

HANDBOOK FOR PRACTITIONERS: MATERIALS AND TOOLS “MIGRANTS’ STORIES THROUGH THE USE OF IMAGES”

INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 3

SIMPLE PROJECT: 2019-1-SE01-
KA204-060418

Social Integration of
Migrants and
activation of Paths for
Learning and
Employability



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Find out more about the project (website)

SIMPLE FB page



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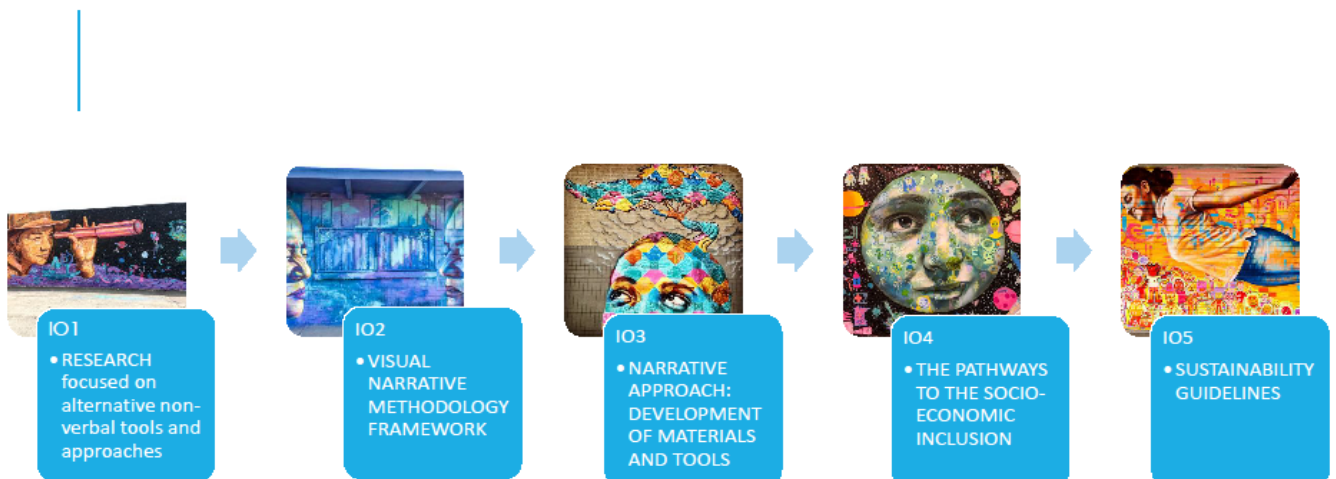
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About SIMPLE project

Background of the SIMPLE project

All European countries are involved in a massive arrival of migrants, and many of them are asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking. Several attempts have been made in the last few years to implement reception policies by each Member State and at European level. However, most of them are based on a material approach rather than social, psychological and welfare related, focusing more on the legal condition of a person rather than on the social condition, which, indeed, is key to devising good reception and integration policies, both for the sake of incomers and local communities. In every migration, incomers carry along a psycho-emotional burden of violence and/or physical, sexual, psychological abuse, which needs to be dealt with, not just deciding about a person's life and condition by granting (or not) a permit to stay. It is sadly known that migrants, especially those who come from Sub-Saharan Africa, were very often tortured during their journeys and social operators lack suitable skills and tools to facilitate the integration process of newcomers.



The **SIMPLE project – Social Integration of Migrants and activation of Paths for Learning and Employability** – develops and piloted an innovative approach to be applied to facilitate the narration of past stories and events faced by immigrant women. SIMPLE will help women to restore their emotional and psychological wellbeing and support a full and fruitful process of social and economic inclusion into the new community.

At the centre of the project activities are immigrant women, with a special attention to women traumatised by the travel and human trafficking. In the SIMPLE project the concept of empowerment acquires a significant meaning, as an individual and organised process, through which individuals can reconstruct their ability to choose, design and regain the perception of their own value, their potential and new opportunities. The project's activities are divided in **5 Intellectual Outputs** and will be developed within a two year framework: from November 2019 until October 2021 by a partnership of 7 institutions from 6 countries: **Sweden, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK.**

Introduction

“Seeing comes before words” John Berger, Ways of Seeing

The following document will present tools and materials applicable to **the non-verbal narrative methodology**. In order to properly implement the toolkit, all readers should first get familiar with the methodological framework (IO2, available on the SIMPLE website¹). Both documents are strictly connected - the methodology does not work without the tools and the proposed tools will not achieve the same results without an in-depth understanding of the theoretical framework.

Visual narratives in silent books can be seen as small-scale worlds that welcome and take us through the complex dynamic of reading and interpreting cultural, natural and inner images that we see. Silent books revoke the imagination and the voice of the reader and facilitate unforgettable meetings between people, books and stories, representing a successful way to meet across cultural boundaries, and to work on diversity and inclusion. The other tools present in this document are all meant to **promote self-awareness as well as expression and sharing of emotions, sensations and thoughts**. Furthermore, they can help us to feel present in the moment and with ourselves, which is an essential condition to approach any non-verbal narration.

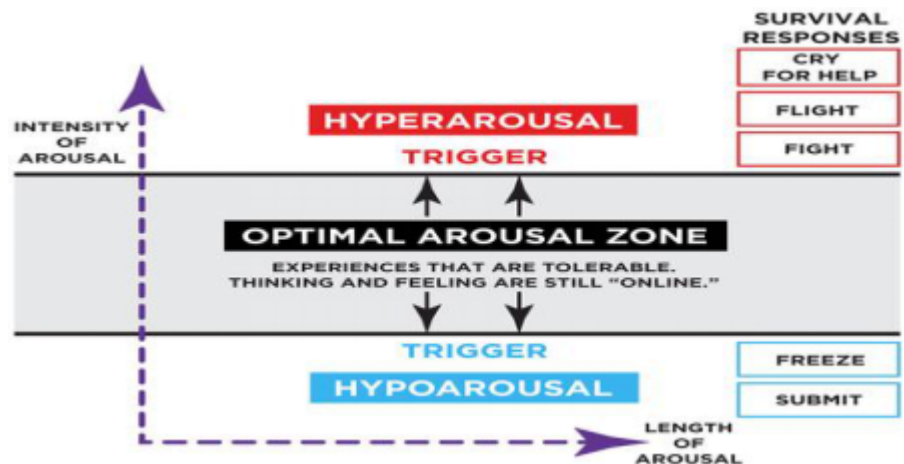
What all of these tools have in common is that all the subjects involved should always feel within their comfort zone in order to use them. In addition, in order to implement these tools, it is essential to have a profoundly non-judgemental attitude and genuine curiosity for the others, who through these tools are sharing with us precious and delicate aspects of themselves and their lives.

Last but not least, here are some instructions for preliminary preparation, valid for all the tools. Find a space in which you, as well as the other participants, feel as comfortable as possible. Take your time to explain what you are going to do, even though sometimes practice is the best way to really understand some of the presented tools.



