



Personal History and Reminiscence

READING
FRIENDS

**THE
READING
AGENCY**

This pack has been put together to help get everyone chatting

Use alongside the session plan Personal History and Reminiscence.

You can print out individual pages or the whole pack – whatever is easier for you.

Get in touch to let us know how your session went and if you have ideas for other sessions or resources that would be useful:

✉ readingfriends@readingagency.org.uk

These icons will help guide you to the appropriate resources for your group:

 Can be enjoyed by a group or one-to-one

 Can be solo activities

 Dementia-friendly

 Large print

 Easy to read



History Wordsearch

Share this icebreaker with participants and chat about travelling in time! The words are all connected to different times in history. Look down, up, left to right and right to left. Answers are at the end of the pack.

S	W	V	I	C	T	O	R	I	A	N	S	J	X	Z	A
G	P	Y	X	V	N	M	B	C	X	A	T	F	J	K	N
N	V	J	L	E	X	Z	G	K	S	Y	O	X	O	P	G
I	C	E	A	G	E	V	E	Z	N	B	N	Q	C	X	L
K	F	G	Z	Y	F	J	O	V	A	X	E	W	B	G	O
I	X	A	X	P	V	W	R	F	M	Z	A	Y	F	J	S
V	M	Z	G	T	V	J	G	X	O	B	G	M	Z	B	A
P	F	Z	F	I	P	X	I	L	R	K	E	B	Q	W	X
F	X	A	K	A	J	M	A	R	B	A	X	F	C	H	O
N	Q	J	V	N	A	I	N	O	L	Y	B	A	B	G	N
O	W	Z	H	K	F	Z	X	Q	F	T	F	W	Z	K	S
R	X	M	E	D	I	E	V	A	L	J	P	Q	G	J	F
M	P	B	V	J	X	W	Z	X	V	F	R	O	D	U	T
A	E	E	D	W	A	R	D	I	A	N	K	W	J	V	F
N	Q	Z	X	J	P	Q	Z	V	X	Q	F	P	V	Z	M
S	K	E	E	R	G	T	N	E	I	C	N	A	F	X	K

Tudor

Stone Age

Babylonian

Victorians

Medieval

Normans

Egyptian

Jazz Age

Anglo-Saxons

Ancient Greeks

Edwardian

Vikings

Romans

Georgian

Ice Age

If you could travel in time, which period in history would you most like to visit and why? What's different about today and then?

Local history treasures online!

Chatting about local history and archive photos of places always gets lots of discussion going, and personal stories shared.

Even though we can't get to libraries and archives at the moment, lots of library services are making more archive material available digitally – [just look up your local library, archives and records services](#) to see what they're offering.

Find your local public library in [England and Wales](#), [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

Here are some [national sites with information](#) about local history groups as well as places to trace your family history:

<http://www.local-history.co.uk/>

<https://www.familysearch.org/>

<https://www.history.org.uk/historian/resource/2364/local-history-online>

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/> : Trace your family story with a family tree!

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/> : Find the family stories that make you 'you'!



Your personal history treasures!

Being at home can give time to sort out all those boxes of letters and memorabilia we've been gathering throughout our lives – and make albums and stories from them!

Often we wish that we had asked our parents and grandparents more about their lives, families and friends: here's a chance now to share and record our family stories. Behind almost every letter, diary entry, school report, and souvenir we've kept, there's a story.



On the following pages there are some tips for sorting and sharing – and you'll also find some extracts to inspire you in this.

You could create photo or letter albums, online files, scrap books, treasure boxes – or even write your own autobiography or poetry – there are endless possibilities.

All the personal history treasures on the next few pages can inspire both individual activity and shared discussion, in telephone conversations and online sessions if face-to-face contact isn't possible. Sessions such as Zoom, Skype and FaceTime can also be recorded (with permission) if you want to capture any of the stories.



