Imagine That!

Exeter Children’s Literature Festival 2010
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people who contributed so much to this project:

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Teachers
Tamar Busby, St James High School
Stephen Mitchell, St Luke's C of E High School
Sara Wood, West Exe Technology College
Zoe Woodman and Kay Thompson, Isca College of Media Arts

RAMM staff
Design – Ian Wills
Mike Walker of Tuckers Hall
Lis Shephard, Project Manager of EXEtreme Imagination
Illustrations – Cara Patterson

And of course, the students who took part and who produced such interesting, varied and inspired work

This anthology of poetry and prose contains a selection of work by young people aged 11 to 13, produced in a series of creative writing workshops which took place as part of EXEtreme Imagination, the first Festival of Literature for Children and Young People in Exeter.

The festival took place from 1-7 November 2010. The week was full of wonderful events, celebrating writing for and by children, which took place in venues across Exeter. It was a key part of the University of Exeter's Arts & Culture Strategy and was supported by the University, Exeter City Council and The National Lottery through Arts Council England.

It created lasting partnerships between the major cultural organisations, venues and literature development agencies in the city as well as libraries and schools.

The creative writing workshops were organised by Daisi (Devon Arts in Schools Initiative) for students from four Exeter secondary schools, and lead by professional authors in cultural venues throughout the city.

The four groups were made up of students from Years 7 and 8, and each worked with a professional author and illustrator who helped fire the students' imaginations and support their creative writing processes.

Every student produced an individual piece of poetry or prose inspired by the fabric, artefacts and histories of the venues visited.
Daisi (Devon Arts in Schools Initiative) is the Arts Education Partnership organisation for Devon and Torbay. Our vision is for artistic and cultural experience to be at the heart of young people’s lives and learning and our mission is to work in creative partnerships to enable arts and culture to enrich and inspire the lives, learning and futures of children and young people.

Daisi sparks and nurtures creative partnerships that enable arts and culture to enrich and inspire the lives, learning and futures of children and young people in our region, and influences practice beyond, regionally and nationally. The spirit of collaborative adventure, a core value at inception, remains so today.

We were very pleased to be involved in the Festival of Literature for Children and Young People, and to work so closely with RAMM to deliver the sessions and create this wonderful anthology of student’s work. We were inspired by the quality of the work, created in such a relatively short period of time, and we hope to further explore this relationship between author and student in future creative projects.
The University of Exeter has seen EXEtreme Imagination as one of the jewels in the crown of its new Arts and Culture Strategy. The Strategy aims to bring the best academic research and teaching strengths into play with first class artistic and cultural work in Exeter and beyond, focussing especially on regional collaborations and major events.

This first festival of literature for children and young people, co-funded by an Arts Council Grant for the Arts, was a major joint venture for a wide range of Exeter’s schools, arts and education organisations, as well as Devon writers and libraries. Its legacy resides in publications by DAISI, RAMM and Riptide short story magazine, and in a commitment by all participants to repeat and extend the festival in the near future.

We are delighted with the new partnerships established before and during EXEtreme Imagination, and we much appreciated the way DAISI worked so imaginatively with us to help make it such a success.

Professor Helen Taylor FRSA FEA, Arts and Culture Development Fellow, University of Exeter
Exeter’s Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) exists to enable people to explore their past and present for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. The collections document the cultural history of the city within a regional, national and international context, helping people of all ages to develop an appreciation and understanding of their immediate and wider environment.

RAMM was delighted to join in EXEtreme Imagination, the first festival of literature for children and young people in Exeter. In this partnership RAMM worked with Daisi to deliver special events around RAMM’s collections and the splendid Grade I listed building St Nicholas Priory.

EXEtreme Imagination workshops enabled RAMM to increase its involvement with secondary school pupils and gave us the opportunity to work with fantastic authors and illustrators. We were thrilled with the work that the young people produced.

We hope that everyone who reads this book will enjoy the inspiring creative writing and will continue to support partnerships that can deliver such rewarding initiatives.
Adults attempting to make up a story from objects.
It wasn’t an ordinary school day for them. It wasn’t an ordinary creative writing session for me. When we walked into a windowless room in the town centre we were confronted by two well-armed Romans soldier in full military dress.


All of it silenced by the centurion who pointed at us and said, “You’re Britons. Look at you! Little groups, little tribes, all arguing amongst yourselves. No organisation. No discipline!” He fixed them with a steely stare. “That’s why you LOST!”

The talk that followed was gripping. (“I’ll never forget what a 7 foot long spear through the leg can do…”)

Then, there was a chance to handle the weapons, try on the armour. To see and feel what the Britons were up against.