¹ SIMPLE website: <https://www.simple-project.eu/>

Window of tolerance



Description of the Windows of Tolerance

The window of tolerance is a simple graphic tool created by Doctor Seigel to represent brain and body reactions. Thanks to this instrument, individuals can understand their own physiological arousal fluctuation as well as the arousal of others. Being able to observe one's own changes in arousal, as well as others', is of great importance since it allows us to implement effective strategies in order to regulate it.

During daily life, our arousal level fluctuates within an optimal range (represented by the upper and lower limit of the window of tolerance). These fluctuations can usually happen many times a day, and sometimes our arousal can change by the minute. The intensity and the frequency of these fluctuations are very subjective and can also vary from day to day, months or periods of our life.

Also, the width of our window of tolerance (our optimal arousal zone) varies during the days, months and years of our life. As we feel in a safe environment, with the right amount of energy, not overwhelmed by emotions, our WoT (Window of Tolerance) grows wider. We are more able to deal with any event/stressor we may face in life. On the contrary, when we feel we cannot trust our environment, we don't feel safe, with a low energy level and/or overwhelmed by emotions, our WoT narrows. Thus creating a higher probability for the fluctuations of the arousal level to exit the optimal arousal zone.

How does our arousal level vary?

When an external event, or even a physical sensation or a thought, occurs, fluctuation happens too. The arousal can increase or decrease, and every reaction is extremely subjective. Usually, it remains inside the boundaries of the WoT, in the optimal arousal zone. When it does, we can implement different strategies to regulate our arousal, in order to lower or increase it as we wish. These strategies can both be implemented alone or with the help of others (others can be very helpful in order to regulate our arousal!).

In some cases, a **very stressful event (trigger)** can occur or our WoT can be very narrow (or both). Then our arousal can go outside the boundaries of the WoT, either in the Hyperarousal or the Hypoarousal zone. When this happens, our brain and our body activate very basic (in an evolutionary sense), automatic responses. We can either experience a flight or fight reaction (hyperarousal) or a freezing/collapse reaction (hypoarousal). In either case, these are automatic and fast survival reactions that we share with the animal world and that are essential to cope with an extreme danger. In the hyper and hypo arousal, it is very difficult, sometimes

impossible, to regulate ourselves and to ask for help, taking benefits from the regulating effects of relations and the presence of others.

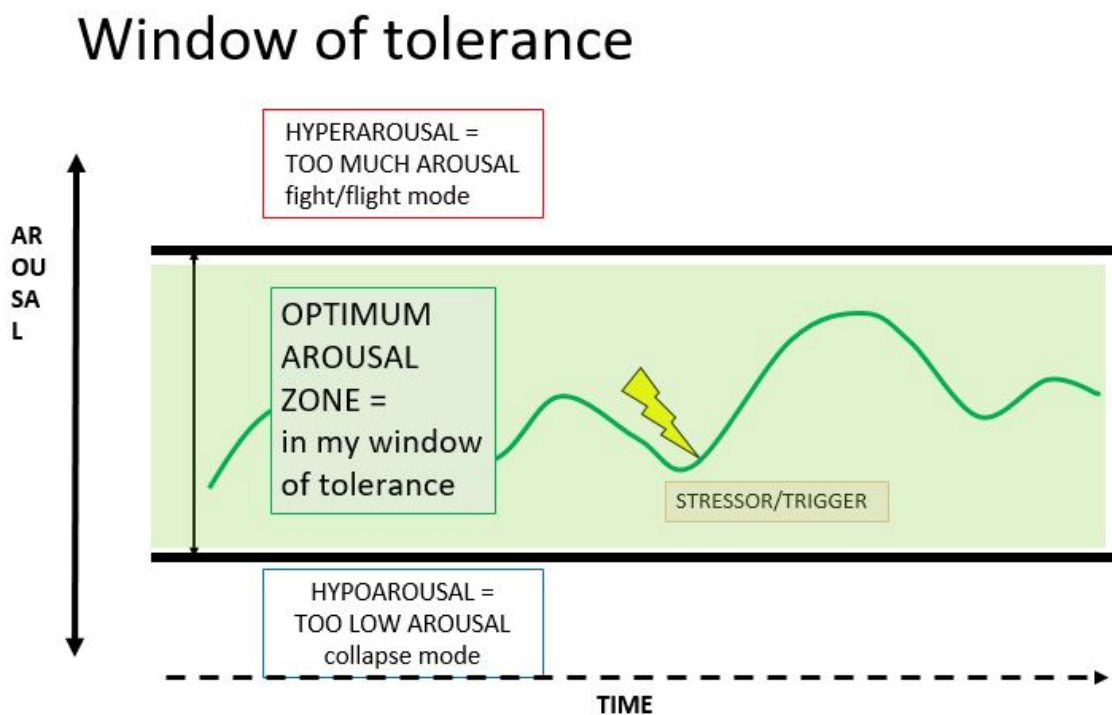
This is why it is quite useful being able to sense our arousal level and when it comes near to the borders of the WoT. It allows us to intervene before it becomes very difficult to regulate it.

The window of tolerance is a useful tool because it gives a graphic representation of the arousal fluctuations. It helps to identify which stressor we are more sensitive and which regulation strategies are most effective for us. At last, asking ourselves these introspective questions on our functioning, about what moves us and how it does so, helps develop our introspective ability, making it more efficient and effective.

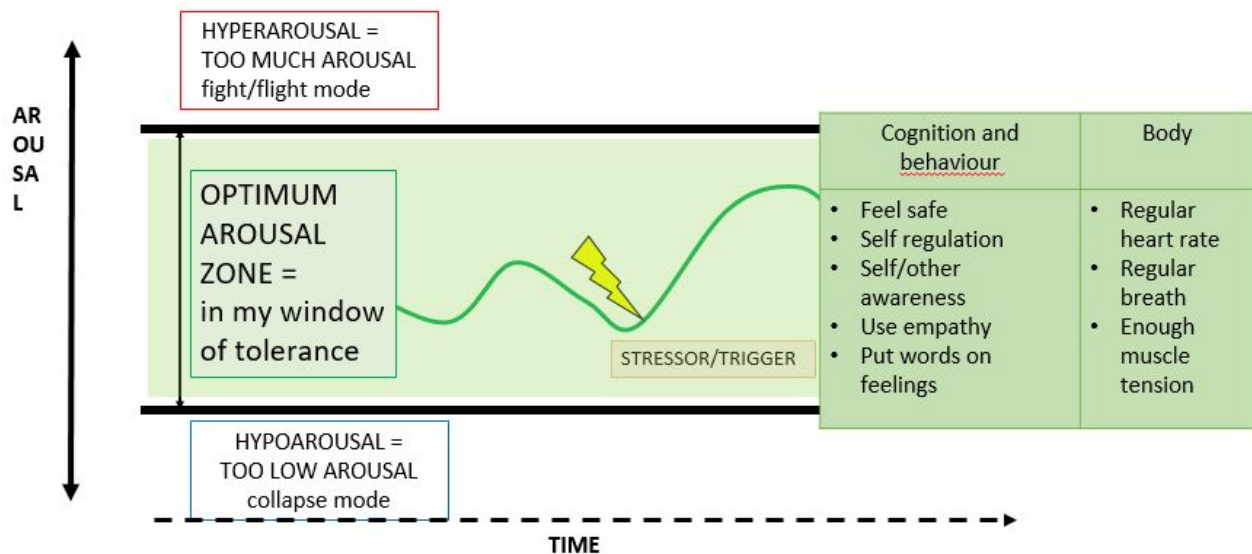
In the following parts of the document, you will find:

- a graphic explanation of the window of tolerance arousal fluctuations;
- a video tutorial with a practical example of WoT;
- simple step by step instructions on how to use this tool.