Your personal history treasures: photographs

Photos

- Sort into smaller sets, to make them more accessible – e.g. themes, particular people, particular times, chronologically by year.
- Where possible write key information on the back – who and the relationship, where, when...
- Put them into albums, scrap books or photo storage boxes – there are lots of online ideas for these too.
- Or scan them/take a photo with your phone and store on a memory stick or hard drive. Label these clearly (they can be easily lost) and find somewhere obvious to keep them. They'll also make a lovely screen saver display on your computer.
- You could also send your digital images to be made into albums. There are many websites for making personalised photo books e.g. <https://www.photobox.co.uk/shop/photo-books>
- Select special photos to be made into calendars, cards, canvas prints, photo cubes.
- **As you sort them, talk about them!** And record those special stories. You could write memories down or record a relative talking.





Your personal history treasures: letters, postcards and diaries

Letters, postcards and diaries

- Sort and group your letters – e.g. by date or sender.
- Chronologically sort your postcards or sort by sender – maybe this is a chance to reconnect with others about past holidays and experiences.
- Are there any particular diary entries you want to find or talk about?
- You could look at the diary entry for around this time last year and see what you wrote.
- Choose special ones to [talk about and share](#), and maybe record.
- Find someone to transcribe them – together make a book of them!



Your personal history treasures: memorabilia and heirlooms

Memorabilia and heirlooms

- Travel brochures and tickets, theatre programmes, birthday cards, ornaments, pressed flowers, that first bootee or lock of hair, or any other collection someone may have.
- The jewellery, the picture, the books, the silver spoon, the wedding dress – all the things you have inherited, or kept over the years, tell such wonderful stories.
- Find particular ones to talk about, or take photos of your collections or items which have special meaning and maybe just a good story!



Recording personal history

You or younger relatives could interview older family members and friends and together shape the stories and memories for albums, writings and recordings.

Here are some questions you could use to get talking about memorabilia and souvenirs:

- Where did they come from?
- What were you doing?
- When was this?
- Who were you with?
- What is the story behind them?
- Why did you want to keep them?
- Where do you keep them?

If someone is chatting about their letters, diaries – and own memories – you could write their story. The headlines below may help to get you going. Have a notebook and head each page – then take notes under each heading.





Trigger headlines for personal stories

- Where and when were you born?
- Parents, family, siblings
- One event you remember from your early years
- Starting school
- What you liked, didn't like at school
- What did you want to be?
- What did you do when you left school?
- Girlfriends, boyfriends, friendships
- Special places you went to
- Special things you did
- Special people
- Three big events in your life
- Three things you're proud of
- What you most liked doing
- The hardest thing
- Something you've learned
- Advice to share

And here's a [website where you could share your stories](#) and read what others have written about kindness, resourcefulness and community in difficult times:

www.kemeneth.co.uk

Stories set in school

Books to inspire your sharing and reminiscing about school.

What was your school like? How did you feel about school? Who was your favourite teacher? Why? Did you get into trouble at school?

Kwame Alexander

The Crossover

Twins, Josh and Jordan are teammates on the basketball court and in life, making their way through middle school and all its trials (homework, crushes, family issues) in this story told in verse.

Enid Blyton

Malory Towers

There's more to life than lessons at Malory Towers. Read the books or watch on TV! <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/shows/malory-towers>

E M Brent-Dyer

Chalet School series

Set mostly in the 30s and 40s: a girls' boarding school based originally in the Austrian Tyrol.

Jerry Craft

New Kid

In this graphic novel Jordan wants nothing more than to go to art school, but his parents have other ideas and he's sent to a prep school where he's one of only a few kids of colour.

Gillian Cross

The Demon Headmaster

Dinah starts her new school where the children are too well-behaved and soon, alongside her foster brothers, uncovers the headmaster's wicked plans.

Laurie Lee

Cider with Rosie

A wonderfully vivid memoir of childhood in a remote Cotswold village, a village before electricity or cars, a timeless place on the verge of change.

Stories told in letters and diaries

Books to inspire your reminiscing about letters and diaries.

