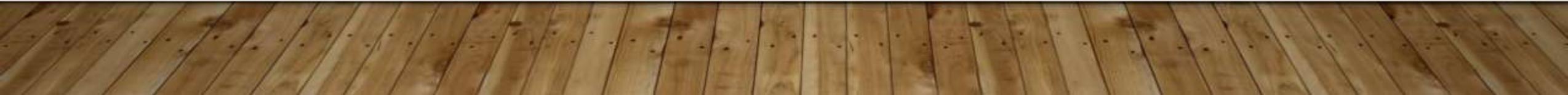


FOR INCLUSIVE ARTS PRACTITIONERS, EDUCATORS AND THOSE  
INTERESTED IN FACILITATING AND DELIVERING STORYTELLING  
WORKSHOPS AND ACTIVITIES FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE

# “STORYTELLING ON THE SPECTRUM”

---

POTENTIAL BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS WHEN USING ESTABLISHED  
STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES WITH INDIVIDUALS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM.



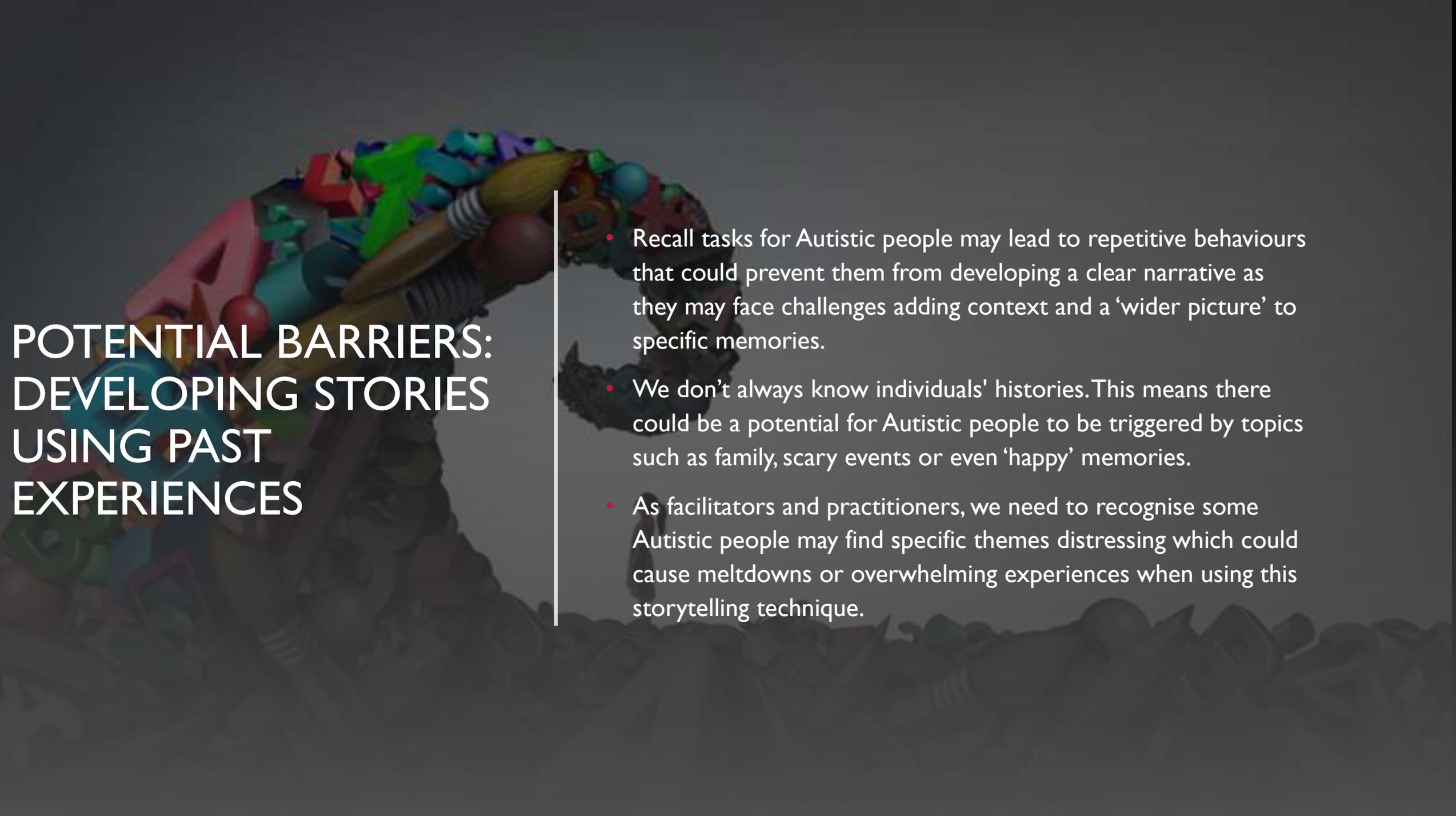
# PURPOSE OF RESOURCE

- This presentation is designed to offer various techniques for storytelling that could be utilised in creative workshops with Autistic people.