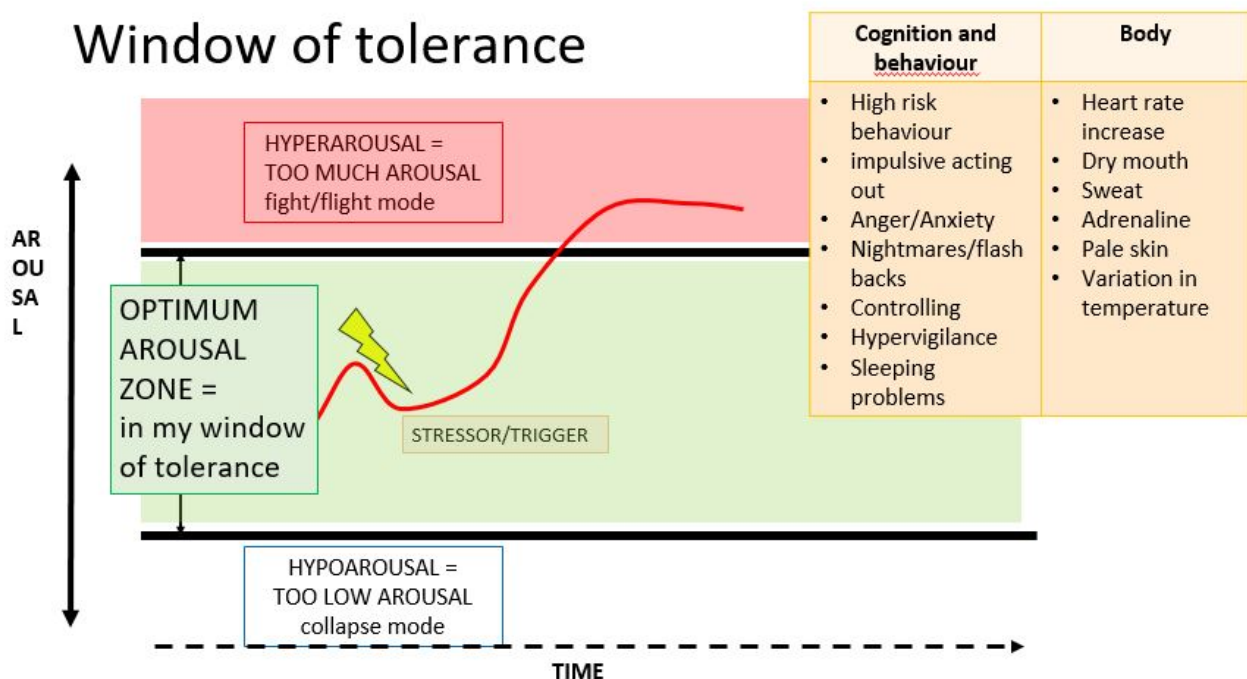
A GRAPHIC EXPLANATION OF THE AROUSAL FLUCTUATIONS



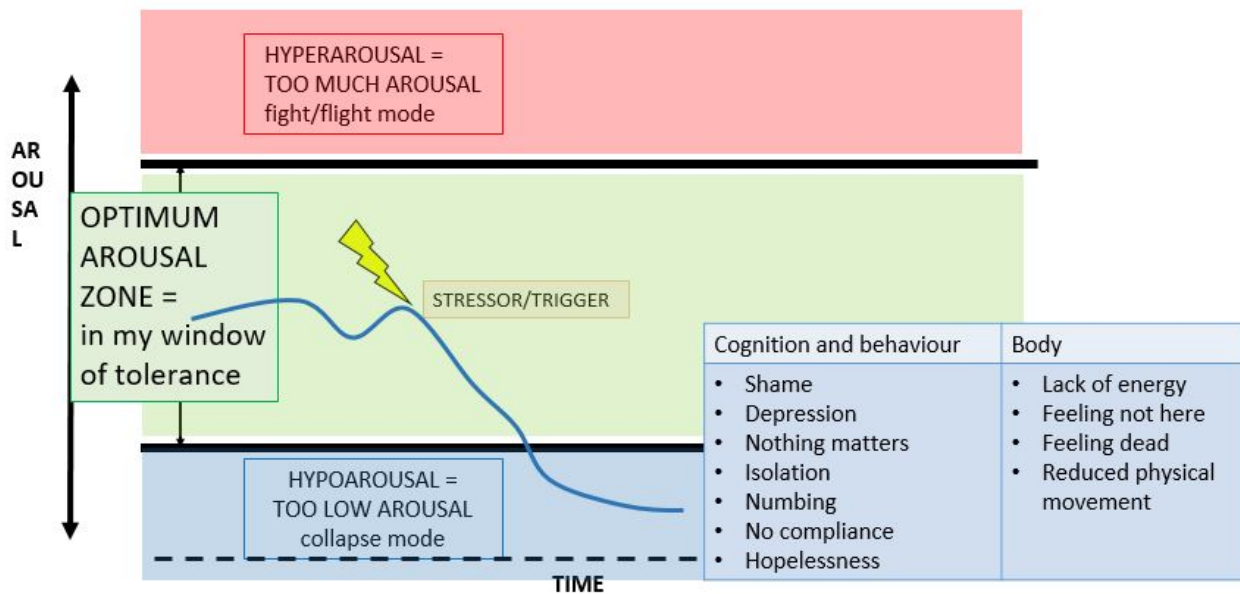
Window of tolerance



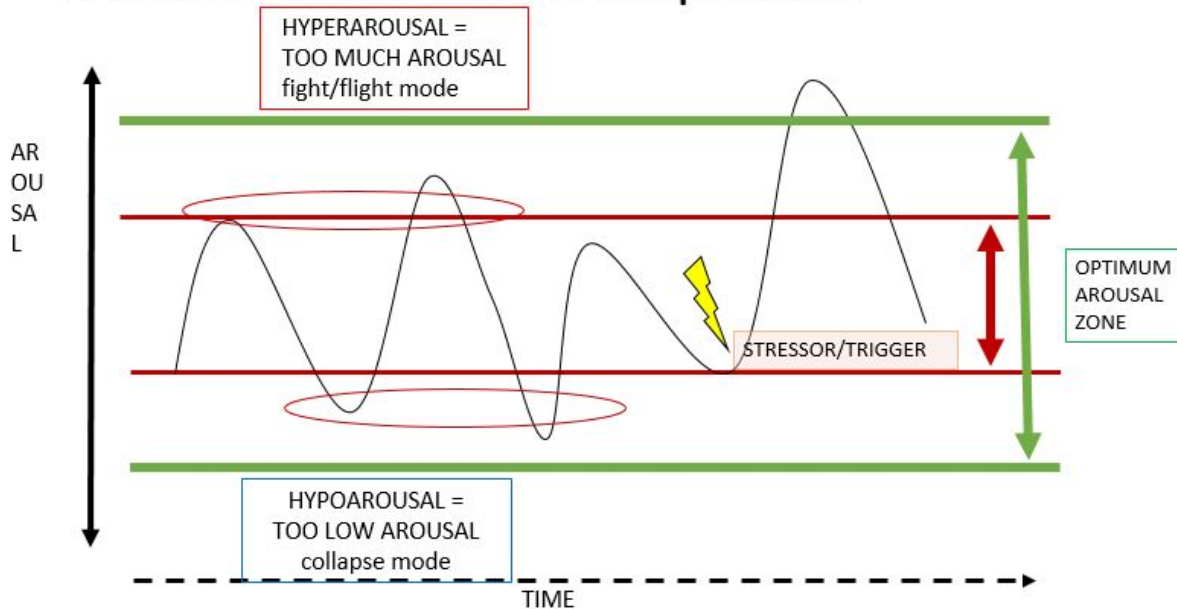
Window of tolerance



Window of tolerance



Window of tolerance amplitude

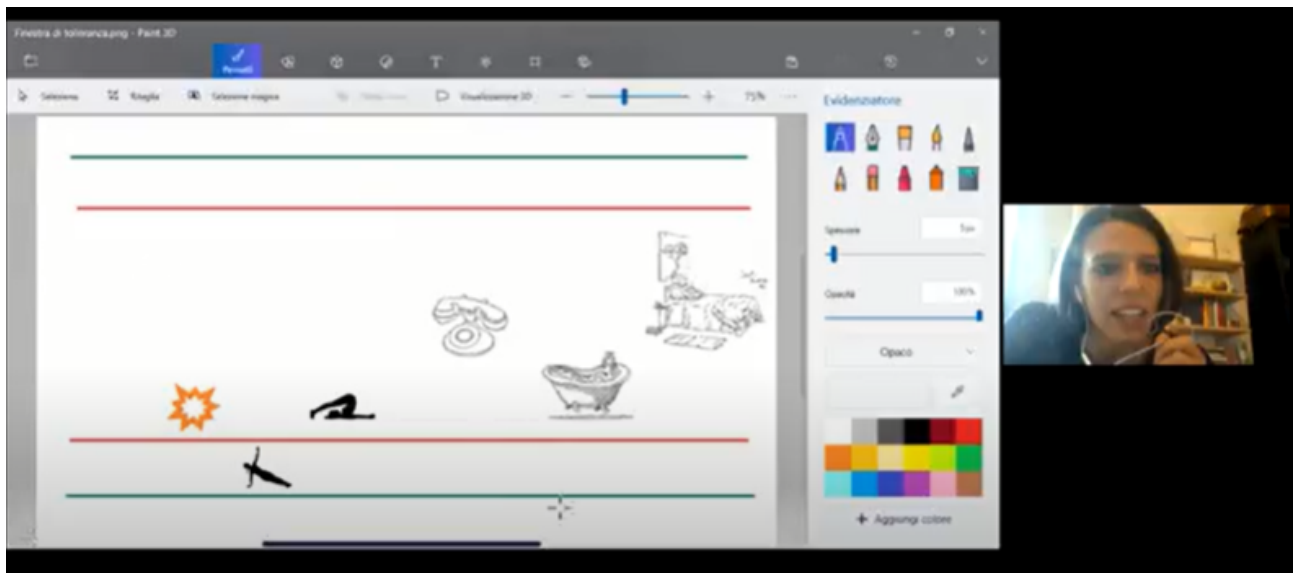


A VIDEO TUTORIAL WITH A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OF THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE





