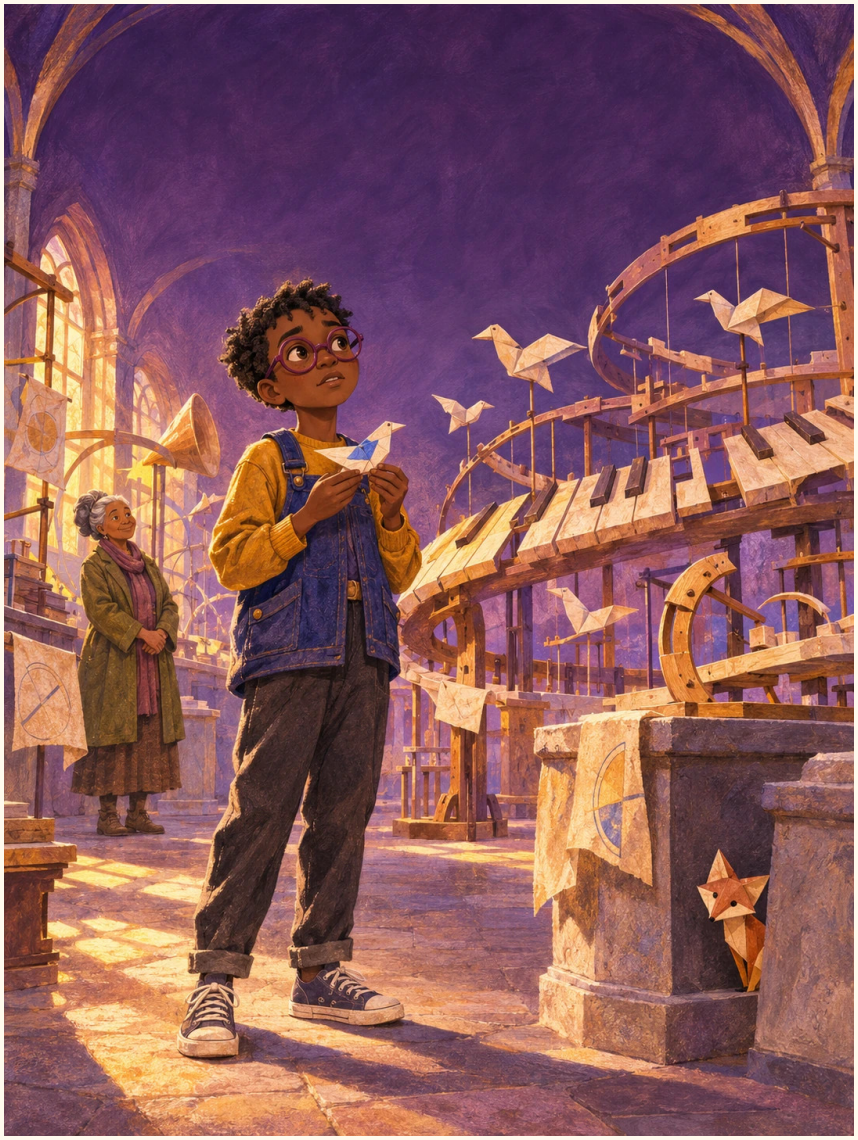
Sam and the Museum of Unfinished Things



Original fictional story draft with an AI-generated cover. Interior illustrations and personalised editions are still in development.

Twenty complete story scenes, conversation prompts, vocabulary, an explained puzzle and a paper activity. Make a private name-personalised PDF at partytrailgames.com/stories/create. The adventure illustrations remain fictional.

SCENE 1 OF 20

The bird in the bin

Sam's paper bird had a blue patch where the wing had torn. Sam had folded it seven times, then dropped it into the recycling basket. The wing was supposed to match the other one. From the basket came a rustle, a tiny cough and the unmistakable sound of paper being offended.

