say 'Zap!' The child from across the room cannot Boing a Zap, they must go around again. Do the game until there are only two children left, at which point they go back to back for a 'words at dawn' showdown!



### Freeze Frame activity (younger group) 30 minutes

Split the children into groups of four again (taking care to that the children are working with others who they don't work with all the time in class to make it more interesting). Ask them if they know what a freeze frame is? A freeze frame is when you make a picture using your bodies, without making any sounds! Practise by getting the children to make a freeze frame of being a family of Travellers, an ogre or their horse on the road (only give them 1 minute on the example exercises). Give each group a small segment of the story to create a freeze frame around and give them around 10 minutes to do so (whilst helping them). Stop the children, and put on music from previous exercise. Tell them to think about the music when they are making their freeze frames. Give them 10 more minutes to work on their freeze frames.

### Movement activity (older group) 30 minutes

Split the children into groups again (taking care to ensure there is an equal distribution of Traveller/Romani and other Welsh children in each group). Ask them if they know what a mime is? It's when you act something out but without using words. Get each group to mime eating a pizza together only to find it's got a bug in it! Then mime out trying to pull one of them from some mud, only for all of them to get stuck (only give them about one minute to work on the example mimes).

Give each group two lines each from the story and tell them that they are going to create a movement (mime) piece to tell the story of those two lines (in total the whole group should end up telling the whole story). Play the music from the soundscape exercise and tell them to think about moving to the music and using it to tell the story in their pieces.

# Traveller Tales

## Literacy, Arts and Crafts Workshops for Romani, Traveller & Other Children

The activity will use the story, *Ossiri and the Bala Mengro* (2016), by Richard O'Neill, Katherine Quarmbly, and Hannah Tolso (illustrator), as the basis for arts and crafts workshops drawing inspiration from this rich, traditional story, with Romani, Traveller and other children in community or education settings. The workshop integrates arts and crafts activities with literacy activities, to inspire, educate and engage *all* children and to bring aspects of Romani and Traveller life, language and culture to the fore.



The arts and crafts activity will be using simple materials, such as paper, card, fabric, scrap materials and natural 'found' objects, such as leaves, twigs, dried flowers, and paints, sequins and colours, to fashion highly stylised horse-shoes, and horse pictures, as symbols of luck and good fortune in Romani and Traveller cultures.

The story should be read aloud, with the children following, supported by Romani and Traveller parents and carers, taking an active role in the workshop and adding details about the lifestyle, traditions and important cultural practices, depicted

in the story. The arts and crafts, with the children using pre-formed templates that can be decorated and coloured, affixed to wall panel celebrating Romani and Traveller culture, for example. Romani and Traveller music will be playing at points during the workshop, with explanations as to what is being played and why (i.e. "This is the international song of the Romani people, "Gelem, gelem" meaning "I came, I came" and it tells us about a sad journey looking for family lost along the way", or "This is music made by an English Gypsy group, the Orchard family, recording traditional Romani and Traveller songs.").

*Ossiri couldn't let go of her dream. She yearned to play music...*

The activity could develop further, with the children creating and telling their own story using their horse-shoes, horse-shapes, with a short delivery of each story involving movement and music and with back-drops or scenery being created behind the story-tellers and story characters, to create a more sophisticated performance.

The workshop could also develop into a scrap musical instrument-making, with children making their own "Tattin Django" instrument and, with those instruments, creating a sound-scape to accompany the tableau or movement pieces around the camp and the family listening horrified at the noise, the Bala Mengro dancing and the stranger disappearing.

## Activity

### Resources

The project would require arts & crafts materials (paper, card, etc.), children's scissors, adhesives, acrylic paints, brushes, feathers, leaves, etc. If the scrap musical instruments are going to be made, then empty plastic pots, tins and cans, plastic beads,



pipes, sticks and metals discs can be used to create the “Tattin Django”. All materials should be checked to ensure they are safe and child-friendly.

Copies of the book, *Ossiri and the Bala Mengro*, Richard O’Neill, Kathe



rine Quarmby and Hannah Tolson (illustrator)

Story-teller/workshop leader

Prepared templates of horse-shoes and horse shapes, in outline

### Story-telling

The story-telling sessions introduce the characters in the story, with a traditional approach.