- The barriers highlighted are presented in order to support facilitators and arts practitioners to recognise some of the possible challenges that Autistic people may face when taking part in using the storytelling techniques. These barriers are not entirely representational of the entire Autistic community as every person is a unique individual.
- Solutions are presented as possible ways of increasing inclusion in order to support the Autistic participants to gain the most out of the techniques and the workshop sessions they are involved in.

# TECHNIQUE: DEVELOPING STORIES USING PAST EXPERIENCES

This storytelling technique allows artists and creatives to develop narratives using their own life experiences as a driving force when developing characters and story plots. Individuals draw on previous events and occasions in life as inspiration for establishing and fabricating current biographical/autobiographical stories.

- Prompts can include:
- “Think about a happy memory.”
- “Share a time when you were afraid of something.”
- “Create a family of characters similar to your own’.”

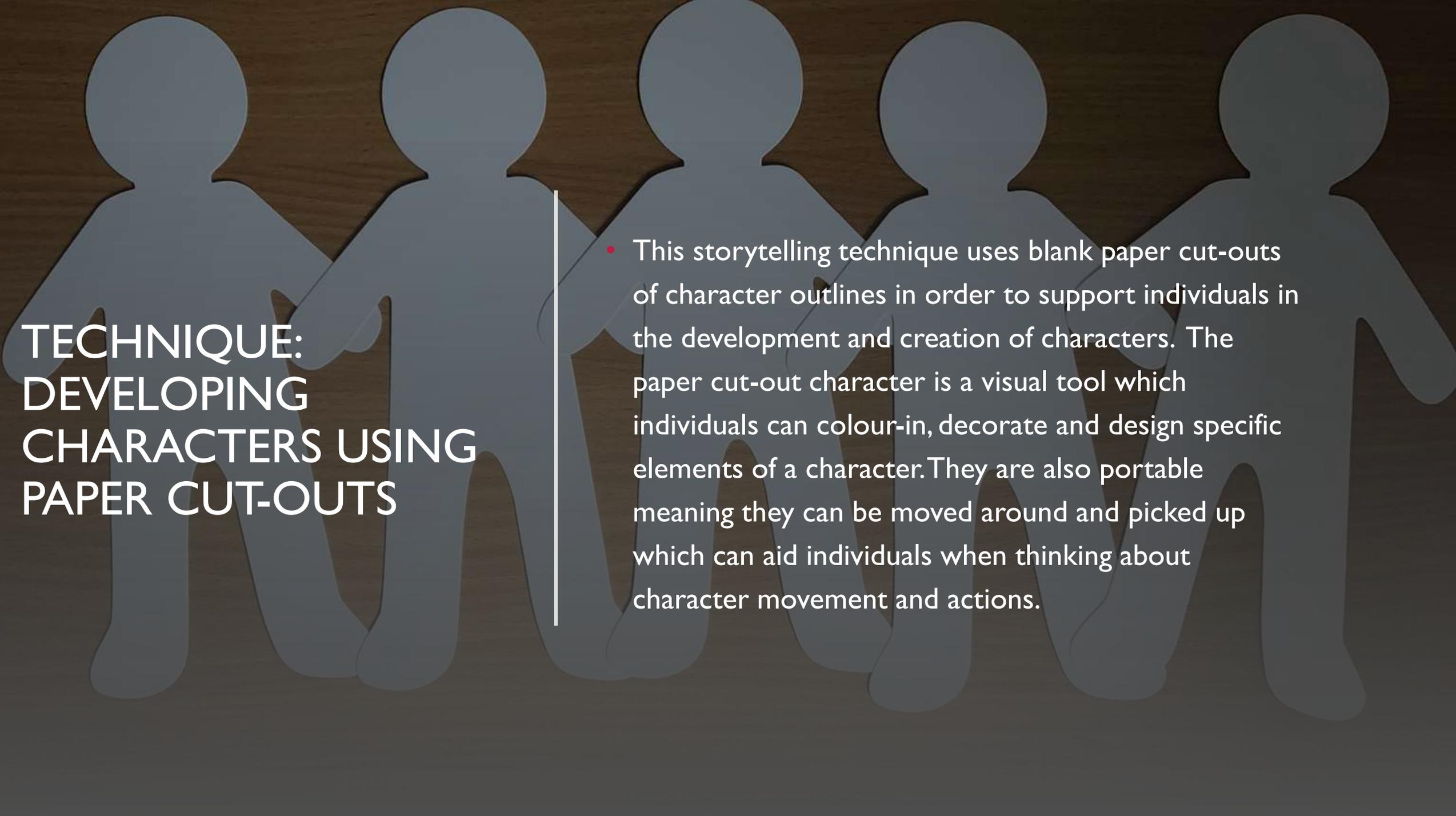
A hand holding a pencil, surrounded by various colorful objects like beads, buttons, and small toys, set against a dark background.

