

Quirk Theatre & Exeter Phoenix  
Present

# Rhia & the Tree of Lights

The  
Christmas  
Show for All  
The Family!

1st - 28th  
December  
2021

# SCHOOL'S PACK

# School's Pack

This pack focuses in on different elements of the show, creating a springboard for in-classroom discussions & activities. From the making of the show to the scientific research behind it, we have tried to bring together all the main themes in one place.

You will also find some drama warm ups and exercises geared towards primary age children. Please **get in touch** with us if you would like to book show specific workshops for your school.

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## About Quirk Theatre

At Quirk we make great theatre for all generations. A real treat that will gladden the hearts of all family members. This is our 19th year creating & performing original theatre in Exeter at Christmastime (& more recently, Torrington)

Quirk shows are often a child's first experience of live theatre and this is a responsibility we take very seriously. Although our shows are silly, anarchic & often ridiculous, we pride ourselves on creating theatre with a social conscience, theatre that deals with big subjects & theatre that has kindness at its core. We are also deeply committed to creating meaningful employment and development opportunities for South West creatives.



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# Rhia & The Tree of Lights

The show follows the story of Rhia, a British Indian girl living on the wild Jurassic Coast. At the start of the show, we find her in her treehouse, trying to prepare for her first Diwali without her Nani (Grandma) and trying to make the Night Jasmine Tree flower again. Rhia makes a new friend called Magda, and together they set off on an adventure to find some answers. Along the way they visit Uncle Bill's cafe, travel back in time for a deep time disco, help a Brown Banded Carder bee find enough food to get through the winter and come to the aid of a Nudibranch (a type of sea slug) who is being held back by plastic pollution. At the end, Rhia celebrates Diwali with her friends & family & the Jasmine Tree finally flowers!

## Synopsis- Scene by Scene

### Scene 1

Sita tells us her 'coming over' story

### Scene 2

Sita & Rhia share the Diwali story together. This is a memory

### Scene 3

Magda visits Rhia's treehouse. They become friends and start to explore Nani's suitcase. They find a note that sets them off on an adventure.

### Scene 4

Rhia and Magda go to visit Nani's best friend, Uncle Bill, who owns a cafe on the beach. Bill tries to give them lots of food!

### Scene 5

Bill starts to remember a time when Sita took him to a city in India called Dehli. We see Sita and Bill ride a motorbike and dance to Sita's favourite song.

### Scene 6

Rhia & Magda travel through time with the help of a very old stones & explore Devon through Deep Time

### Scene 7

Magda and Rhia meet a sleepy Carder Bee and help it find enough food for the winter

### Scene 8

The bee sends Rhia & Magda to look for her friend in the rockpools. The cold water reminds Rhia of a time her and Nani went cold water swimming. This is a memory & it helps Rhia to feel brave

### Scene 9

Rhia & Magda meet a Nudibranch who sings a song about his plastic problems. Rhia & Magda help him clear out his rockpool

### Scene 10

Following a clue, Rhia heads for the caves. She spots a glittering gold ammonite & goes inside. There is a storm & the tide is coming in. Magda runs to find Bill. Rhia manages to free the stuck fossil but loses it & the suitcase in the waves

### Scene 11

Bill & Rhia say goodbye to Nani on the beach

### Scene 12

Rhia celebrates Diwali, honouring her Nani & welcoming Lakshmi. The tree flowers!

# Inspirations

Charice, our writer, wanted to write a story that reflected her experiences, and that allowed South Asian children to see their stories, and people who look like them, on stage in Devon. For many years, theatre in the UK has mainly been about, for, written by and performed by white people, and this can mean that many People of Colour don't feel welcome in theatres.

We also wanted to share our love of nature, and to cultivate a love for natural spaces and care for the environment. So we set out to make a show that brought science and storytelling into one place. Often we can think of science and art as very separate things, but in life they collide all the time. We wanted to show that people can be many things- you might be a Scientist but you might also love stories, dancing and eating chips on the beach! You might like making notes and taking things slow or you might like jumping into the cold sea with two feet- there are many ways to adventure!

