

# The EBOW **Recipe Book**

*for Engaging Beyond Our Walls*

August **2024**, 1st Edition (in preview); Published by the [Playful City Lab](#)  
**Authors:** Benjamin **Stokes**, Haze **Arroyo**, Meagan **Couture**, Eric **Schoenborn**, Michael **Mrizek**  
[Game Center](#) of American University, Washington, DC

Available  
online



**Citation suggestion:** Stokes, B., Arroyo, H., Couture, M., Schoenborn, E., & Mrizek, Michael. (2024). *The EBOW Recipe Book for Engaging Beyond Our Walls* (EBOW). Playful City Lab. <https://playfulcity.net/go/ebow/>



# Recipe Index

*(click to jump)*

1. [Text with a Sculpture](#)
2. [Ghost Tour](#)
3. [Tour with Trivia](#)
4. [I, Spy Photo Collecting](#)
5. [Escape Room-Style Tour](#)
6. [Insider Voice Tour with Choices](#)
7. [Sequencing Puzzle](#)
8. [Phone Calls to Guide a Hunt](#)
9. [Multimedia Tour](#)
10. [Storytelling Box with Touchscreen](#)

index

TOPIC

PAGE



# Why Recipes ?



*Like a recipe book, we hope this book will*

- get you **inspired** to make something
- build your sense of the **ingredients, proportions** and **sequencing** – and build your intuition about patterns
- empower you to find **substitutions** or **combine ideas** to match your local assets and culture

*Our philosophy – and some design principles:*

# Pick What's **in Season**

## 1. Listen to your ingredients, don't force it.

If an example project uses a massive sculpture in public space, it doesn't mean you can only use that scale of sculpture for that style of project. Maybe your community has a mural, building, even a stuffed animal! Use what you have available locally.

## 2. Match your skill level and time available.

We always underestimate how long a project can take. Keep your expectations within the realm of time and skills that are currently available, for best results.

## 3. Always adapt it. So much is about what emerges.

Keep an open mind. Sometimes a “mistake” leads to finding something interesting or sparking a moment of joy. During your process, allow space for creativity to emerge.



# What project is the *right size* to get started?



flickr image by [Eraphemalia\\_Vintage](#)

**A starter size:** These projects can be designed with a few sticky notes, some inspiration, and a dash of playfulness. For example, a small library in Milton, Wisconsin [brought to life a sculpture](#) just outside the building that features three metal birds in a garden. Paper prototypes often provide a early taste of the experience; lightweight digital can also be fast for prototyping.

**A bigger bite:** Audio tours, history scavenger hunts, and cell phone photography quests can all be easier than you might think. But they also take a bit more iteration and development to get the tone and pacing right. For one example, the DC Public Library collaborated with the National Women’s History Museum to create a “[community voice over](#)” for an exhibit in the library.

**A specialty platter:** Projects that are a heavier lift or with special features include stories that respond to the physical world, like climate stories that vary depending on today’s weather, stories that change when a local bus is late, projects that involve motion sensors or turning on outdoor lights, and stories that use tools like ChatGPT to modify a story in real-time.



# #1

## Text with a Sculpture

*Imagine: You come across a sculpture – or mural – that wants to share its stories. In reply to your text message, it sends back photographs, images, memories, and anecdotes. The conversation takes unexpected turns as you reply to its questions.*

### Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Find an interesting, and maybe overlooked, object.** It can be a sculpture, mural, building, stuffed animal, etc.
2. **Transform the object into a protagonist.** Find a personality that “fits” the object and use that to create a character out of the object. See our guide to [protagonists and hosts](#).
3. **Write the protagonist’s dialog.** Consider the literal and figurative point of view of this object. What might it see that people typically don’t? Write in the first person with drama!

### Mix to taste:

4. **Playtest the dialog.** See if adding pictures or other media at key points are helpful in telling the story. Paper or theatrical prototyping is invaluable. See [playtesting](#).
5. **Build in the digital tool of your choice.** Try out the first greeting.
6. **Like it? Launch it!** See [activity launches](#). Start small. Go where the people are.