# POTENTIAL BARRIERS: DEVELOPING STORIES USING PAST EXPERIENCES

- Recall tasks for Autistic people may lead to repetitive behaviours that could prevent them from developing a clear narrative as they may face challenges adding context and a 'wider picture' to specific memories.
- We don't always know individuals' histories. This means there could be a potential for Autistic people to be triggered by topics such as family, scary events or even 'happy' memories.
- As facilitators and practitioners, we need to recognise some Autistic people may find specific themes distressing which could cause meltdowns or overwhelming experiences when using this storytelling technique.

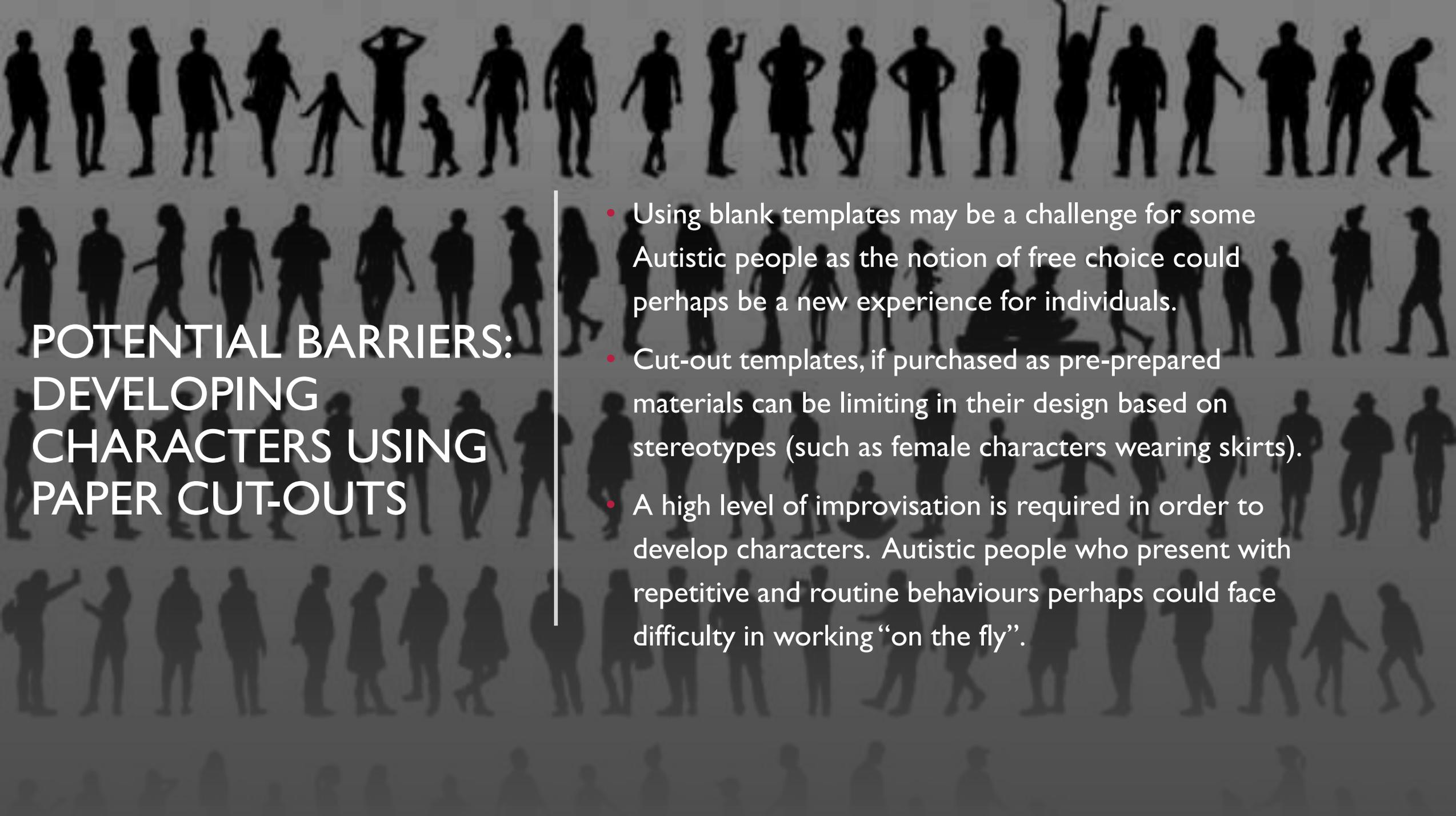
# POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: DEVELOPING STORIES USING PAST EXPERIENCES

- Where possible, encouraging an open dialogue should take place with the Autistic participant prior to a session in order identify any trigger points that should be avoided.
- When creating and telling stories in groups, implementing discussion around topics, memories and themes surrounding past events which everyone in the session can relate to could promote inclusive working. An example of this could include posing the question “What journey did you take to get to this session?” as a prompt.
- Allowing individuals to exercise choice and agency to use fictional events from the past may support those who face challenges accessing or engaging with past experiences and memories.



## TECHNIQUE: DEVELOPING CHARACTERS USING PAPER CUT-OUTS

- This storytelling technique uses blank paper cut-outs of character outlines in order to support individuals in the development and creation of characters. The paper cut-out character is a visual tool which individuals can colour-in, decorate and design specific elements of a character. They are also portable meaning they can be moved around and picked up which can aid individuals when thinking about character movement and actions.