After that my job was easy: to invite the students to chose a side: invent a character.

A Briton? Facing an invasion, with everything to lose?

A Roman? Far from home, with a job to do?

The studious silence as the students started to imagine themselves into the past was memorable...

Tanya Landman, Author
I'm here. Wherever here is... My eyes slowly open. The sun shines in to my eyes as if it was the first sunrise.

It's hot. No food, no water. Just a note, attached to my belt by a piece of off white string.

You had to find out. You had to be the brave one.

It could only be Bravilus. The most aggressive member of the Senate. Somebody you wanted as your ally not as your enemy. For you to understand why he has dumped me out here, I suppose I had better let you in on the secret. Bravilus was plotting to kill Caesar. That's why he sent his men after me. He has great power, and I am a liability. He needed me to disappear. As I get up and start looking for the nearest water source, the desert sand slides between my toes. As I go on I get more tired. More thirsty. Sometimes I wonder why I don't lie down and die. Then I think of my family. And I keep fighting. For sometimes the reward is worth more than the struggle. For sometimes, you have no choice.
I remembered the face of the Briton, muddy and crusted with dried blood.
I remembered his putrid breath on my face.
I remembered his axe stick in my arm and his club on my hand as my sword pierced his stomach.
I'd killed many today.
I didn't want to kill again.
As I awaken, I find myself on the forest floor. It is about midday. The first thing I see is an injured magpie flapping its wings next to my leg. One for sorrow… I sit up to put it out of its misery. Snapping its neck and seeing more blood makes me shudder at the thought of yesterday’s adventures. I suddenly feel very empathetic for the little bird as it gives up the fight of life.

My mouth hurts. I feel drowsy and my shorn hair sticks shamefully out at odd angles. There is nothing around but trees turf and the little bird’s corpse. It is silent.
He jabbed at me with his sword. I blocked. At that point a Roman soldier came up behind me and hit me on the back of the head with the flat of his sword. I fell into darkness.

I awaken in the same forest. It was late afternoon. The first thing I saw was my sword. As I moved towards it there was a sharp pain in my leg. It was broken.
I was brought up in Devon, and Exeter has been my local city for much of my life. How is it, then, that I’ve never really taken in the unassuming beauty of St Nicholas’ Priory? Walking through that door for the first time was like walking into a palimpsest of times and cultures, each still visible. The vaulting on the ground floor has stood for a millennium – the stone work there, both the columnar and the fallen, is somehow very moving, as too is the idea of the many lives, religious and secular, lived out within its walls and in the context of a changing Exeter.

I was working with a group of young students on ghost stories: their imaginations were immediately hooked by the great stone sarcophagus at the edge of that room. We sat for the first session in the beautiful Tudor dining room, complete with wall panels and friezes. Neil from the Museum, with his colleague, offered us a phenomenal intro to the venue and its history. I noticed that it was the ‘human interest’ stories that caught the pupils’ imaginations, on the whole: the girl from decades (or maybe centuries) ago who sat in the windowseat; the suggestion of inexplicable noises of children playing on the ground floor, heard by a previous inhabitant; the museum curator from the early twentieth century who lived by herself in this building – that is, apart from her raven, who remains (stuffed) at the doorway as a guardian. I was interested that it was the boys who were fascinated by the kitchen, with its apothecary-like pestles and mortars, herbs and spices; and the slightly gruesome details of the brace of (stuffed) duck, or the taxidermist’s rabbit hung by its feet to drip its blood into sawdust. Not much, Neil told us, has changed in the kitchen since early mediaeval days and the monks.

I’m delighted to say that all the pupils from the school I worked with were inspired enough by the venue as to create some really interesting (and in some cases truly chillingly ghoulish) pieces. It always amazes me, though of course it shouldn’t, how the imagination will fly, given one or two simple pieces of information and some atmosphere.

Roselle Angwin, Author
In the window,
Sitting, staring.
Wondering what could be beyond,
Those chilly glass panes.
Wondering what could be contained,
Within the shadowy coach,
That rumbles over ancient cobbles.

Glancing over dark street corners,
Lost from public memory.
Scanning mazes of alleys
Seeking, searching
Until I see it.
Looming, menacing
The Church.

Dreaming of yesterday,
A hundred years ago.
A white wedding,
Stained with scarlet
My dear love, held in my arms.
Limp, lifeless
All my fault.
"It won't open!" I shouted rattling the door.

“What do you mean it won't open?” Helen asked.

“It. Won’t. Open. Do I need to spell it out or scream it in your face?” I screeched.

“Let me try” she said pushing me out the way, she pulled on the door knob with all her strength and with a ‘pop’ it came off in her hands.