# Structure

The story begins about 6 months after Rhia's Nani dies and we explore grief throughout the show. We see Rhia saying she hasn't managed to cry yet, and at the end we learn that Bill has been missing Nani a lot too. We wanted to look at memories, and how sometimes after losing someone they can make you sad, but that after some time has passed, those same memories can bring you comfort.

Throughout the story we drop into memories of Nani, sparked by something a character has said or done. We wanted it to feel like those memories sneak up and plunge characters in to another time and place, like sticking your head into a rockpool!

# Show Themes

**Migration / Home** The show begins with Sita's 'coming over story'- the story of how she came to leave India and move to Devon. Lots of people will have a coming over story, and the opening sequence explores the struggle to lay down new roots. Nani does this by planting a garden.

**Geology / Place** We use deep time to explore the elasticity of time, going back to the Triassic when all the land masses were in one big clump. We also look at the treasures of the Earth, how it's always moving and changing, and how nothing is fixed. Through this, we look at Rhia's 'letting go'. A big storm reveals beautiful golden ammonites, and also allows Rhia to let go of Sita

**Climate Change / Caring for our Planet** The characters that Rhia & Magda meet along the journey have some challenges that they need help with. The Carder Bee and the Nudibranch both face difficulties because of problems caused by humans. We wanted to highlight very specific ecological issues in Devon and present positive actions to meet those challenges.

# Making a show

It can take a lot of people to make a show. To make *Rhia*, we worked with an Indian Dancer, a Set & Costume Designer, a Composer, a Marine Biologist, an Anti Racism Activist and a Bumblebee Ambassador, to name but a few! Here we talk to a few members of the creative team about their job, and how they helped us make the show.



## “ Fi Russell - Designer

I'm Fi and I'm the set and costume designer. It is my job to think about how the world the story happens in is going to look on stage. I love my job as I get to play make believe all the time, just as you might turn your den into a spaceship or castle I get to do that as an adult. The magic comes from doing it in such a way that the audience can believe it as well.

”

Fi drew lots of pictures while we were writing the show, and when we knew what was going to happen in each scene, Fi made a storyboard. Storyboards capture the story in pictures, rather than words, so you can see what it will look like.

We call all the stuff that we build on stage to tell a story the **set**. Fi made us a set that could change to be lots of different things.

- The top picture is the set like it is near the start of the show, when it is Rhia's treehouse, with a washing line in the garden.
- The second picture is when the set turns into Bill's cafe. Fabric has been pulled over the treehouse to make it look like rocks and cliffs at the seaside.
- In the third picture, the set has been transformed again to make a cave.. Here, fabric is used to make a cave roof, and other blue fabric is used to show the waves coming into the cave.



Think of a setting (like the beach, a shop, the Rainforest) & then draw a set. Think about how you might change your set to show a different setting. How do I make my rainforest look like a park, for example?



## Charice Bhardwaj- Writer

“ I’m Charice. I’m one of the writers for Rhia and I help create the characters and scenes which make up the show. Part of my job is to stretch my imagination as big as it can go, and see what or who comes out! I usually find lots of fuzzy images, big feelings, and funny voices from characters I haven’t met yet. It’s also my job to do research and learn about new things all the time. I gather ideas to write about by looking closely at the world too, and working out how to sew them together - like knitting a giant, colourful scarf. My favourite thing about storytelling is expressing myself and feeling free - because you can change anything you want with your own voice! I often have to brave in my job to share pieces of myself and the stories I believe in. For me, being a writer is about shining light where light doesn’t usually go. That’s where the juiciest stories are! ”

## Jonny Wharton- Composer

“ I’m Jonny and I am the music composer for the show. I create the sounds and music of the characters' world. I get to play many musical instruments, using my computer to arrange all the sounds together. I love trying to imagine the music that helps us understand what the characters are feeling and doing. It's really fun to find new sounds that suit each show I work on. Sometimes I go on sound expeditions to record real life sounds like the sea, a busy street, or trains. Other times, if there's a crashing sound in the script, I create it by banging things or throwing them around in my studio. When we hear these sounds we can feel like we are in the world of the play ”



## Activities

- Choose one of the settings Jonny mentions above (the sea, a busy street etc) and make a soundscape as a whole class. Talk about the different elements you might hear and try out different ways of making them- with your voices? With your hands/bodies? With musical instruments/objects?
- Listen to recordings of different instruments with your eyes closed and then talk about the images that came into your mind. Did an oboe make you think of the forest? A harp, the wind?