Available on the SIMPLE YouTube page:

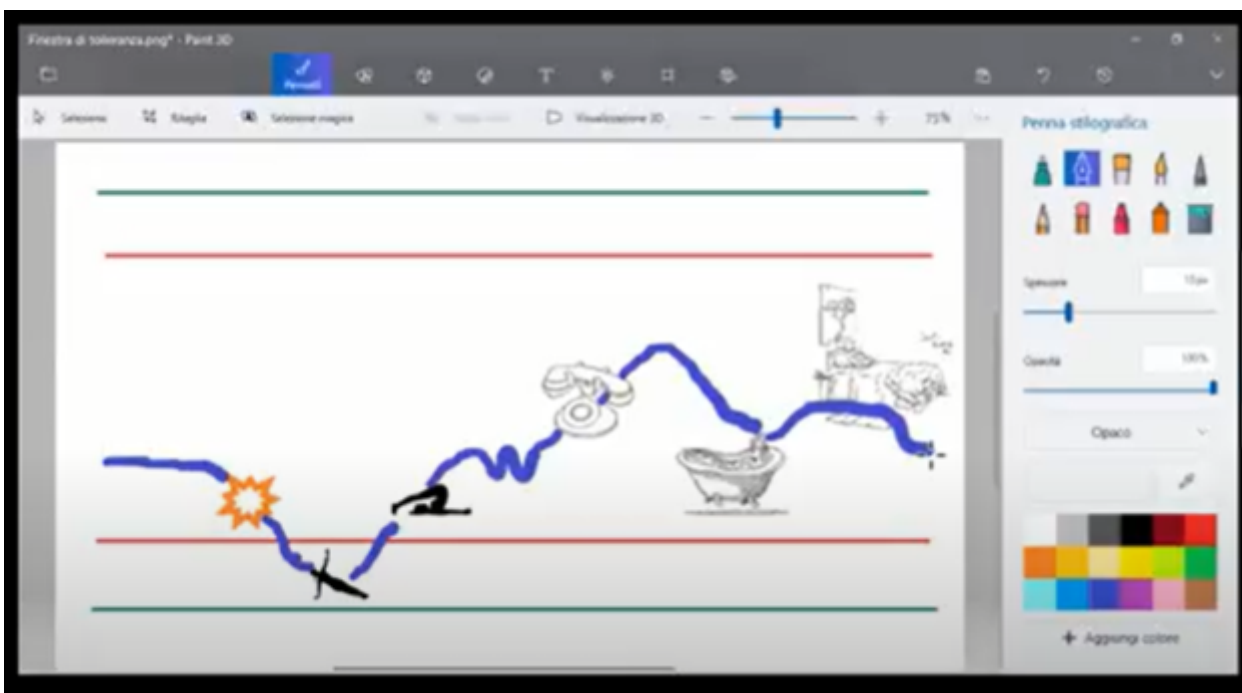
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6kchMcPiOgA0U3HaaDzBbg>



WRITTEN EXPLANATION OF LUCIA'S WINDOW OF TOLERANCE:

- The green line is her normal window of tolerance.
- The red line is the narrowed space caused by "stressing events" she faced that day.
- "it was very late, 7:30 p.m., Lucia was supposed to close her work. She felt tired.