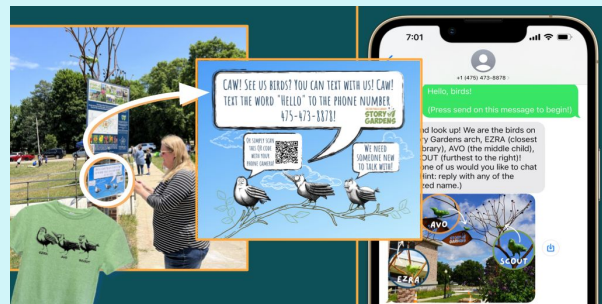
### Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” version, consider using posters with speech bubbles coming from the sculpture or object

As seen in...

## Interactive Story Garden with Three Birds

Creator: Milton Public Library (WI)



The project extends existing **sculptures of birds** in the library garden. Participants are invited to text Ezra, Avo, and Scout, sculptures perched at the story garden entrance. Three **unique personalities** were developed for each of the birds by library staff who also invited students from a local school to create one of the characters. Participants start by **scanning QR codes** on signage throughout the gardens with playful illustrations from a local illustrator which helped establish the story gardens’ hosts as familiar and friendly local characters.

>> [See more photos online](#)



Milton Public Library

Milton, WI

# #2

## Ghost Tour

*Imagine: A friendly spectre has invited you to see the world through their eyes. As they guide you around, they reveal a new perspective to familiar surroundings.*

### Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Trim to 2-3 locations.** You can always add more locations *after* playtesting. See [tour routes](#).
2. **Invent a compelling personality for the ghost.** See [protagonist](#) or [host](#).
3. **Write your ghostly dialog.** Lean on the personality of the ghost to bring out creativity in the content. Figure out where it makes sense to use pictures to accompany the dialog.

### Mix to taste:

4. **Playtest your dialog.** Make sure the dialog takes participants on the intended route in the correct order. See [playtesting](#).
5. **Build your tour in the digital tool of your choice.**
6. **Launch your activity!** See our guide on [activity launches](#).

### Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” version, consider using paper flyers at the starting location with a map of the path and dialog from the ghost tour guide to give them the narrative and any other content as they make their way around the tour path.

As seen in...

## Ghost of the Caboose

Creator: Umatilla Public Library (FL)



Community members were able to participate in a spooky story led by a **friendly ghost** about a famous historical caboose in the center of town. The library launched this activity in time for Halloween and have since continued to expand on the project by adding narrative flourishes.

>> See [more photos online](#)



Umatilla Public Library

Umatilla, FL

# #3 Tour with Trivia

*Imagine: Just as you arrive, a challenge appears on your phone. You answer the question and are delighted when you have guessed correctly. Anticipation builds for what the next location will bring.*

## Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Scale down to 2-3 locations.** You can always add more locations *after* playtesting. See [tour routes](#).
2. **Create an enthusiastic trivia host.** Can their personality tie to the local identity? See [protagonist or host](#).
3. **Craft your trivia questions.** Typically with 2-3 answer choices. Ideally the “wrong” answers still reveal something about the place - and the reply guides the player into the right answer. Consider adding images on questions where it would enhance the experience. Diagramming these on paper can be helpful.

## Mix to taste:

4. **Playtest your trivia questions.** Make sure they make sense and the answer choices work well. See [playtesting](#).
5. **Build your tour in the digital tool of your choice.**
6. **Launch your activity!** See [activity launches](#).

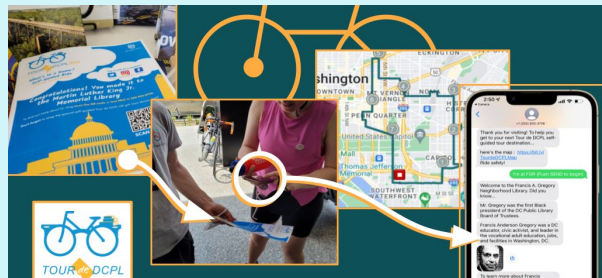
## Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” version, consider using paper flyers with trivia and a map with the path highlighted

As seen in...