Arts and crafts workshop/s

The decoration of the horse-shoes, card-templates, etc. with materials and colouring.

Finishing decorating horse-shoes and horse shapes, fixing the finished pieces to the panel.

Children’s own stories (particularly those from Romani or Traveller families), with the children as characters involved

## Workshop Plan

Aims	To introduce Romani and Traveller story-telling and crafts; to encourage pupils creativity; to understand aspects of Romani culture; to challenge stereotypes through positive role models (instructors)
Learning Outcomes	Pupils will have produced an individual arts piece based upon the Romani and Traveller story; pupils will have learned about Romani and Traveller culture and crafts
Previous knowledge of pupils/students	Some general knowledge about Romani and Traveller people; some misinformation and stereotypes about Romani and Traveller people
Materials & Equipment	Arts & crafts materials (paper, card, etc.), children’s scissors, adhesives, acrylic paints, brushes, feathers, leaves, etc.
Brief summary of content	The story-telling sessions would introduce the characters in the story (20-25 mins.); story-telling, drawing on the story (10-15 mins.); The creation of the horse-shoes, horse shapes, card-templates, etc. Some decorating and colouring (35 mins.); Finishing decorating horse-shoes and fixing (30 mins.)



# Romani stories and mask-making

## Activity

The activity will use the stories of Abram Wood, the famous Gypsy story-teller and legendary musician from the eighteenth-century, as recorded in the book by Daniel Morden, *Dark Tales from the Woods*, (2006, Point Press) as the basis for creating masks of animals and characters from these rich, traditional stories, with Romani and Traveller children in south-west Wales. The activity will inspire the children and to bring to life the characters that live in these tales.



The mask-making process will be using simple materials, such as paper, card, plaster-bandage, scrap materials and leathers, to fashion masks that will be fitted (through using the plaster-bandage base or prefabricated, plastic or card half-mask) to individual children's faces, then decorated with natural 'found' objects, such as leaves, twigs, dried flowers, leather or paints, sequins and colours.

The stories can be read aloud, with the children following (in order to develop and encourage understanding and reading skills, relating the project to Key Stage literacy targets), supported by parents and carers. The mask-making session will follow, with the children using pre-formed templates that can be decorated and coloured, affixed to individually tailored plaster-bandage bases, in a two-stage process.

The activity could develop further, with the children telling the story using their masks and the characters, with a short delivery of each story involving movement and music and with back-drops or scenery being created behind the story-tellers and characters to create a more sophisticated performance, which might be video-recorded as a series of digital narratives.

The story-telling sessions would introduce the characters in the story (10-15 minutes); The creation of the masks (fox, squirrel, herring,

stag, dragon, swan-maidens, boar, wings – for swan-maidens, mouse, eagle, pocket watches (plaster-bandage or prefabricated plastic basis), card-templates, etc. Some decorating and colouring (1 hr. 15 mins.); Break (20 minutes); Finishing decorating masks and fitting the finished masks to each child (1hr. 15 mins.); Final stories, with the children as characters involved in movement and games (15-20 minutes).

## Materials

Arts & crafts materials (paper, card, etc.), children's scissors, adhesives, acrylic paints, brushes, feathers, leaves, etc.

*“His complexion was very dark, with rosy cheeks... and he wore two gold rings, a gold watch & chain...”*

# ROMANITRAVELLER

12 July 2017

Douglas and Elizabeth Hern and their eight children, who had been living in a [house] for six years and who were back in their caravans to travel from Bala to Swansea.  
Dyddiad/Date: June 22, 1951  
Geoff Charles Collection, National Library of Wales



## I was born into a Travelling family... a Traveller childhood

By Dr Adrian Marsh

I was born in a Travelling family, in Cardiff, Wales. My mother was from the 'rag-and-bone' people, Tattin' Folki. Her *daddo* was a *tottin* man, collecting what the *gorgios* left behind or threw away - there was money in it, he said (though he couldn't hear us, as he'd been bombed in the war and was deaf as a post). My *daddo* was the arty one, puppets and silk flowers, a window dresser by trade. He was from the Irish Travellers from County Longford in the Irish midlands, by the Bog of Cats.