“Great. Way to go, Helen, you've locked us in!” I moaned.

We were in a large, Tudor kitchen, with dead ducks and rabbits hanging by their necks on the walls, shelves with various pots and pans and broom lay in the dark, dusty corners. The only exit was the door with no handle.

“So, what now?” Helen asked

“I guess we sit here until someone finds us!” I sighed.

We slumped down against the wooden door. It was creepy in here. It was cold and only a slither of light got in by one of the arrow slits high up in the walls. It was like a prison.

In the corner a small mouse scurried into a hole in the wall. I wonder if it has a family?

“Did you hear that?” Helen whispered.

“Hear what?” I replied.

“That scratching sound, coming from the corner” she said.

Then I heard it too.

“I hear it. Let's go see what it is” I said

“I'm not going” she protested

“Why not?” I shouted

“I'm scared” she whimpered.

“Fine. I'll go on my own” I said.

I stood up and walked over to the corner, and looked. There was nothing.

“There's nothing there” I said sitting back down.

We sat in silence for a moment.

“Get out” someone whispered

“Did you hear that?” Helen asked

“Yes! I squeaked.

“Leave”

“Come on lets go!” I shouted.

We jumped up and started pushing on the door screaming.

“Get out!” It shouted this time.

“Leave!”

“We're trying!” I shouted back.

Suddenly, the door opened and Helen's Mum stood there.

“Come on girls we have to go!” she said ushering us out the door.

“But there was...and there...and it!” we stuttered.

“What is it?” Helen's Mum asked.

“Nothing.” I said

Helen and I decided to not tell anyone, about the voices and the scratching, they'd think we were crazy! But every time we passed St. Nicholas Priory, the memories of that evening came flooding back, and they'd never go away.
All the forgotten souls in this kitchen
Come to life every night
To seek revenge on the bodies
Who served them on the plate
Grinding on the walls and pots
Creaking, gnashing, banging, smashing
As they wait morning
And the day to pass
Staring at the chef left alone
Cooking for the big man on the throne
But if you try the food
You'll get a surprise
You might taste some human eye
Now you have heard about them
And you have been well warned
I order you to stay away or
It will be you who is served
It all started when I came home from school one evening. It was getting late and darker, so I decided to take a short cut, by the old St Nicholas Priory. There’s an alley behind, most people just chuck out their rubbish there, not how you should treat a place of prayer, but that’s just my feelings, I guess. Anyway so it was about 5 o’clock on a winter’s Wednesday, and it was getting really dark. I knew my parents would be getting worried, so I began to walk faster when I started to hear the drifting sound of music, the sort of music that makes you want to start to dance straight away. I looked up, there was the old abandoned Priory, but no… wait…there were lights coming from the window.

But I thought it was meant to be abandoned. I peeked through the shattered window. There was no one there; I looked again. Were my eyes playing tricks on me? I could see misty, white, ghostly figures dancing. Was I going mad? Then I let my eyes focus, they didn’t look like ghostly figures dancing, they were ghostly figures dancing!

So, now you know my secret…

That first Wednesday the ghosts let me know that if I spoke of them, I would join them for ever, in a locked seal. Now, every Wednesday I and I alone hear the screams of the dead.
When the youngsters from St Luke’s got to see the artefacts – and not just see, but touch – it was like watching electricity fire through their imaginations. The room filled with wide-eyed gazing, gawping and gasps, and they immediately followed the promptings of the touch of the past back into history, to lace together a series of stories.

We had Roman Centurions, African explorers, Victorian servants, wartime children, a wonderful array of ideas. I heard some great adventures of the mind coming together, full of excitement, action, and a taste of days long lost.

It was a great experience for me, and a pleasure to be involved.

And as for the youngsters – I sensed a real appetite and enthusiasm for imagining, creating and writing stories following their time at RAMM.

Simon Hall,
Author
The African Mask

By Annabelle Sharples
St Luke's C of E High School

Dark brown
Straight face
Unusual shape
Shells for eyes
Hard
Old
Thin
Big
Wood
Mystical
Long
Heavy
Large
Elvis’s Daughter

By Georgia Spencer
St Luke’s C of E High School

My dad got me a roman helmet,
He played with me when he could,
He’d make up stories all night long,
So I could fall asleep,
He even wore it for tea sometimes,
He was busy being the king of pop but he always made
time for me!
Gentle feet pad across the carpet,
Beautiful ladies' feet.
Across the carpet bought for her,
By Him.
Him.
He who was mine first.
Mine.
But she took Him anyway.
For I cannot keep a man,
But she can.
So I was set aside.
Our family pushed her forward.
My sister.
She stepped forward.
Happily.
But then who wouldn't.
What lady would not step forward at the chance to marry a king?