# “ Simon Hall - Carpenter

My name is Simon and making the Quirk set is something I get very excited about. The 'Set' is what you see on the stage when you come in and sit down in the theatre. It's what the actors perform in front of. Sometimes there are platforms that the actors perform on.

I have been a carpenter for a long time and I love making things so much that I just can't stop! I usually make the Quirk sets in my Mum's garage. It's really nice to see her and she often brings me a cup of tea and some biscuits. It's such good fun making a pretend world for the characters in the show to live in.

The best bit of all is getting everything in place in the big room where we do our rehearsals and knowing that the next day everyone is going to come in and we can start playing on it. Fi, the designer, draws everything for me so I know what I am going to make.



- To make the tree for our set, Fi first drew the design out small on paper. We all talked about it a lot and made changes until we were really happy with it.

- Simon used big bits of very thin wood (ply) to make a kind of corner out of two big bits. And then Fi drew her picture of the tree on it- but really big this time!\*

- Simon then took the big bits of wood apart again and used special cutting tools to cut along all the lines Fi had drawn.

- Then he put it all back together again! As you can see, there is also a platform and a ladder. This makes Rhia's treehouse. Cool!

## Activity

- Think back to your set design- what different materials could you make it out of?

# “ Dan Bolt - Underwater Photographer

I'm Dan and I've been helping my friends to learn about Nudibranchs so that they can create an interesting character for the play. My hobby is taking photographs in the sea and my favourite things to photograph are these small creatures. It's fun to find them in rockpools, or while I'm snorkelling. Some of them are very good at hiding and are hard to spot. But others are very brightly coloured and very easy to see. I've been looking for Nudibranchs for many years, and I still get excited when I find them. Sometimes I find a very rare one that I've not seen before. That is a special feeling!



Dan took these photos!



# “ Vrushali Harihar Choreographer

I'm Vrushali, and I am a dancer. I love to dance, and in my job I get to teach other people how to do very special kinds of dance. I believe that every natural thing- people, animals, plants, even rain- has expression. And everything has a unique dance too. That means that dance is everywhere and that anyone can do it!

I am the Choreographer for Rhia, which means I make up dances and teach them to the performers. I often use the words in a song to choose movements that fit. Every song narrates a story, whether there are words or not, and every dance defines it.





# Drama Games

## *Quick Warm Up Games*

### **Pumpkin Face/ Raisin Face**

- Open your whole face as wide as possible and say 'PUMPKIN FACE' in your biggest voice
- Screw your face up as tightly as possible and squeak 'raisin face' in your smallest voice
- Repeat, getting your body involved too!

### **Pass the Face**

- Make an amazing funny face, then turn to the person next to you in the circle
- The next person has to mirror the face as exactly as they can. They then make a new face and send it to the next person.
- Repeat, all the way around, adding sounds for more fun!

### **Pass the Sound**

- The first person in the circle makes a brilliant sound (with an action attached for more fun)
- The next person has to mirror the sound as exactly as they can. They then make a new sound and send it to the next person- try & find variety of pitch, timbre, volume etc
- Repeat, all the way around, ending with a round of applause!

### **Aims**

- Warming up the face, voice and body
- Having fun together
- Unlocking playfulness




# Drama Games

## *Rhia Rehearsal Room Exercises*



### Flocking

We use the flocking exercise nearly every rehearsal day, as it's such a great way to tune in to each other & to open up play.