## Tour de DCPL & Discover Branch History

Creator: DC Public Library (DC)



**Seven locations** were featured in this annual group bike tour of Washington, DC, libraries. Each location was chosen for being **recently renamed**, or named after a famous resident. The group received a **print flier** at each location with a custom QR code, which revealed their challenge trivia question by text message. They also received **historic photographs** from the archives by text message to take home, and use in answering the questions. Riders also received **goodies** to take home at each location. Solo riders could also go on their own at any time or join later.

>> [See more photos online](#)





# #4

## I, Spy Photo Collecting

*Imagine: Your eyes scan over a familiar area for something unseen - a shape. You see the perceived shape and photograph it, sharing it to a collection of shapes others have found.*

### Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Reduce to 2-3 locations.** You can always add more locations after playtesting. See [tour routes](#).
2. **Create an intriguing protagonist.** See [protagonist or host](#).
3. **Write your protagonist's dialog.** As part of the narrative, you will need to challenge participants to find shapes to photograph at each location. See [narratives](#).

### Mix to taste:

4. **Playtest your dialog.** Ensure that the challenge to participants is clear. See [playtesting](#).
5. **Build your dialog in the digital tool of your choice.**
6. **Launch your activity!** See [activity launches](#).

### Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ To engage the community, a curation of these images can then be printed out and displayed in the library, both as a way to celebrate patrons' participation and as a way to bring awareness and encourage others to check out the interactive storywalk.

As seen in...

## Photo StoryWalk on Architectural Shapes

Creator: Spooner Memorial Library (WI)



Participants walk around their community to take **photographs of shapes** they spot. The shapes theme came from a book to teach different shapes to young kids, which they were encouraged to read at each stop of the activity. Participants had the option to participate in the activity as part of another StoryWalk the library was hosting. The virtual activity was integrated with 4 stops on the StoryWalk and involved **taking pictures of shapes** in their surroundings and **answering trivia questions**.

>> [See more photos online](#)



**Spooner Memorial Library**  
Spooner, WI



# #5

## Escape Room-Style Tour

*Imagine: An enigmatic host has given you a clue. When you solve it, you make your way to a new location, excited to learn its significance as well as the clue for where to go next.*

### Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Limit to finding 2-3 locations.** They should revolve around a theme or set of content. You can always add more locations *after* playtesting. See [tour routes](#).
2. **Create a host with a unique personality.** See [protagonist or host](#).
3. **Write your dialog and challenges.** The dialog will need to provide participants with the challenges to solve so they can unlock the next location. See [narratives](#).

### Mix to taste:

4. **Playtest your challenges.** Make sure they make sense, are reasonable to solve, and the order is correct. Paper prototyping will be helpful here. See [playtesting](#).
5. **Build your tour in the digital tool of your choice.**
6. **Launch your activity!** See [activity launches](#).

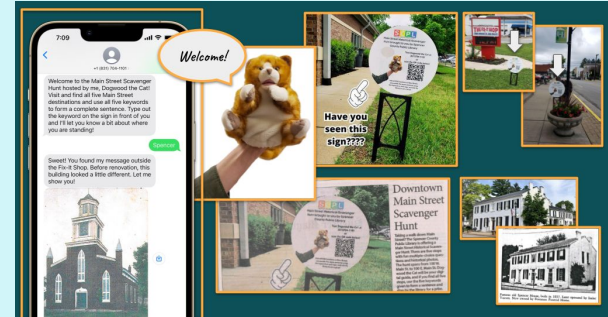
### Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” version, consider using paper flyers at the starting location with the clues for each location and dialog from the host personality to give them the narrative.

As seen in...

## Main Street Historical Scavenger Hunt

Creator: Spencer County Public Library (KY)



A history-based scavenger hunt that leads to five businesses and points of interest near Main Street in Taylorsville, KY. Each location displays a **sign to prompt** the text-based scavenger hunt. A puppet from the library, **Dogwood the Cat**, is featured as the host. At each location, a **keyword must be unscrambled** in order to get the clue for the next location. The narrative includes a playful “**Magic 8 Ball**” component developed by library staff that leads to unexpected outcomes for this playful activity in the streets of this small historic town.