-  (trigger) Lucia's boss called her and had an unpleasant discussion about money. 7.30 p.m. was not the right time to speak about this argument. They did not find any compromise; she felt frustrated and upset. She went out of her window of tolerance. If the telephone had rung in a different moment of the day, Lucia's window of tolerance would have been larger (green line) and would have allowed her to maintain calm.
- In that moment (outside her window of tolerance) Lucia started to think negatively (I need to change my job, I feel exhausted). She was aware of her emotions and was able to handle her mood; she knows that bad emotions overcame her because she was really tired. She felt her body become stressed.
- So, she decided to do physical workout.  This exercise helped her to go up and come back inside the borders of the window of tolerance.
- Then she continued with yoga exercises, which helped her to focus on breathing. She felt her body come alive again, her shoulders started to open and relax. She regained the feeling of safety and of being strong, more concentrated. She managed to regulate her inner state with the body exercise and let "the discussion with the boss" be just one of many challenges we face every day.
- Later on she had a nice call with her friend that she enjoyed and made plans for the weekend to have a walk together in nature. This friend helped her to feel much better. She felt relaxed. After the conversation with her friend, she had a calming shower. She was preparing her body to sleep. She felt relaxed. Body, mind, emotions were calmed.



Step by step instructions on how to use the tool Window of Tolerance

- First of all, explain the tool and why you feel it could be useful;
- Explain the graphical representation of the tool (i.e. *these lines are the borders of the WoT or this is how we can represent the fluctuations of our arousal*);
- Ask if the person would like to draw her/his own WoT concerning a stressful event/situation she can recall (it does not have to be an extreme situation for the tool to be effective);

- They can choose the width of their WoT that most represents how they felt at that particular moment;
- Everyone can graphically represent the events/strategies with any symbol, drawing, cross, dot, line, words etc. they desire. There is no right or wrong way;
- Give 10 minutes to draw the WoT;
- When the drawing is done, ask the person to explain what they represented;
- You can also ask how the process was, if it was easy, hard, boring or interesting etc.;
- Ask how and when this tool can be used in everyday life;
- Remember: there is no right or wrong WoT; each one is representative of one's subjective experience!

Art-based tools for creative expression

Description

Art-Therapy is a psychological technique that includes all the creative expressions such as drawing, painting, writing, playing music, dancing, making sculpture, collage etc. It is an instrument that may help to identify and resolve emotional conflicts, reduce anxiety and stress, improve self-awareness and the ability to be present in the moment as well as to encourage self-esteem. It creates a gathering time with ourselves and with others.

From this technique we can derive some useful exercises to promote expressive creativity. **The creative expression and non-verbal communication** overthrow linguistic and age barriers, allowing a dialogue free from external bonds. It allows the expression of everything which is difficult to describe with words.

Regarding the setting, it could be in both an individual and/or a group session. As always with these tools, it is essential to create a safe place.

Different materials can be used so that individuals can feel free to experiment, play and express themselves in an environment which is **free from judgment**.

In these exercises we can ask the person, or the group, to express on a "canvas" how they feel in the present moment, how they felt in a specific moment in the past or about any other topic that might be of interest to the person or the operator. **The aim is to represent, on a tangible medium, feelings, sensations, ideas and thoughts.** To do so, we can **use any material at our disposal**. If we have only one means of artistic expression (i.e. paper and a pencil) it is not a problem, that is what will be used. The wider variety of materials we have at our disposal, the more the person will feel comfortable.

You should be comfortable with the materials you present. You don't have to be an expert but still need to have some basic knowledge on how to use them and need to have had some experience on trying to use them and experiment with them.

This activity needs time, at the very minimum 30 minutes, ideally at least 40 minutes. This activity can be even longer, just beware of the confidence the participants have with artistic expression. If they are more used to it, the activity can be longer. Otherwise, it is best to give a shorter time.

How to guide a creative expression exercise

- First of all, explain the tool and why you feel it could be useful;
- Show and explain the materials at their disposal;

- Ask the participants to focus on the feelings, sensations, thoughts, images etc. they want to represent;
- Set a time for them to choose the materials and create their artistic piece;
- Remind the participants to express themselves and that there will be no judgement about their creations;
- If you want, you can accompany the activity with some soft, relaxing music. Beware of the volume, it shouldn't be too high;
- Once the time is over, there should be a moment for sharing the experiences;
- This can be done in small groups, or in a big group with all the participants. In any case, each participant should be free to share what they want, or not share anything at all if they prefer to do so. Also, each participant can choose if they want to show their creation or if they prefer to keep it for themselves.

Examples of an ART activity and its outcomes

This art-based activity has been carried out during the SIMPLE staff training in May 2020. In the images below, you can see a variety of materials used for self-expression: collage, drawing, pictures, paintings and digital drawing with the use of Miro* (online visual collaboration whiteboard). Remember that the technique and materials are of a personal choice of each participant as they have to feel comfortable, familiar and not judged when carrying out the activity.

*You will find a wider explanation on the possible ways to use digital tools in next section of this document. Miro can be an efficient digital tool to apply in an art-base activity as well as during the visual narration.



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Body physical exercises

Description

Keeping our body engaged and active is essential for everyone's well-being. It doesn't matter if it is **sport, yoga or walking**, as long as it is an activity that can give back the sensation of an active, alive body.

Furthermore, working with the body allows us to create a safe place in the "here and now", leaving out difficult memories from the past and worrying thoughts about the future.

One of the exercises we can do with our body to improve self-awareness and our well-being is **grounding techniques**. These techniques are essential for anyone who struggles with the consequences of distressing events. **Especially in individuals who were forced to migrate, the body is the only land that they can carry with them. The body represents the place of origin and, as well, the place where difficult memories and experiences can be relived.** But everybody can benefit from the deeper connection with our body and our feelings derived from these exercises, as well as improved stability and a sense of control. **You will find an example for a basic grounding exercise in the next paragraph.**

We can also use a **visualisation technique** to promote connection with our inner selves. Visualisations also allow us to **create new possibilities and experience them at an imaginative level**. Every time we use the imagination to visualise something, our nervous system activates and involves our body, just as we were living and experiencing that visualisation in real life. When guiding a visualisation, be aware of your voice: the pace of your speech, the volume of your voice, the tone of your voice. All these elements are important since you are guiding this experience, and the participants are following your voice. Your voice gives direction and sense to the experience; it should be easily heard but not so loud that overcomes each participant's own inner experience.

There are many possible visualisations - many are found in books or on the internet. We propose in this document an example of a tree visualisation, which also has a strong grounding element to it.