- Gather in small groups (4 or less)
- Form a diamond shape like this photo 
- Move around the space, allowing the person at the front of the diamond to lead the movement
- Everyone else in the group tries to move in exactly the same way
- Whenever the group turns & a new person is at the front, they become the new leader
- Try and move together, mirroring what the leader is doing
- It's best to keep movements slow and small to begin with, allowing things to speed up as everyone tunes in



### Aims

- Group focus / Play / Cooperation / Physical Warm Up



### Development

- Starting with breath, encourage participants to add sound as a group, letting sounds come out of the physicality.
- Invite flocking groups to 'meet' each other in the space & see what games develop



# Drama Games

## *Rhia Rehearsal Room Exercises*

### Clown Game

This is a brilliant game for one person at a time, that relies on an engaged & supportive audience to make it work. So make sure you have got the whole room on board with being vocal, kind & up for the challenge

- Invite one volunteer to leave the room- they are the clown
- As a group, decide on the action that you want the clown to perform when they come back in. Keep it very simple and exact. For example: hop on one foot or sit cross legged
- Once everyone is agreed, invite the clown back in
- The clown must try out different actions in the hope of getting it right
- Nobody can tell the clown what to do, but you can clap & cheer when they are getting close to it. The louder the clap/cheer, the closer the clown is to getting it right
- When the clown does the exact action the audience must go WILD! Cheer, whoop, clap, stamp your feet.
- Encourage the clown to take a lap of honour & enjoy their success!



### Aims

- Bravery / Clown Skills / Teamwork

### Development

- If it feels appropriate/safe to, you can increase the specificity of the challenge- but make sure you increase the volume of the celebrations too!



# Diwali

*Rhia & The Tree of Lights* begins with Nani Sita sharing the story of Diwali with her granddaughter, Rhia. Diwali is festival of lights, celebrated by Hindus, Jains & Sikhs all around the world. The festival lasts for 5 days & symbolises the triumph of light over darkness. During the show, Sita shares her version of the Diwali story and the show ends with Rhia's Diwali celebrations. We see Lakshmi appear as a silhouette.

## The 5 days of Diwali

- **Dhanteras** 'Dhan' means wealth & 'teras' 13. On this day, people purchase utensils and jewellery to bring good luck.
- **Chhoti Diwali** or 'small Diwali', with early morning rituals & fewer candles lit, in preparation for the big day!
- **Lakshmi Puja** is the main day of Diwali. The Puja is performed in the evening to invite Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, inside & people pray for peace, wealth & prosperity for all the family
- **Govardhan Puja** commemorates a day when Krishna lifted Govardhan Hill to save villagers from torrential rains. It is celebrated with a feast- a 'mountain' of food
- **Bhai Dooj/Vishwakarma Puja** marks the bond of love & protection between siblings



## ACTIVITIES

Try making a rangoli design together as a class

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWbwGGXGVBU>

Explore the story of Diwali

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRpNNF4fB4g>

Write your own Diwali poem, inspired by Baljinder Bhopal's 'Diwali'



# A Diwali Poem

by Baljinder Bhopal



It's that time of year again.  
Leaves are falling, sun setting,  
Earlier earlier, by  
September stars are calling.  
Moon appears white, full and fine,  
Then becomes thin, crescent shaped.  
Now in Scorpio, it's time,  
For stars to reign over Earth.  
It's dark. Favourite stories  
Are re-told. Oldest ones changed,  
Or stay the same. You get to  
Choose ones you hold, dear to you  
And your home. In Mexico  
It's The Day of the Dead.  
In India, lights in trees  
Help those loitering souls  
Find their way to lands of bliss.  
Just in case, they lose their way,  
Saying goodbye to loved ones.  
"Have courage, peace, come to us"  
All Gods and Goddesses say.  
Lights above, lights below, light  
The path and coax those souls on.  
Divine's voice in wind whispers,  
'It's light over darkness,  
Goodness over evils. Death re-birth,  
Winter renews.  
Friends over enemies,  
Not more misery, fun mirth'.  
Let's bring on the noise and din.  
Racket, crash, fizz, ping, bang, bosh,