>> See [more photos online](#)



# #6 Insider Voice Tour with Choices

*Imagine: As you walk through an exhibit, you are on the phone listening to an insider give you the exclusive stories that go beyond the exhibit.*

## Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Pick an exhibit or location.** This can be a curated exhibit or a location in the community; something that would benefit from sharing a new perspective about.
2. **Select a relevant community member.** Find the person who has a unique perspective on this content that you could interview.
3. **Pick interview questions like it's a podcast.** They should ask for anecdotes that are non-obvious; you shouldn't be able to do a quick web search and easily find the same information/stories.

## Mix to taste:

4. **Interview the community member.** We found that having one long recording that captured the voices of the interviewer and resident to have the best result. For this particular exhibit, listening to the unedited, conversational-style interview felt the most appropriate.
5. **Build your tour in the digital tool of your choice.**
6. **Playtest the activity.** Make sure the flow of information makes sense, especially for something like an exhibit where people are likely moving around through the space while interacting with the activity. See [playtesting](#).
7. **Launch your activity!** See [activity launches](#).

## Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” version, consider using a series of postcards or business cards at each stop in the exhibit tour with commentary, visuals, etc. from the community voice
- ★ For an added design process, consider seasonal voices; swap out the community voice at regular intervals to have a rotating cast of community voices to lend a variety of perspectives, while creating an incentive to return to the exhibit for locals

As seen in...

## Black Feminist Exhibit Voice Tour

Creator: The Women's History Museum (DC)



An **audio walking tour** through the “Black Feminist” exhibit created in collaboration with the National Women’s History Museum for the MLK branch of the D.C. Public Library. This physical installation is augmented by the voice of **D.C. community leader Katea Stitt** who provides her insights and stories of the history “beyond” the exhibit, guiding participants with images and text.

>> See [more photos online](#)



# #7

## Sequencing Puzzle

*Imagine: A conversation with an object uncovers the existence of a puzzle. Unscrambling the information to discover the mysteries ahead.*

### Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Find a compelling object.** The puzzle should be grounded in a location by the host object. Consider how your object fits with the narrative/content/location of the puzzle.
2. **Give the object a vibrant personality.** See [protagonist or host](#).
3. **Write your narrative dialog and your puzzles.** The narrative should transition into writing the puzzle pieces that need to be arranged in a specific order (chronological, spatial, etc.). See [narratives](#).

### Mix to taste:

4. **Playtest your puzzle.** Use paper prototyping (etc.) on just the puzzle. See [playtesting](#).
5. **Build your puzzle in the digital tool of your choice.**
6. **Launch your activity!** See [activity launches](#).

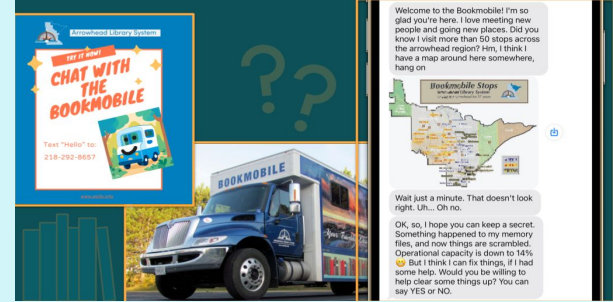
### Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” version, consider using signage to anchor the puzzle experience and having the information that needs sorting printed with velcro on the back. The information can then be ordered on a felt wall.

As seen in...

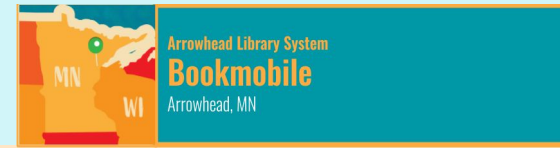
## Chat with the Bookmobile

Creator: Spooner Memorial Library (WI)



The Bookmobile's files have gotten scrambled and she needs your help to sort them out; **answer questions** to help the Bookmobile get functioning again. This playful **text based puzzle** created by library staff prompts participants with **custom signage to engage with this important resource** of the Arrowhead Library System.