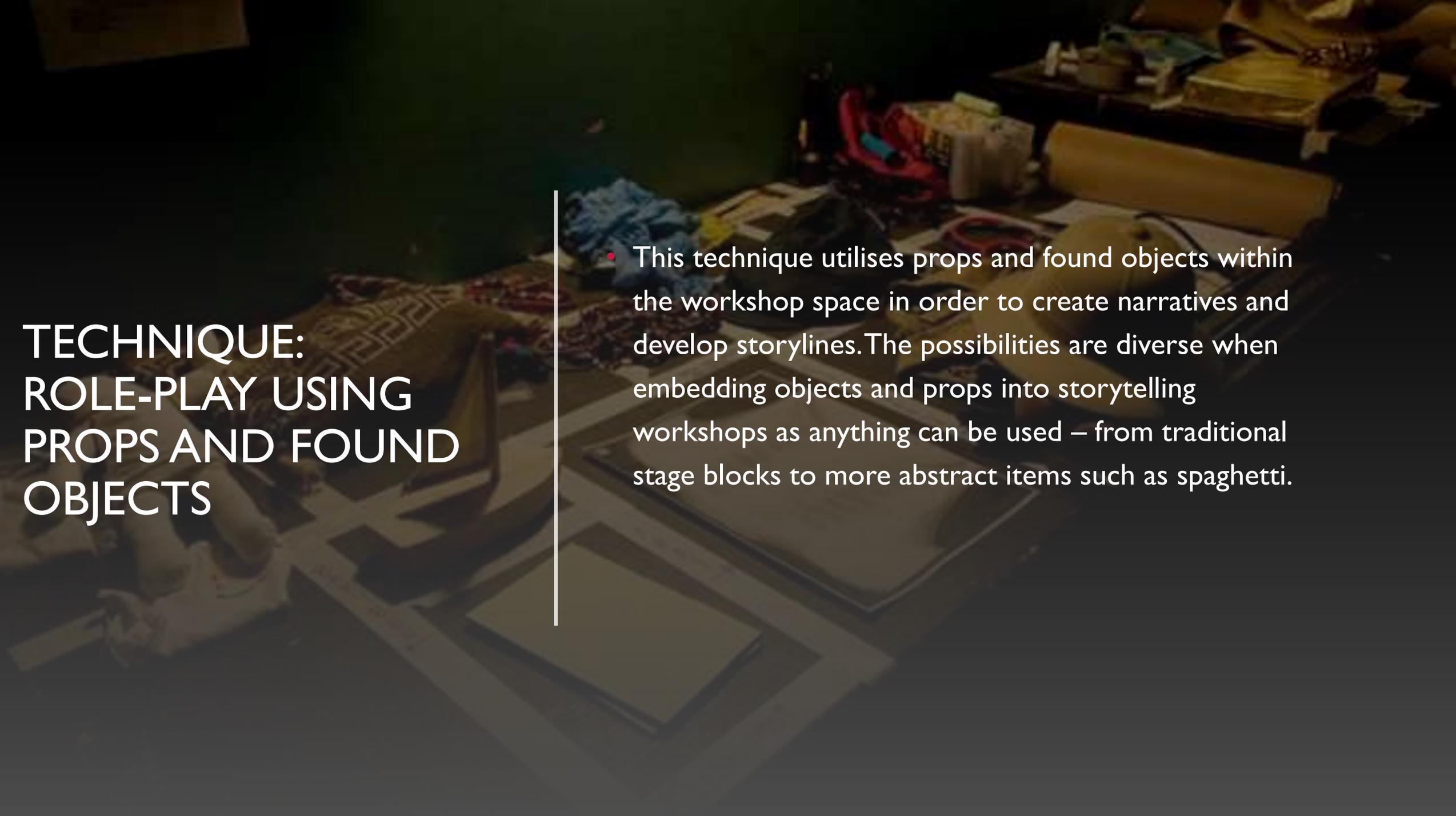
The background of the slide is a repeating pattern of black silhouettes of people in various poses and activities, representing a diverse range of human forms and movements. The silhouettes are arranged in horizontal rows across the entire page.

## POTENTIAL BARRIERS: DEVELOPING CHARACTERS USING PAPER CUT-OUTS

- Using blank templates may be a challenge for some Autistic people as the notion of free choice could perhaps be a new experience for individuals.
- Cut-out templates, if purchased as pre-prepared materials can be limiting in their design based on stereotypes (such as female characters wearing skirts).
- A high level of improvisation is required in order to develop characters. Autistic people who present with repetitive and routine behaviours perhaps could face difficulty in working “on the fly”.