Have you ever written a letter? Who was it to? What about a diary? What did you write about? Do you still have it?

Elizabeth Acevedo

Write Yourself a Lantern

Featuring lines from Elizabeth Acevedo's *The Poet X* among its lined pages, this full-colour, beautifully designed journal is perfect for readers, long-time writers, those trying their hand at poetry, or anyone with a voice all their own.

A.S.Byatt

Possession

An exhilarating novel of wit and romance, at once a literary detective novel and a triumphant love story. It's the tale of a pair of young scholars investigating the lives of two Victorian poets. Following a trail of letters, journals and poems they uncover a web of passion, deceit and tragedy, and their quest becomes a battle against time. See also the film.

Sharon Creech

Love That Dog

Told in very simple verse, this is a moving and memorable story about a boy and his dog and his growing passion for poetry. It might inspire people to write their own story in this way, highlighting key events in their lives in simple verse.

Helen Fielding

Bridget Jones' Diary

As Bridget documents her struggles through the social minefield of her thirties, she tries to weigh up the eternal question (Daniel Cleaver or Mark Darcy?). Read the books, watch the films and talk about your life in your thirties.

Helene Hanff

84 Charing Cross Road

Told in a series of letters, this true story of the correspondence between a New York writer and a London bookseller has touched the hearts of thousands. See also the film.

Halima Khatun

The Secret Diary of an Arranged Marriage

A British-Bengali girl looking for Mr Right. A motley crew of men, some hoping it's them. A mum on a mission to match make. And an age-old tradition with a twist. It'll change your view of matchmaking for good...

Jeff Kinney

Diary of a Wimpy Kid

Greg finds himself thrust into a new year and a new school. Desperate to prove his new found maturity, Greg tries to use his best friend's new found popularity to his own advantage. Recorded in his diary with comic pictures.

J. Nozipo Maraire

Zenzele: a Letter for my Daughter

Written as a letter from a Zimbabwean mother to her daughter (a student at Harvard), J. Nozipo Maraire evokes the moving story of a mother reaching out to her daughter to share the lessons life has taught her.

Dodie Smith

I Capture the Castle

Meet 17 year old Cassandra. The youngest daughter in a family of impoverished artists, it's her imagination and writing that takes us away from the ramshackle old English castle where they live, and towards an intriguing tale of husband-hunting and light-hearted sibling rivalry. See also the film.

Sue Townsend

The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13 $\frac{3}{4}$

Meet Adrian Mole, a hapless teenager providing a glimpse into adolescent life. Writing candidly about his parents' marital troubles, the dog and his life as a tortured poet and 'misunderstood intellectual', Adrian's honest diary is still hilarious and compelling.

Matching activity: School reports of famous people!

Perhaps you've found some of your old school reports! Did you fulfil your teachers' expectations? Or have you gone way beyond them! What did your teachers think or say about you?

Here are some excerpts from the school reports of famous people – can you match each report comment to its lucky (!) recipient? Answers are at the end of the pack.

1. 'His essays continue to suffer from ingrained grammatical faults, particularly in punctuation . . . Stubbornness is in his nature and could be an asset when directed to sound ends. But his flying off the handle will only mar his efforts and he must learn tact while not losing his outspokenness.'
2. 'She writes indifferently and knows nothing of grammar, geography, history or accomplishments.'
3. 'He has no ambition . . . He is a constant trouble to everybody and is always in some scrape or other. He cannot be trusted to behave himself anywhere . . .'
4. 'Certainly on the road to failure . . . hopeless . . . rather a clown in class, wasting other pupils' time . . . [However] I believe he is not beyond redemption and could really turn out a fairly responsible adult.'
5. 'He has learned nothing and never will do anything in decent style.'
6. 'An indolent and illiterate member of the class. A persistent muddler. Vocabulary negligible, sentences mal-constructed . . . reminds me of a camel.'