SCENE 2 OF 20

An invitation with a gap

Under the bird lay an invitation. You are invited to the Museum of Unfinished Things, it read. Please bring something you almost threw away. The address ended with an empty square. Sam turned the card over. On the back, the blue-patched bird had left a small paper feather pointing towards the old arcade.

SCENE 3 OF 20

The door that waited

Between the closed bakery and a shop selling nothing but umbrellas stood a door Sam had never noticed. Its brass sign read OPEN, with the final N pencilled in. An older keeper opened it. "Mrs Vale," she said. "And you must be the person with the bird." Sam kept the patched wing behind one hand.

SCENE 4 OF 20

A room full of almost

There were teacups with handles waiting to be chosen, maps with unexplored corners and a boat designed by somebody who had drawn a magnificent cabin but forgotten the hull. A paper fox prowled between the displays. It had one white ear. "Somebody still means to colour that," Mrs Vale said. "The fox has opinions."

SCENE 5 OF 20

The silent orchestra

In the last gallery stood a wooden machine shaped like an enormous tree. Bells hung from its branches. Paper birds perched on the keys below. A plaque called it The Orchestra of Everybody. Beneath the name was a space where the final instruction should have been. “Nobody has made it play,” Mrs Vale said.

SCENE 6 OF 20

A very confident plan

Sam liked instructions. Sam liked getting them right. Three brass buttons surrounded a central handle: MATCH, ORDER and LISTEN. Above the handle hung a tag: Leave room. “Obviously,” Sam said, “it needs all the birds to match.” The paper fox sat on Sam’s shoe with the expression of a doubtful bookmark.

SCENE 7 OF 20

The first perfect row

Sam folded six identical birds and lined them on the keys. MATCH clicked. Every bell made the same thin note. It was a note with nowhere interesting to go. The machine stopped. One of the identical birds sneezed a square of paper. Mrs Vale offered a dustpan without saying she had expected this.

SCENE 8 OF 20

The missing feather

Sam examined the mechanism. Seven perches, six new birds. A blue paper feather lay beneath the seventh. Sam recognised the colour and slipped it into a pocket. The patched bird in Sam’s hand rustled. “It’s not finished,” Sam murmured. The fox’s white ear twitched.

SCENE 9 OF 20

Order, naturally

Perhaps it was a sequence. Sam sorted the bells from smallest to largest, then the keys from shortest to longest. ORDER clicked. The bells climbed a precise little scale. Just as Sam began to smile, they ran out of notes. An empty measure of silence sat at the end like a chair nobody wanted.

SCENE 10 OF 20

The keeper’s unfinished sentence

“The maker used to say…” Mrs Vale began, then stopped. “You’ve forgotten?” asked Sam. “I remember,” she said. “But this isn’t a museum of me telling everyone the last line.” Sam did not find that helpful. Then Sam noticed a narrow drawer beneath the handle. Its label read OTHER IDEAS.

SCENE 11 OF 20

A drawer of disagreements

Inside were drawings from earlier visitors. One wanted a marching band. One had drawn rain. Another showed a kettle with aspirations to opera. Their notes disagreed about almost everything. Yet each drawing left the same empty space in the middle. Sam spread them on the floor and placed the blue feather in that space.

SCENE 12 OF 20

The question that cost something

Mrs Vale offered Sam a pencil. “Whose idea would you ask about?” Sam looked at the kettle. It was ridiculous. It was also nothing Sam would have drawn. “That one,” Sam said reluctantly. Mrs Vale explained that its maker had wanted a sound that welcomed people into a kitchen, not an impressive solo.

SCENE 13 OF 20

Listening without a button

Sam had been trying to discover what the machine wanted. Now Sam asked what its visitors had wanted to hear. Rain on a roof. A parade passing home. A kettle before a conversation. The patched bird tapped the rim of a teacup. It made a small, uneven note. This time Sam let the note finish.