Example of grounding exercise

Basic grounding exercises are very simple and consist in standing up with your feet spread as wide as your shoulder, knees and ankles slightly bent so that you find yourself in a stable and reasonably comfortable position. There, try to let yourself breathe freely and concentrate on the physical sensations in your body. Starting from the contact points between your feet and ground, then coming up through the ankles, the calves, knees, thighs and all the way up to the top of the head. Try to feel the stability and the support that the ground gives you, along with all the sensations of your body. Try to leave out the judgement, be curious about yourself and be open to whatever sensations come.

This exercise can last from 5 minutes to as long as you want/feel. If it is your first time, start with a shorter time, and slowly work your way up with the duration.

If you want to propose this exercise to other people, you must have tried it yourself before, the more times you do that, the better ability to guide others you will have.

Here you can also find a simple clear infographic on a few different ways in which you can practice grounding.

There are many different ways of grounding - even if you don't find one of the options below helpful there are many others you can try. **You can also create your own ways of grounding, by finding anything to focus your senses on and anchor you in the present moment.** Note that grounding is not about making the emotion go away or detaching from your experience; it is about tolerating the experience and emotions while staying present in your body.



Example: Tree visualisation

Walk freely in the room, occupy the space, choosing where to go and which part of the floor to occupy.

Choose the rhythm that allows you to best feel your body.

Try and be aware of how your feet touch the ground, feel how your shoes are supporting this movement of the foot and of the knee.

Now, with each step, imagine that your shoes are leaving an imprint, just as if they were wet, leaving their mark on the floor. That footprint is yours, and yours only. There is no other footprint in the world which is the same. Is it big or small? Just visible, or very clear?

Let your breathing guide your body into the exploration of the space and of your sensations.

When you find a spot that you like, you can stop there.

Now we will guide you through a small visualisation to better explore the sensation of our body. You can close your eyes to facilitate the visualisation or you can, as well, keep them open.

I will ask you to just slightly bend your knees, keeping them relaxed, in order to support, without effort, the weight of your body, allowing the floor to sustain it.

Let the breathing slow down after the movements, and let it become deeper. Feel your stomach inflating during inhalation and deflating during expiration. The air comes in cooler and goes out warmer.

Feel your feet sink into the ground as if they were roots of a tree. Roots connect you solidly to the ground, they help get water from the soil. Feel the sap going from the soil into the roots and then into your body,

² Source: <http://www.tothegrowlery.com/blog/2017/4/18/six-different-types-of-grounding-exercises-for-anxiety-intense-emotions>

where it starts to expand. What colour is it? What is its shape? What is the rhythm and the speed in which it expands into the rest of your body?

The sap goes up through your leg into the vertebral column, which is the trunk of your tree. How is your trunk? it can be tall, short, thin, thick, straight or twisted, light or dark.

Feel how this cortex protects you and contains you. Feel the sap running inside you and touching all your organs and your heart.

Going up, the trunk leads to the branches, the leaves, the flowers and everything that needs light and wind to grow. Feel how the sap reaches the top of your body and allows every single cell to flourish. Every part of your body is the tree, and, with you, other similar trees are going through the same experience.

Now, with this sensation of wholeness, we ask you to stay for a few more moments in contact with this experience.

Very slowly, you can now begin to move your body, starting from your hands and feet, and also slowly start to open your eyes and look around you.

The narrative approach

« Unforgettable meetings between people, books and stories - a successful way to meet across cultural boundaries, and to work on diversity and inclusion. Everyone has a story to tell, everyone can take part »



The role of Silent Books

Wordless books are a genre of their own, with a privileged access to some poetic themes, grammar and its specific aesthetic and pedagogical possibilities.

The silent books have no text, but they are particularly rich in their visual language, a language that everyone has access to and a language that makes it possible for us to dream and to imagine. Wordless books can tell simple and linear tales or complex stories, and they push the boundaries of artistic and creative expression. Books and stories gave comfort and security, an opportunity to disappear into a story and escape the difficulties of life for a moment. This was a place where people could share worlds and experiences with each other.

Shaun Tan, the author of the award-winning book “THE ARRIVAL”, describes the target, role and power of the silent books in the following words:

“Who are my books for? They are for as many different people as possible. I just trust that we all have something extremely valuable in common: an unpredictable imagination... As a creator, you provide a little architecture, build some imaginary walls, add a few furnishings, then wait for an anonymous visitor to arrive: should they accept the invitation, any real meaning can only come from their own hearts and minds... The reader is not so much the recipient of ideas; they are a conversationalist, enjoying a language that transcends the ordinary boundaries of daily chit-chat. All we need to do as creators and readers sitting together in the imaginary guest room is look at things and wonder about them openly” *(Shaun Tan, Visual Journey Through Wordless Narrative, the Arrival).

Description of the Narrative Approach

The process of narration supports the reconstruction of personal life meanings and allows imagining paths for the future. Transforming our experiences into stories allows us to organise our thoughts, sensations and emotions. Reworking on one’s story helps in the process of awareness of past events. The narrative process is a slow process that takes into account the individual necessities and emotions. To do this process in a relationship with another human being is of great importance as it helps us to fully benefit from all the positive outcomes of the process and minimising the difficulties. The listener is a witness, a guide and supporter. She/he must practice active listening and there has to be a trusting relationship with the protagonist.

The use of images. Migrant stories through the use of images.

The use of images allows us to approach distressing memories in a protected context. The images act as an external box, where the person can talk about the events without feeling them in the present moment.

The images strongly recall intimate and personal moments, while putting physical and emotional distance between the narrator and the image itself. In this way, the difficult event is confined into the image: images create a distance in space and time between the past and the present. The recalling of memories is not perceived as dangerous and the narrator can feel a sense of safety in the “here and now”.

Reorganising the chronological events helps people to feel safe in the present moment, putting a distance between the “here and now” and what happened in the past. Therefore, it helps reduce the arousal alarm state and the sense of fear.

During the SIMPLE project, an innovative narrative tool has been developed and experimented, benefitting from the experiences of the Italian project partners. The narrative tool is using Shuan Tan's graphic novel "The Arrival", where migrants narrate their stories thanks to the highly suggestive images of the book.



Why "The Arrival"

A man leaves his wife and child in a poor town, seeking something better in an unknown land on the other side of a large ocean. He soon finds himself in a confusing city of strange customs, remarkable animals, curious floating objects and unreadable languages. With nothing but a suitcase and a handful of money, he must find a place to live, food to eat and some form of work. He is helped along the way by sympathetic strangers, each with their own unspoken narrative: **stories of struggle and survival in a world of unfathomable violence, chaos and hope.**

A book about migration in the world: then, now and in the future. A story about the common problems that refugees have, whatever their nationality. It is about language, about being understood and understanding, about homesickness, poverty and separation from your family.