Set Aside
By Daisy Macioccu
St Luke's C of E High School
Charles Dickens

By Josh Givens
St Luke's C of E High School

Famous through the ages
Someone everyone knows
Or at least they think they do
Is his work powered by joy or depression?
No-one knows
When hear of a new novel
should we really have "Great Expectations?"
With his quill always in the ink
Never stopping to think
Is it a passion or an obsession?
No-one knows
Famous through the ages
Someone everyone knows
Or at least they think they do
Map of the World

By Beth Soanes
St Luke’s C of E High School
I must have walked past Tucker’s Hall a hundred times in the fifteen years I lived in Devon, and never taken the trouble to look at it or even think of going inside. So when I climbed the stairs and entered the upper hall, I wasn’t prepared for the sensation of time travel. The oak panels, the carvings, the amazing barrel shaped ceiling all bathed in slanting Winter light coming through the tiny, leaded panes, simply took my breath away.

When the West Exe students arrived I stood at the door to the Hall and heard them all having the same reaction; I think everyone gasped as they entered the room, and began to feel the magic of Tucker’s Hall transporting them to another time. The students seemed to soak up the atmosphere of the place, and the information they were presented with.

I was really impressed by their ability to focus, observe and reflect, to invent and imagine. As soon as they began to write, they were able to combine facts with their own observations, and create convincing narratives and compelling voices drawn from the Hall’s long history.

The pieces that the West Exe students have written in response to their visit to Tucker’s Hall read like ghost voices. Apprentices and masters, weavers, fullers and shearmen, seamen and harbour masters and even the voice of the Hall itself speak to us from the past.

Nicola Davies, Author
Don't judge a book by its cover.
You could walk right past,
You could walk right past
You could walk right past...
...but inside is hidden treasure!

Not like anything you can imagine:
Faces that take you on an adventure in time;
Wooden beams that hold up history;
A room with that's captured more than all the records;
A magical world inside the world we live in now.
Come on, take a step back in time!

Beams stretch like a ribcage, holding up the building's
history
Bleeding out the brightness from within.
Stained glass windows let the light seep
Through the dark, through the atmosphere
Where all the stories hold their breath and wait...

Discussing, arguing, conferring
The judges eyes bore down into your soul and secrets
Faces glaring down at you, the sinner.
Grovel, plead and pray,
Victim in a game of rich man's chess.
Discussing, arguing, conferring
Judging, judging, judging.

Carved faces, look down in anger, happiness, confusion.
Oak embodies soul and the beauty of emotion,
It fixes patterns on the wall like moving waves.
Flowers, leaves, swirls and shears, bobbins shuttlecocks.
Tools of the trade, passed down through generations,
Hand to hand, face to face.
But now we look and see something different,
Carved faces looking down, trapped in one emotion.

Weapons on the walls for warring,
You can feel the flesh impaled,
Feel the armor with real bodies inside and hearts beating.
Weapons on the wall for warring,
Made by hand, precise and perfect,
You can feel the flesh impaled,
The hearts beating.
Beauty destroyed by beauty.

Gold bosses, royal colours,
Trade marks in golden letters
The fiery lion and unicorn chained,
Hold up the pride of Exeter.
But the fireplace is burnt and cold.
Autumn colours bloom in the light
From carts to cars,
From mud to tarmac
From buckets to jacuzzis
We've come so far, it's frightening.

Come on, step back in time,
To the amazing treasured life
Inside the one we're in.
Life

By Niamh Tapper
West Exe Technology College

I am what they call a housewife. All day I look after my six children, keep my house in order and cook meals for my husband when he has completed a long day at the harbour. I work all day and am up as soon as it is light. I hear the birds calling each other, and the sound of the world going to work.

During time in the evening before we have to turn the candles out, I will work on my woollen mill—quickly so as to make the most of the daylight, and produce the most cotton possible.

I have to have money for my children to make it through each day: My eldest three toil to help the family; the eldest working as Sheer Men, and the other as a Fuller’s apprentice.

With weaving you have to concentrate to start with, but then you can let your mind wander... sometimes you think about the good things, the celebrations, the occasional days off; some times only the sad things come to your mind; the injury, the illness, the death.
A shiver of excitement went through me as I saw I had woken before everyone else. It was still dark. I could catch the stars – it seemed as though they were raining down on me.

On deck looking at the stars I wondered what lay beyond, and longed to be a navigator. Stars are so lucky. How lucky I would be to be able to do the job I am passionate about.
I can see everybody from here. Every movement. Trying to speak but not having the chance. I hear every sound – from the quietest twitch to the loudest of bangs. People respect me; they cherish me, and love me. I was created before you were even born and am still living now. I do not have the ability to move but my mind runs free.