SCENE 14 OF 20

Room for the wrong-shaped wing

The six perfect birds occupied six perches. Sam placed the blue-patched bird on the seventh. Its repaired wing brushed the bell next door. Sam reached to straighten it, then paused. The accidental second note sounded warm and strange. “Could we leave that?” Sam asked. Mrs Vale smiled as if a door had moved.

SCENE 15 OF 20

The second pair of hands

Sam could hold the LISTEN button or turn the central handle, but not both comfortably. At first Sam tried an elbow. The machine made a rude wooden burp. Sam looked at Mrs Vale. “Will you help me try this?” The invitation had said bring a thing. It had never said do everything alone.

SCENE 16 OF 20

A song with a space in it

Mrs Vale held LISTEN. Sam turned the handle. Rain-bell notes scattered through the branches. A kettle-like whistle rose underneath them. The blue-patched bird sounded its uneven double note. Then came the empty measure. Sam nearly stopped. From the other side of the room, the fox tapped its paper tail. The measure was no longer empty.

SCENE 17 OF 20

The final instruction

A little drawer slid out of the tree. Inside lay the missing words: for someone else. Leave room for someone else. Sam read them twice. MATCH and ORDER had not been traps; their notes were part of the music. They had only failed when Sam tried to make them the whole song.

SCENE 18 OF 20

The room that opened

Behind the orchestra, a door unfolded into a bright workroom. There were places for visitors, some finished tools and many unfinished ideas. Sam found a chair beside a child drawing a boat. “Your cabin is excellent,” Sam said. “Would you like help with the bit that floats?” The child moved the drawing between them.

SCENE 19 OF 20

Something to take home

Mrs Vale offered Sam the patched bird. “Won’t the orchestra need it?” Sam asked. “It needs a seventh voice,” she said. “The next visitor will bring another.” Sam left the blue feather in the OTHER IDEAS drawer. Keeping the bird did not mean keeping every part of the adventure.

SCENE 20 OF 20

An eighth fold

At home, Sam unfolded the bird just enough to tuck in a small blue tail. The wings still did not match. Sam set it beside the window instead of the bin. Next morning, another paper feather lay beside it. Beyond the glass, a boat-shaped cloud drifted towards the arcade. Sam fetched a second sheet of paper.

Questions worth talking about

1. Which three clues make “Leave room for someone else” a fair ending rather than a surprise with no warning?

2. Were MATCH and ORDER bad ideas? What changes when Sam combines them with listening?

3. What does Sam give up when asking about the kettle drawing?

4. Why can the museum let Sam take the bird home? What might the next visitor contribute?

Read it again, differently

Return to the incomplete OPEN sign, the fox’s white ear and the empty address square. Do their gaps feel like mistakes, invitations, or both?

Three words to take away

inference

An explanation you build from clues and what you already know.

revision

Changing an idea after looking at it again or learning something new.

measure

Here, a group of beats in music; elsewhere it can mean finding an amount or size.

The seventh voice

Name three clues placed before the orchestra plays that suggest another contribution is needed. For each, explain two possible meanings. Which clue becomes strongest only after Sam listens to the kettle idea?

Answer & explanation

Possible clues include the seventh perch, the blue feather, the “Leave room” tag, the gaps in earlier drawings and the final silent measure. They can first suggest missing parts or a faulty sequence; together they suggest an invitation to another contributor. The gap in different visitors’ drawings becomes especially meaningful after Sam understands their different intentions. Other evidence-based readings are welcome.

Pass the unfinished idea

15–20 minutes · Two sheets of paper and pencils; two or more people.

1. Draw half an invented object. Leave a deliberate gap and write what you hope it might do.

2. Pass it to someone else. Ask one question before adding their idea.

3. Take it back and name one change you would never have thought of alone. Draw an ending that leaves space for another contribution.

For the grown-up: Use paper only; no real machinery or tool repairs. The goal is collaboration, not judging whose drawing is best.

Story & reality: The museum and living paper animals are fantasy. The clues invite interpretation; there can be several thoughtful answers when a reader supports them with details from the story.

Your drawing, plan or next idea