7. 'She would be a very good pupil if she lived in this world.'
8. 'With so much in her favour, the student is hampered by the weakness of her voice. She seems to lack the confidence to project and make the most of the voice she does possess . . . If she does not work on her projection, it will be "the films" for her and that would be such a pity!'
9. 'A quiet student who needs to stop playing with his motorcycles and learn that music will not make him a liveable wage.'
10. 'He will never amount to anything.'
11. 'He is a natural leader but sometimes he leads the boys (his friends) down the wrong path.'
12. 'We have no doubt that he will make a name for himself.'

John Lennon
 David Bowie
 Joan Collins
 Idris Elba
 Dame Judi Dench
 Roald Dahl

Albert Einstein
 Charlotte Bronte
 Fidel Castro
 Jeremy Paxman
 Winston Churchill
 Ludwig van Beethoven

The School In August (extract)

Philip Larkin

The cloakroom pegs are empty now,
And locked the classroom door,
The hollow desks are lined with dust,
And slow across the floor
A sunbeam creeps between the chairs
Till the sun shines no more.

Discussion ideas

Compare the schools during the lockdown and schools in the summer.

What has the weather been like for you?

Do you know of anyone home schooling? How are they getting on?

Was anyone you know due to take exams?

How did you feel about the summer holidays when you were younger?

Were you excited to go back to school or did you dread it?



In Mrs Tilscher's class (extract)

Carol Ann Duffy

This was better than home. Enthralling books.
The classroom glowed like a sweetshop.
Sugar paper. Coloured shapes...
Mrs Tilscher loved you. Some mornings, you found
she'd left a gold star by your name.
The scent of a pencil slowly, carefully, shaved.
A xylophone's nonsense heard from another form.

Discussion ideas

Did you ever feel that school was better than home?
Who was your favourite teacher?
Are there any smells you remember from school?
Do you remember having any music classes?



Mother: A Cradle To Hold Me (extract)

Maya Angelou

Mother,
During those early, dearest days
I did not dream that you had
A large life which included me,
For I had a life
Which was only you.

Discussion ideas

When you were younger, did you know about your parents' lives?
Did they ever talk to you about their lives, or did you find out things later, or maybe not at all?
Did you know what job they did, who their friends were or about past relationships?



Diary of a Nobody (extract)

George and Weedon Grossmith

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1026/1026-h/1026-h.htm>

The Diary of a Nobody is an English comic novel that records the daily events in the lives of a London clerk, Charles Pooter, his wife Carrie, his son Lupin, and numerous friends and acquaintances over a period of 15 months. It was written in 1888.

After my work in the City, I like to be at home. What's the good of a home, if you are never in it? "Home, Sweet Home," that's my motto. I am always in of an evening. Our old friend Gowing may drop in without ceremony; so may Cummings, who lives opposite. My dear wife Caroline and I are pleased to see them, if they like to drop in on us. But Carrie and I can manage to pass our evenings together without friends. There is always something to be done: a tin-tack here, a Venetian blind to put straight, a fan to nail up, or part of a carpet to nail down.'

Discussion ideas

How do you feel about being at home?

Do you have lots of things to keep you occupied i.e. DIY, gardening, cooking, reading, creative activities?