I have been so lucky in my life; I have one of the most stunning homes and meet people every day. I am able to help people with any of their problems.

There is a man who comes in here often. He is a wealthy man, large and greatly respected- the Under Warden. He talks to me often when no- one is here, kneeling down, right knee first. I know his whole life; he started as an apprentice and at twenty three, became the Under Warden. I felt for him and respected him when his poor wife died; he struggled with his six children.

I sympathised with him until yesterday. He stole five shillings from the fine pot. I knew he meant well and was praying that no- one would find out but I had to get him punished.

This happened the day before Henry the Eighth, sent Oliver Cromwell to ruin all things Catholic. He is going to burn down all of the Catholic churches, anything related to Catholicism, and me.

I Can See Everybody From Here

By Eve Richardson
West Exe Technology College
I have received the letter to say that the boat has left Topsham harbour with all of the supplies to trade with us on board. Now after days of preparing we are waiting, ready with our supplies. Our hands are sore and blistered from the metal handles that hold packs of bricks and tiles. My usually pale hands are red and purple but it will be gone in a few days. We will have about a month until the next trade, but for now fifteen boys and men stand watching the horizon, anticipating the next move, waiting for that right time when the boat will arise from the line on the edge of the sea.

My name is Joseph or Joe as people call me for short, I am fifteen almost sixteen and I live with my little sister and my mum. My dad left us when I was born so I have never met him and probably never will. I work with my best mate Josh as a trader in Holland along with many others with ages ranging from fourteen to fifty five. Most of us live right next to the harbour and work from five hundred hours to twenty one hundred hours. We get tired and sore but this is our duty to our city.

Just over the horizon there will be a big boat carrying twenty five people, they too, waiting to trade but not brick and tile but leather and wool instead. They would have travelled over the Atlantic to meet us and will stay for one night before sailing back in the morning.

This is the first trade of the year which is always the hardest mainly because there are new workers who don't know the ropes and the supplies at there lowest because trying to get the supplies during the winter is hard because of the snow, ice and rain. Although we haven’t done too badly this year.

The outline of the boat is seen at eighteen hundred hours and our grip tightens on the metal as it slowly tries to pierce our skin. The boat is big but I have seen bigger. It is called “The Georgina” it slowly sails towards us and faint figures of the crew are starting to make shape as they stand watching it cuts through the glimmering water.

The boat pulls up beside us and the trade starts quickly both of us making money and receiving the materials that we need. The trade takes along time because there is always a lot of arguing and decisions to make so we don’t finish till twenty three hundred hours when we all make to beds as it has been a long day for every one.
The groups visited Tuckers Hall, St Nicholas Priory and the Royal Albert Memorial Museum’s RAMM in the Library.
Tuckers Hall was built in 1471 as a chapel for the craft guilds of the weavers, fullers and shearmen. After the Reformation the Hall became a meeting place for the guilds and has remained in that use ever since. The building has seen many developments throughout its 600 year history, and is soon to experience more. It is currently engaged in a substantial development programme, which has expanded the number of rooms and created space for an Interpretation Centre which will provide a detailed history of the cloth trade in Exeter.

“Working with a real author is an experience the students won’t forget. It isn’t just that they believe someone who makes their money from writing when told that revising and re-writing are vital, but they also get the perspective of someone for whom writing is really, really important. Teachers obviously know how to write but they can’t spend their time perfecting their skills. Authors do.”

Stephen Mitchell, St Luke’s School
St Nicholas Priory

Originally part of Exeter’s first medieval monastery, this splendid Grade 1 listed building later became the Tudor home of a wealthy merchant family. Now presented as their richly furnished Elizabethan town house adorned with beautifully crafted replica furniture and the bright paint and textiles of the period, St Nicholas Priory is one of Exeter’s hidden jewels.

“I learnt how to use my imagination.”
Niamh, age 12, St Luke’s C of E High School
RAMM in the Library

RAMM in the Library was an exhibition gallery and a family space and a home for RAMM in the city centre while the museum building was being redeveloped. The exhibition gave a flavour of a museum in transit, displaying a selection of objects from RAMM's collection and their relationship to Exeter through time.

“The Daisi sessions for the Literature Festival provided our students with a fantastic opportunity to meet an author and be inspired by her enthusiasm for writing. For us as teaching and support staff, it gave us an insight into the artistic capabilities of our students in a different environment.”

Zoe Woodman and Kay Thompson
Isca College of Media and Arts
Now it’s your turn...