We moved up and down the Newport Road, sometimes staying long enough in one place for one of my sisters to be born; there were two by the time we left Cardiff. I'd learned a bit of iaith Cymraeg, by then, the Welsh (though I can't speak it now) and *poggadi-chib* rokkerin' the Romanies, though not in front of the *gorgios*. I

learned the hiding ways young, careful, secret, one eye over your shoulder like.

When we left for the *aitchin than*, back to the family yard on southern England's coast, we were camping up and down along the way, in army towns and amongst country people too. We got to Portsmouth when I was still a little *chavvi*, where we had *folki*, *joeys* and *slanging buffers* in the seaside circus and arcades. Behind us, a trail of words tossed like trash in the *drom* by the *gorgios*, "Gyppo", "Tinker" and worse...

School was *kushti* in the infants class, growing cress and 'Janet and John' books. Learned to read and spell, to take apples away from pears and nobody seemed to mind, or nobody knew. I stopped worrying, got on with playing with sand and finger painting, the knots in my stomach disappearing, because school was big, no family here, the kids were kids, not *chavvies*, but they

didn't *ken* I was. Dropped the accent though, soon as. singing like a Taff from the valleys was going to get me *mullered*. Learned the Cockney, as Pompey people were from The Smoke in olden times.

Then juniors, things got jumpy. Got seen 'parking' for sixpences, from the tourists in the summer by Raymond's mum, and I knew she'd clocked me, seen who I was and what I was. Come September, that was going to come back, bite me in the arse...

Started in the playground, "Pikey, pikey, do as you likey!", then the long walk home, past the bingo hall and the steps seemed full of sharp, spikey bodies and twisted faces, angry, raging really. When the first one hit me, I thought, "This is it, this is what it's going to be like for the rest of the year". Didn't go back to school much after that...



## Family Stories

Romani and Traveller families have many stories of their own experiences and recording these in some fashion, through children asking their parents and relatives, is a way of keeping family and community history, culture, identity and experience alive. Some of the most important work that Romani Cultural and Arts Company has been doing is capturing these experiences from Romani and Traveller families, as part of the heritage projects, that have resulted in collections of narratives, recordings and successful exhibitions.

Children and young people from the Romani and Traveller communities are both the most precious resource the communities have and the guardians of these stories and experiences, the bearers of future well-being, sustainability and continuity of the culture, language and history of Romani and Traveller peoples.

The previous story is one story from Dr Adrian Marsh (the author of this 'manual), and the 'word cloud' draws from that story, as

an example of how you can capture these experiences through reminiscence and oral history, supporting the community and helping to preserve their culture.

## Tin foil 'milagros'

### Creating Spanish or Mexican 'miracles' using Roman and Traveller motifs, for decoration and personal jewellery



Spanish *Gitanos* and Mexican *Kalon* make and decorate sanctuaries, or 'wishing places', with milagros, or little miracles. These are often linked with wishes for better health, or protection for loved ones, or well-being for animals, and hung on tress around holy wells, or small chapels.

You will need:

- Tin foil sandwich trays/platters (clean)
- Sharpies or glass paints of bright, primary colours
- Ball-point pens
- Soft (2B) pencils
- Wooden spoons of differing sizes
- Scissors
- Cardboard squares to work on
- Felt or other protective table-cloth
- Coloured ribbon
- PVA or other craft adhesive
- Templates – hearts, hearts with wings, flaming hearts, horses heads, horse-shoes, hands, hammers, Romani and Traveller motifs

Using the designs from old Romani tarot cards (photocopied or traced), you can add 'loteria' images to the milagros, in larger forms to create a central 'picture' at the heart of your heart.

Using the heart designs (or other Roman and Traveller motifs), trace over the design lines with a soft pencil, on top of the tin foil platter, impressing the design into the tin foil.

Carefully cut around the tin foil design, leaving three or four centimetres.

Using the round end of a small wooden spoon handle, gently rub the heart shape, lightly pushing the tin foil to shape the heart and make it stand out 'proud' from the surface.

Using a ball-point pen, gently press the patterns into the edge of the heart shape and the other shapes (flames, wings), to create texture and line.

Using the tube of a ball-point pen without pen, press the circular shapes around the design edges.