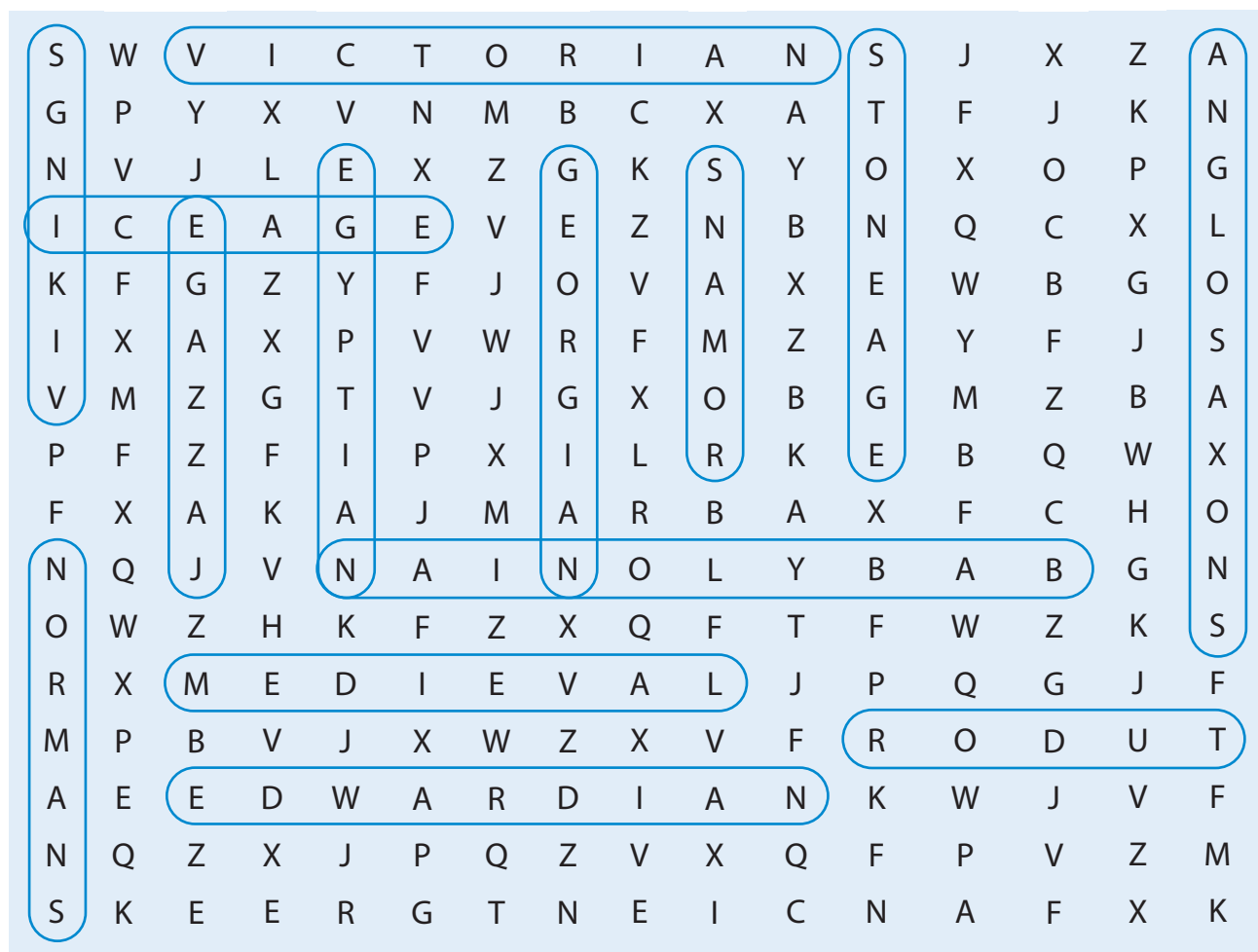
Have you had times in your life when you've rarely been at home?

How did you feel about 'home' when you were younger?



Answers

Wordsearch answers



School reports answers

1. Jeremy Paxman 2. Charlotte Bronte 3. Winston Churchill 4. John Lennon 5. Beethoven 6. Roald Dahl 7. Dame Judi Dench 8. Joan Collins 9. David Bowie 10. Einstein 11. Idris Elba 12. Fidel Castro

READING FRIENDS

Reading Friends is a nationwide programme developed by The Reading Agency with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund. The programme connects people experiencing loneliness by starting conversations through reading. Reading Friends is delivered in partnership with organisations across the UK.

 readingfriends.org.uk

 [@readingfriends_](https://twitter.com/readingfriends_)

The Reading Agency is a national charity that tackles life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. We work closely with partners to develop programmes for people of all ages and backgrounds. The Reading Agency is funded by Arts Council England.

 readingagency.org.uk