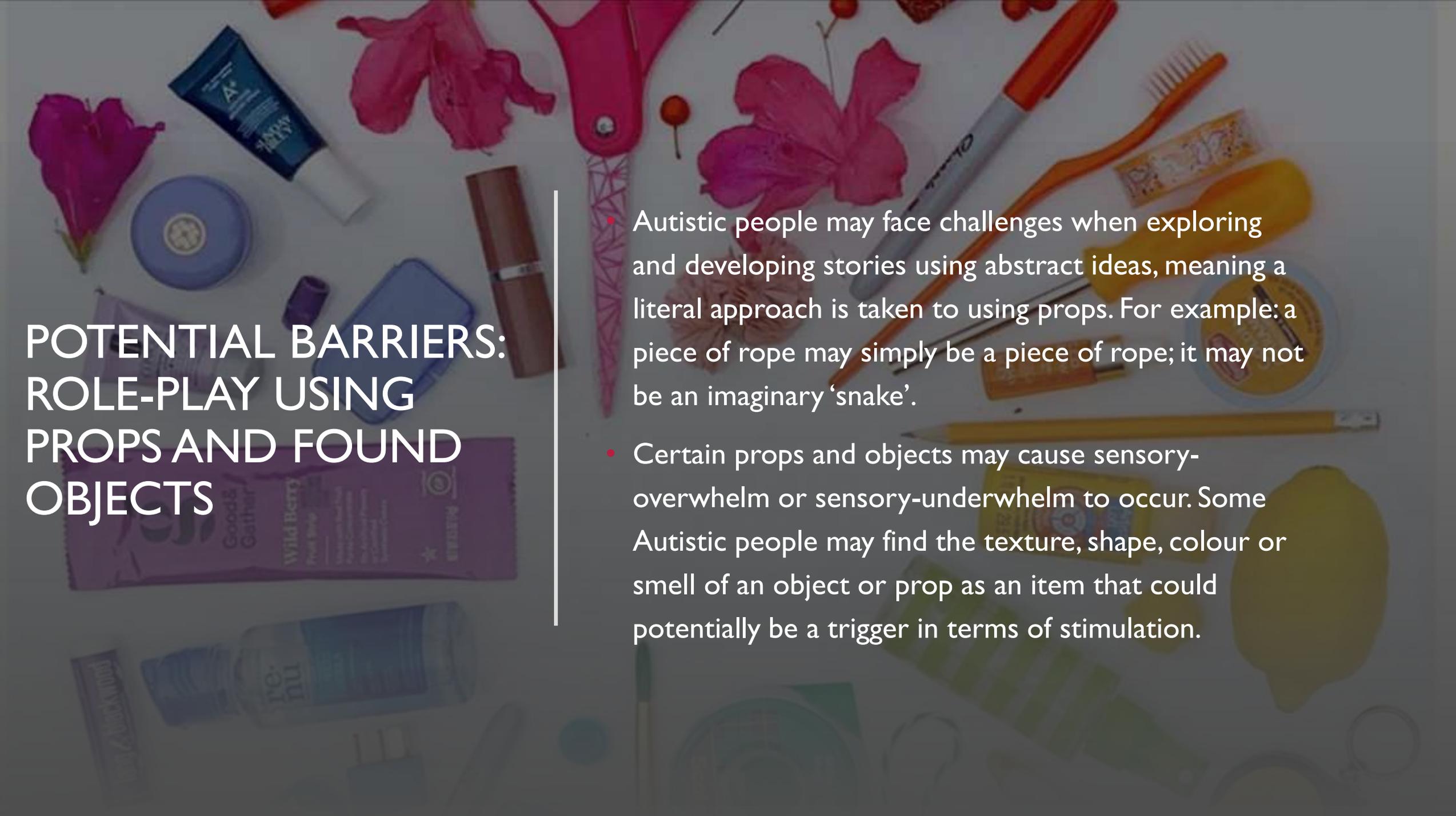
# POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: DEVELOPING CHARACTERS USING PAPER CUT-OUTS