>> [See more photos online](#)



# #8 Phone Calls to Guide a Hunt

*Imagine: After an initial text, you receive a surprising call with the first clue. The dramatic voice calls at each place, sending images and clues to make progress.*

## Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Pick a super dynamic personality and voice.** Fiction may be especially fun for this one. See [protagonist or host](#).
2. **Reduce to 2-3 locations.** You can add more locations after playtesting. They should be on a theme. See [tour routes](#).
3. **Write your dialog to maximize personality.** As part of the narrative, you will need to challenge participants with clues to the next location. See [narratives](#).

## Mix to taste:

4. **Playtest your dialog and your hunt clues.** See [playtesting](#).
5. **Record the dialog.** The recording should be done in character for the host of the hunt.
6. **Build your hunt in the digital tool of your choice.**
7. **Launch your activity!** See [activity launches](#).

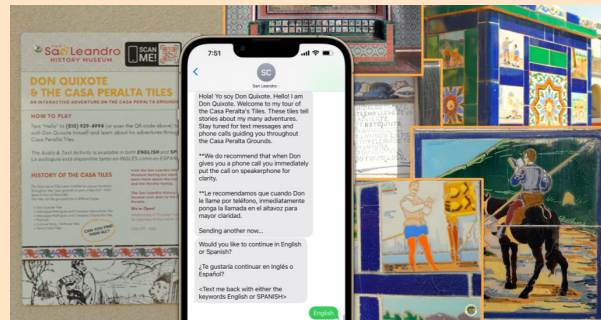
## Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” version, consider using paper flyers at the starting location with the clues for each location. Include the dialog from the host personality to set the tone and provide the vibrancy of the narrative.

As seen in...

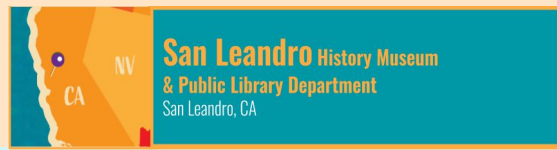
## The Casa Peralta Tiles

Creator: San Leandro History Museum & Public Library Dept. (CA)



A **bilingual audio scavenger hunt** exploring the grounds outside the library by the historic Casa Peralta, a unique architectural gem known for custom tiles depicting the story of Don Quixote. The tour is led by **Don Quixote who narrates from a phone call** to participants as they explore the property. While hearing accounts of select custom tiles, participants are exposed to this underappreciated local jewel and the story of Don Quixote which was such an important inspiration to the original owner of Casa Peralta and a wonderful tie-in to this California town.

>> See [more photos online](#)



# #9

## Multimedia Tour

Participants chat with a host personality and are led around on a tour through text, images, videos, and audio clips.

### Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Identify 2-3 locations.** You can add more locations after playtesting. They should be on a theme. See [tour routes](#).
2. **Create a vibrant protagonist that matches the content theme to be the guide.** In this case, the guide was a historical character with amnesia. See [protagonist or host](#).
3. **Write your narrative.** This team used ChatGPT to help generate initial content that was then edited. Be sure to note how the narrative will be delivered (text, image, video, audio) to know what assets need to be created later. See [narratives](#).

### Mix to taste:

4. **Playtest your questions.** See [playtesting](#).
5. **Create your multimedia assets.** Collect the images and record the video and/or audio that you plan to use.
6. **Build your tour in the digital tool of your choice.**
7. **Launch your activity!** See [activity launches](#).

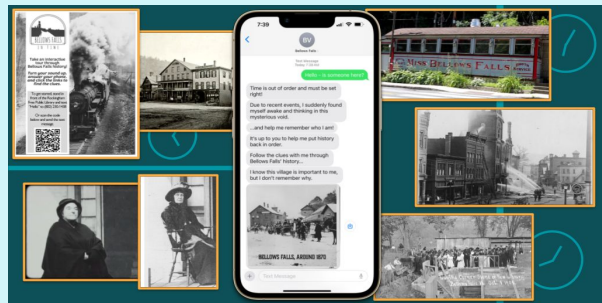
### Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” version, consider using paper flyers with trivia and a map with the path highlighted and include images throughout to bring some of the multimedia elements in.