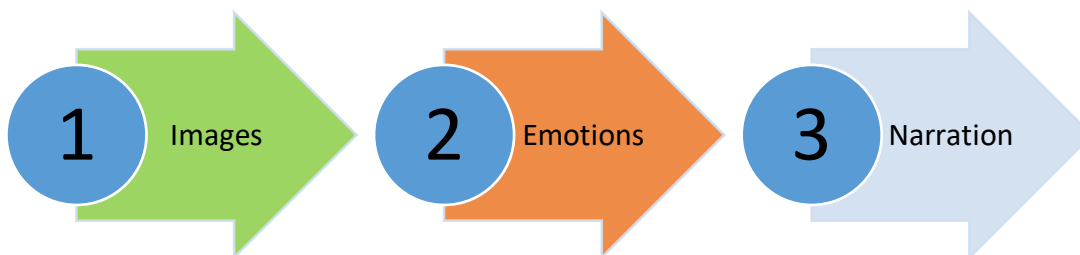
Most important for our objective, the "Arrival" book represents a silent book with highly evocative images. The absence of words, the choice of colours, and what the images themselves represent, creates a space for imagination and expression.



What do you need?

The Arrival book of Shaun Tan (one or more copies).

Note: When working with images, the activity starts from the proposition of images. Those awake emotions of past events and facilitates narration.



Instructions

The goal of this activity is to create a safe and stable life in the “here-and-now”, allowing the narrator to remember the situation of extreme stress, rather than experiencing it over and over again. This narrative process with images **can last for several meetings.**

The person can choose all the images from the book needed to tell us the stories of her/his life. In order to tell her/his story, after choosing the images, the narrator should organise them in a chronological order, displacing the images in the space as preferred (this can be done on any suitable surface, such as a table but also on the ground). This can help the narrator to redefine the duration of events, what happened before, and what happened after the event and to reorganize his/her stories. In addition, it helps the individual to regain a sense of self.

Remember: It is important not to force the narrator. The narrator is in charge and it is up to her/him to decide to go on or to stop the process at any given time.

This activity can be implemented both in individual and group settings. As always, as we add more people to the activity, we increase the richness of the process as well as its complexity. Be aware of this and start from individual settings if you are not used to guiding or working with groups. Try to know the tool, be comfortable with it and only after, create more complex settings to implement it.

How to use “The Arrival” to narrate one’s story:

- First of all, explain the tool and why you feel it could be useful;
- Show the book and explain to the person that she/he can choose any number of these images, and use them to tell her/his life story;
- If possible, don’t put a specific amount of time for this activity;
- Stay with the person in this moment, specifying you are available for any questions/problems/doubts;
- Once the person is done with choosing the images, ask her to place them in chronological order in the space at your disposal;
- Then ask the person to start telling her story from the first image. How to tell the story is up to the person, but if it is difficult for them and they don’t know how to start, you can help them to figure out a way;
- While the person narrates, your objective is to listen and to observe, both the person and the images. In the pauses on the narration, you can ask questions (such as the ones shown in the next paragraph). Tell the person how you are feeling or even underline positive elements in the images that were not taken into consideration. **Remember: be curious, respectful and most important of all don’t judge;**
- If time runs out before the end of the narration, take note of the images (also with a photograph) and continue the narration in the next session;
- If this activity is done in a group, make sure everyone has time to share the experience if they want to, in this or future sessions.

While working with the images:

Keep in mind some questions:

- How are you feeling while the other is telling you his/her story?
- How is the activation of the window of tolerance?
- (To the person) How were you feeling while choosing the images? What thoughts, emotions, sensations did you have?
- What are the thoughts, emotions, sensations while telling your story?

Observe:

- When the narration starts? When it ends?
- At a chronological level, is the narration fluid or are there some “empty spaces”

Video example of the activity: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=gncxRN2e_A4



The use of digital tools for self-expression and narration

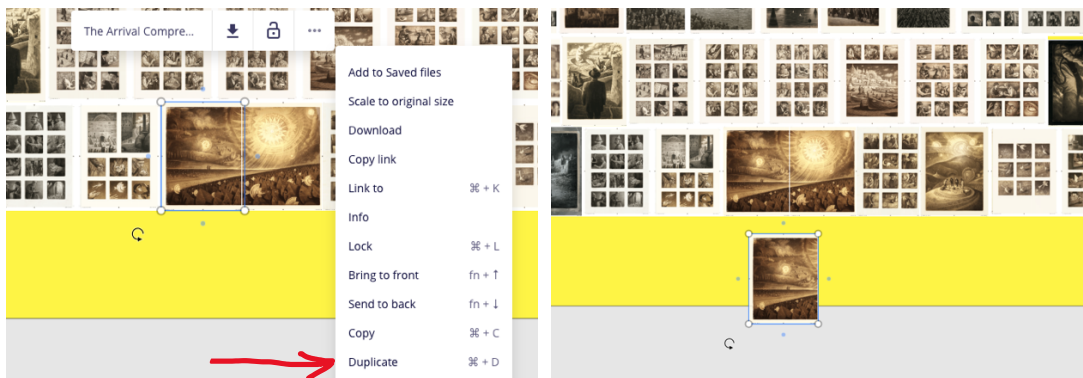
How to work with online collaborative whiteboard “miro” as a storytelling tool (www.miro.com)



In the middle of the page, you can find the illustrations of the book “The Arrival” by Shaun Tan.



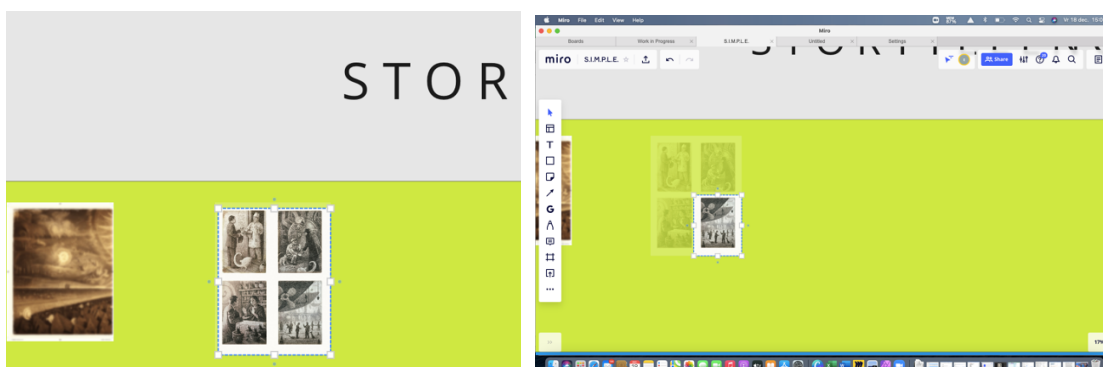
If you want to use an image, click on it. Now there are two possibilities, you can simply use the “cmd D” keys to duplicate the image, or search for duplicate in the pop-up menu.