- Providing examples and pre-designed templates may help inspire Autistic individuals to develop characters using specific elements. For example, if an Autistic person sees the template character is wearing a blue hat, they may wish to draw a yellow hat on their character.
- Making photocopies of the characters is one way of preserving them if movement plays a role in character development as a method of preserving original designs.
- For Autistic individuals who wish to create characters outside of binary stereotypes (such as humans or animals), providing time and space for them to make their own templates and cut-outs can support them to realise their ideas 'from brain to page'.



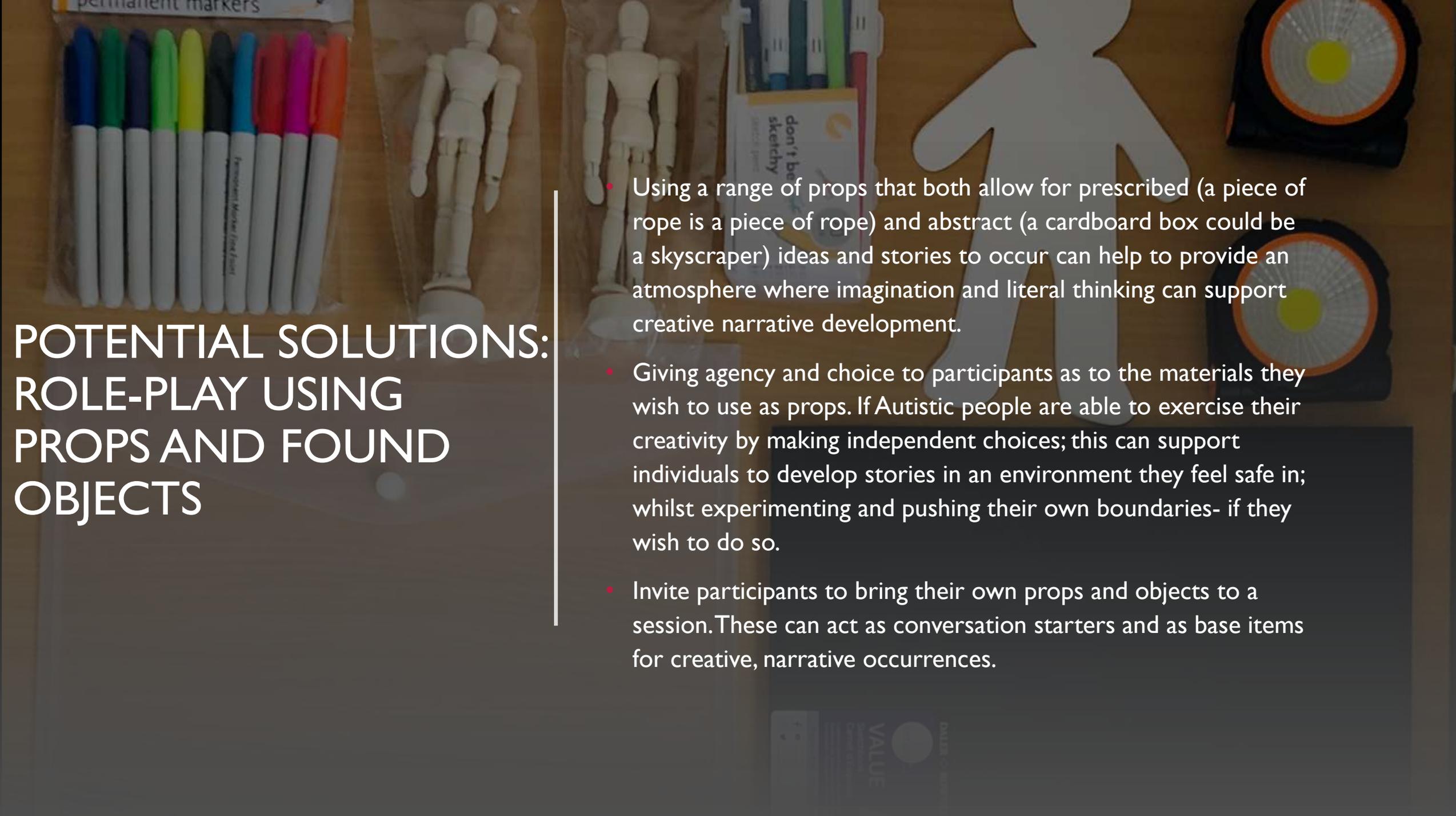
## TECHNIQUE: ROLE-PLAY USING PROPS AND FOUND OBJECTS

- This technique utilises props and found objects within the workshop space in order to create narratives and develop storylines. The possibilities are diverse when embedding objects and props into storytelling workshops as anything can be used – from traditional stage blocks to more abstract items such as spaghetti.



## POTENTIAL BARRIERS: ROLE-PLAY USING PROPS AND FOUND OBJECTS

- Autistic people may face challenges when exploring and developing stories using abstract ideas, meaning a literal approach is taken to using props. For example: a piece of rope may simply be a piece of rope; it may not be an imaginary 'snake'.
- Certain props and objects may cause sensory-overwhelm or sensory-underwhelm to occur. Some Autistic people may find the texture, shape, colour or smell of an object or prop as an item that could potentially be a trigger in terms of stimulation.



## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: ROLE-PLAY USING PROPS AND FOUND OBJECTS

- Using a range of props that both allow for prescribed (a piece of rope is a piece of rope) and abstract (a cardboard box could be a skyscraper) ideas and stories to occur can help to provide an atmosphere where imagination and literal thinking can support creative narrative development.
- Giving agency and choice to participants as to the materials they wish to use as props. If Autistic people are able to exercise their creativity by making independent choices; this can support individuals to develop stories in an environment they feel safe in; whilst experimenting and pushing their own boundaries- if they wish to do so.