Turn the milagros over and, on the 'proud' surfaces that stand out, glass paint (or colour, using Sharpies) in bright, bold colours.

If the milagro is large, you can add a central frame by cutting out a rectangle from the tin foil platter, decorating it using the same techniques and pasting in a traditional design from old Romani tarot cards, i.e. in the centre of a horse-shoe milagros.



## 'Big Polaroids' selfies project

The original Polaroid film measures exactly  $3.108 \times 3.024$  inches (photo area) and  $4.233 \times 3.483$  inches (total area). That's  $7.894 \times 7.6801$  cm (photo area) and  $10.752 \times 8.847$  cm (total area), which gives that familiar Polaroid 'look' with the white (or colour) frame to the photograph, slightly bigger at the bottom of the frame.

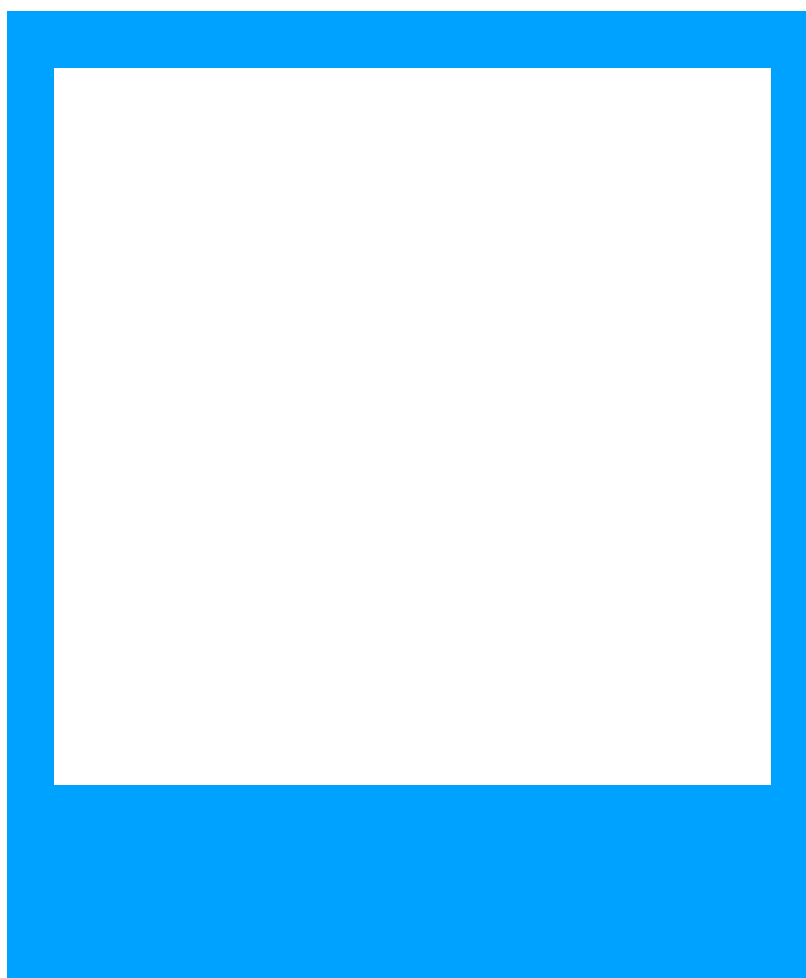
Create a 'big' Polaroid film from stiff, thick white (or colour) card, large enough to fit children's own heads (or them and their friend's heads) into, to use as frame for portrait photographs with them, their friends and family, their favourite pet, then using their mobile 'phone camera (but not your own), take a picture whilst they are holding the frame.

Hold the frame further away from them, their friend or friends, their family members and relatives, to create group shots. Make sure the hands holding the frame are in the shot.

Using an old plain cotton sheet, sponges and shapes, found objects and brushes, you can create a photographer's studio background.

Lay the sheet out on a table or two (with a place cloth underneath to protect the table), then using the shapes and objects, some subtle colours, tones and shades, print the shapes onto the cotton, covering the surface in 'layers' to give the illusion of depth and distance for these portraits.

You will need to make sure that there is a permission form for each child to participate in the activity, that **only the children's cameras and phones are used** and no other



photos are taken and that these are selfies, not photos of other children.