As seen in...

## Bellows Falls in Time

Creator: Rockingham Free Public Library (VT)



A guided **multimedia** tour through the village of Bellows Falls led by a **mysterious character** who knows the charming history and stories behind the landmarks of the village. Help her remember the order of how things happened on this interactive tour around town.

>> [See more photos online](#)



**Rockingham Free Public Library**  
Bellows Falls, VT

# #10 Storytelling Box with Touchscreen

Participants use a touchscreen interface to explore a narrative told through a physical installation.

## Prepare the ingredients:

1. **Write your narrative dialog.** See [narratives](#).
2. **Pick a dynamic protagonist personality.** See [protagonist or host](#).
3. **Prototype the branching narrative on paper.** The narrative style that works best is a branching narrative: think “choose your own adventure”. Sticky notes are helpful here to quickly reorder branches.

## Mix to taste:

4. **Build your narrative in the digital tool of your choice.** We suggest Google Slides as a free, easy-to-use tool to create a dynamic slide deck with elements that work as “buttons” to take you to specific slides. See [dynamic slide decks](#).
5. **Playtest your slide deck.** See [playtesting](#).
6. **Build your box.** See [storytelling box design](#).
7. **Create box signage.** Draw attention; make people aware of it and that it is meant to be interacted with.
8. **Playtest your box.** Try a “soft launch” to test not just if the box design works, but also to test out placement of the box and the signage.
9. **Launch your activity!** See [activity launches](#).

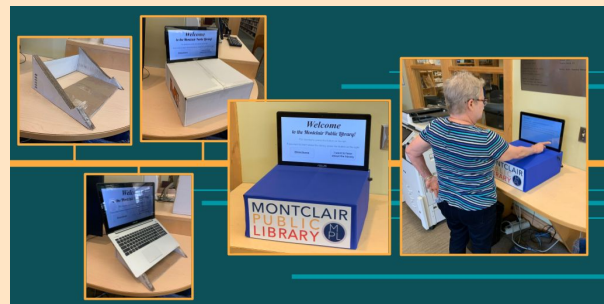
## Expansions and substitutions:

- ★ For a “no tech” option, consider creating something like a “comment box” that is a physical box where people can make submissions with slips of paper they have written on.
- ★ Use additional technology to make a more complex storytelling box. Some ideas include using arcade buttons, RFID, Raspberry Pi, Scratch-based digital systems, standalone monitors, etc.
- ★ Create an interactive sculpture that has pieces made from play-doh that, with the help of a Makey Makey, are the “buttons” to control the digital system.

As seen in...

## Circulation Desk Box

Creator: [Montclair Public Library \(NJ\)](#)



This box was created to be an FAQ style of interaction for people seeking common information at the circulation desk. The blue is eye-catching and the box feels almost like a **stage for the screen**. We were drawn in, and found ourselves asking, “What can you do here?” Inside is a repurposed laptop with touchscreen capabilities. The physical structure is mostly **cardboard** with about \$15 worth of **wallpaper**, and **signage** printed in the library. The narrative is controlled with **Google Slides** using a hot-linking. The whole thing is positioned next to the front desk at the branch library.

>> [See more photos online](#)



*Seasoning:*

**Protagonist or Host**

**COMING SOON**



*Seasoning:*

**Print Materials (as mobile media)**

**COMING SOON**

*Seasoning:*

# Narratives

**COMING SOON**

*Seasoning:*

**Playtesting**

**COMING SOON**

*Seasoning:*

# Activity Launches

**COMING SOON**

*Seasoning:*

# Tour Routes

**COMING SOON**

*Seasoning:*

# Dynamic Slide Decks



*Seasoning:*

# Storytelling Box Design