- Invite participants to bring their own props and objects to a session. These can act as conversation starters and as base items for creative, narrative occurrences.

## TECHNIQUE: STORYBOARDING

- As a technique, storyboarding is a visual tool that allows for thoughts to be laid out sequentially. When developing narrative structures, the purpose of storyboarding is to bring ideas from 'brain to page' using a pre-formatted layout on paper. Storyboard templates traditionally feature a box for an image or 'freeze frame' sketch of a scene, and a box for text and scripted dialogue.

## POTENTIAL BARRIERS: STORYBOARDING

- As storyboarding uses pre-formatted templates, some Autistic people may thrive as following routine can be beneficial and comforting; but for others it could be challenging because a linear approach is taken starting at the beginning and working towards a conclusive ending for those who do not use prescribed routines.
- Using freeze frame sketches, discussions and written words /scripted dialogue together may be an overwhelming process for some Autistic people as thinking about many elements at a time could be a challenge to process.
- Storyboarding is a predominantly visual exercise, meaning for some Autistic individuals who are more kinaesthetic and like to use movement, the technique may be under-stimulating. This under-stimulation could lead to disengagement within workshop sessions.

SETTING

CHARACTERS

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: STORYBOARDING

- Taking a kinaesthetic approach working with storyboards can support Autistic people who prefer to use their bodies and movement. For example: using actions and 'acting out' poses that can be photographed or printed and act as 'freeze frame' captures of a scene.
- Splitting a story into smaller sections, rather than focussing on the whole picture can help some Autistic people to develop a definitive and clear narrative structure. This can be done by using prompting statements such as:

Character 1 / met / (Character 2) / at (location) /  
Character 1 said / Character 2 said (conversation) /  
Character 1 did (action) / Character 2 did (action) /  
What happened was (conclusion).

[WWW.IOSTORIES.COM](http://www.iostories.com)

---

**A creative resource for 'Storytelling on the Spectrum'.**