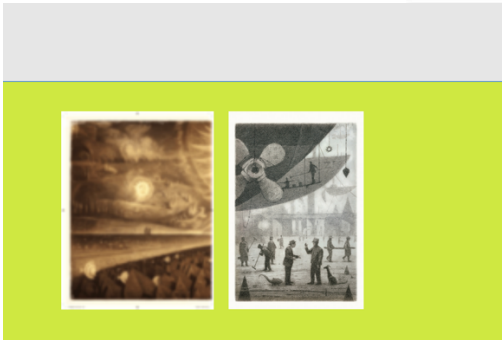


Drag the image to one of the coloured bars. If you are creating Story 1 your colour is green (Story 2 is dark blue, Story 3 is pink, Story 4 is dark green, Story 5 is yellow, Story 6 is light blue).

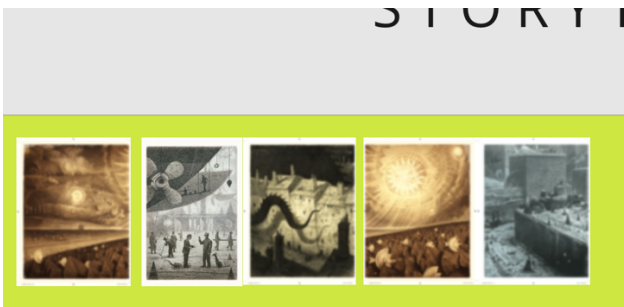


If there are different illustrations on a page and you want to use only one, you can crop the page.

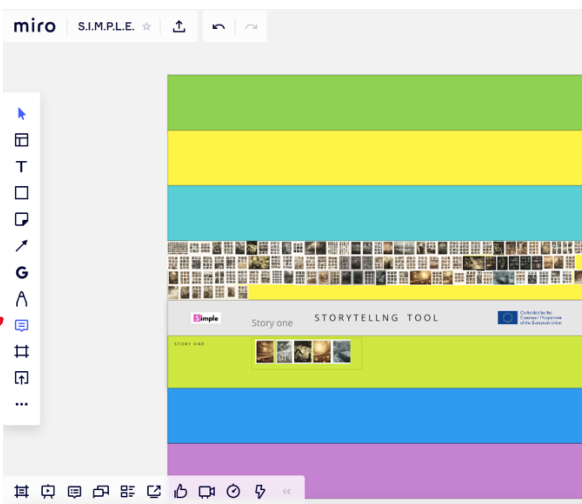




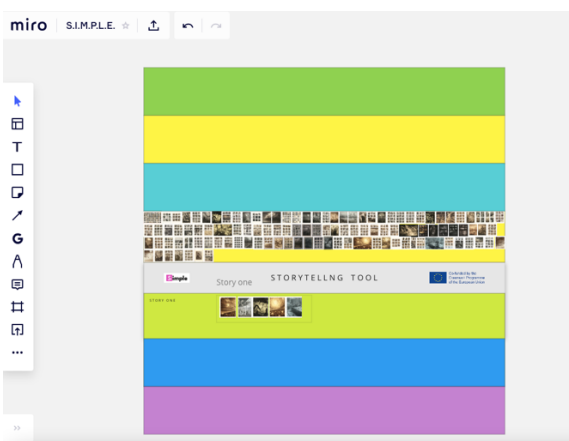
Click on the image, push “Enter” to crop and enlarge image.



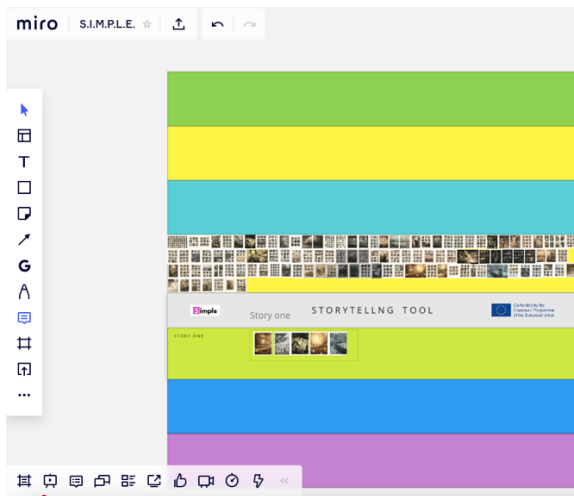
Add all the images you need to tell your story.



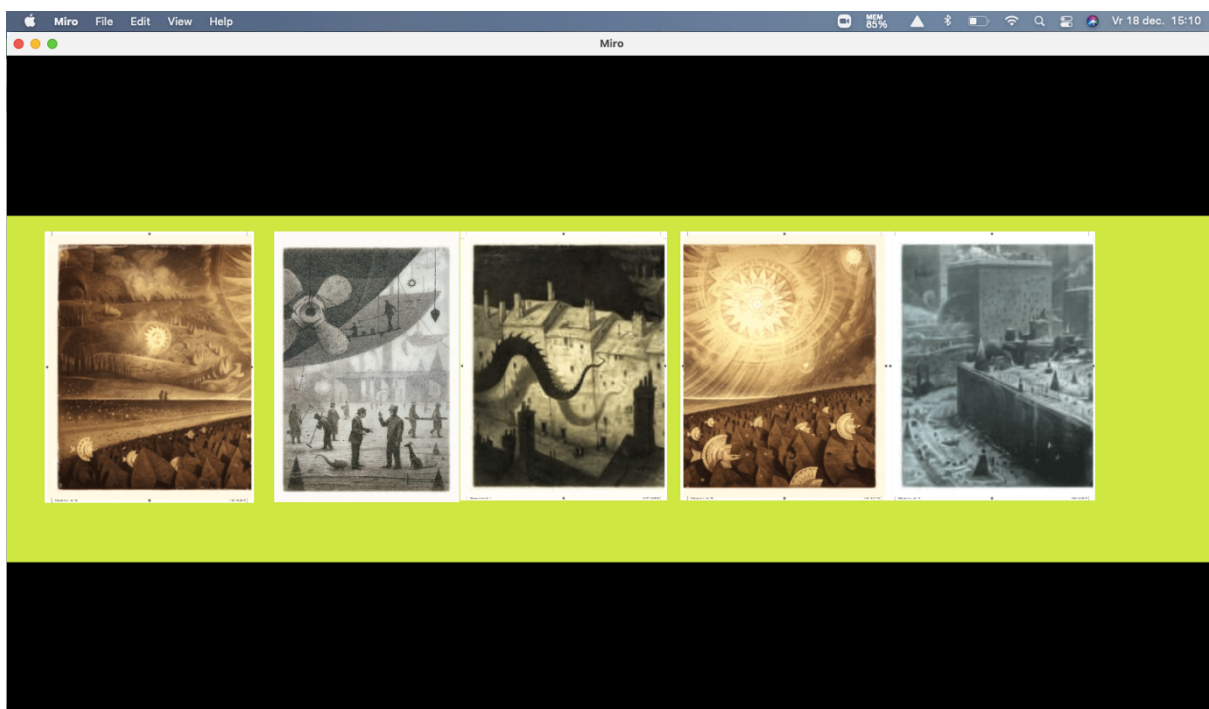
If you want to show your story to others, use the left toolbar to draw a frame around the images.



Click on the lower left corner; a toolbar will pop-up.



Click on the second icon to present.



.... and share your story

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