Whoosh, hoosh, boosh, fisshhhh, fire, fireworks.  
Darkness fights but will it win,  
If light fights back?  
Clusters, Deepavali rows  
Of lights lead the way,  
Gathering friends, families  
Together for food, presents,  
Games, laughter, to celebrate  
Victory. God and Goddess  
Means good and goodness. Being  
Friends and helping someone else.  
Humans join in, take part  
To get Diwali done.  
By lights of a thousand lamps,  
The oldest stories are told for everyone.  
All get cuddles from the Goddess.  
It's the end of Ravana.  
Master demon with 10 heads  
20 arms, clever, cleverer,  
Cleverest. Handsome, charming,  
Looks and smells so nice, never outdone.  
Laxmi's lesson for tonight is abundance,  
Please ask her for wealth, health and fun.  
The dark moves across the stars.  
Come out, let lights burn  
She'll surely come out this night  
So pick some treasures for yourself.  
Solace, joy, money, peace and love.  
With Diwali winter's ok.  
Spring is now not so far way,  
AND Christmas Yule is on its way.



# *Sita's Diwali*

At the start of the show, we see Sita & Rhia sharing the Diwali Story together. Different bits of the story are more exciting for each character, and we also see that there are different interpretations of the story.

## Script Excerpt

**SITA** Hey thunder bogies, do you remember the Diwali story?

**RHIA** Introducing the mighty Goddess Sita!

**SITA** As powerful and kind as the earth!

**RHIA** Lord Rama

**SITA** The greatest archer in the Universe! He could shoot an arrow at a grain of rice! He was skilled, generous, handsome...brave.....muscly...

**RHIA** Nani!

**SITA** Sorry.

**RHIA** And evil Demon Ravana! With 10 big fat badonky stinky heads and 20 badumbo arms.

**SITA** Rama said - "Babe, I'm going into the forest. But I can smell that stinky Ravana closeby..."  
He drew a magical circle in the ground around her  
"...If you stay inside it, nothing can hurt you."

**RHIA** But....

**SITA** An old man came begging. And Sita was wanted to help him

**RHIA** Don't do it, Sita!

**SITA** She took one step forward..

**RHIA** The circle!

**SITA** And the old man burst into flames! RAVANA!



# Nudibranchs

Rhia & Magda's adventure leads them down to a rockpool on the Jurassic Coast, where they meet a rather surprising new friend- a **Nudibranch**. Pronounced 'nudey- brank' these amazing creatures are actually commonly found in our UK seas and come in a fabulous array of different shapes and colours. When we discovered these fascinating sea slugs, we knew we needed one in the show- which is how you got to see our singing, dancing, David Bowie style Nudibranch!



©Dan Bolt www.underwaterpics.co.uk

- Most British nudibranchs are smaller than the end of your thumb. That's **tiny!**
- Most species eat a **single type of food**, which is one reason we have so many kinds in our waters.
- Nudibranchs evolved from **sea snails**, but have got rid of their shell.
- Nudi's can eat **poisonous** things & they use these toxins for their own defences



These pictures were taken by our underwater photographer friend, Dan Bolt



©Dan Bolt www.underwaterpics.co.uk

**Wasps and Bees** use colours to warn off predators- black and yellow tend to be the danger colours in nature. But **under the sea**, black is much harder to see because it's too dark, so Nudi's tend to use **yellow and white** instead! This warns other creatures not to eat them. !

Next time you're at the beach, see if you can spot a nudibranch in a rockpool! Find out more about these amazing creatures here: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/marine/sea-snails-and-sea-slugs/nudibranch>

# THE JURASSIC COAST

*Rhia & The Tree of Lights* is set on the Jurassic Coast, England's only natural World Heritage Site. The Jurassic Coast starts at Orcombe Point in Exmouth, and stretches 95 miles along the coast to Old Harry Rocks in Dorset. 185 million years of Earth's History are captured in the rocks along this stretch of coastline making it a place of huge geological importance. In the show, Sita says that holding a rock in your hand is like time travelling and she's right! Rocks from the Jurassic Coast can hold clues to what life was like during the Triassic, Jurassic & Cretaceous periods through fossilised remains.



A fossil is formed when something that was once alive (like a plant or an animal... or a dinosaur!) gets buried- the quicker the better! This is because the longer the organism is exposed, the more likely it is to be eaten or rot away. The perfect conditions to make a fossil are actually incredibly rare, but if the environment is right, then the hard bits of a living thing can turn into a fossil. This happens when minerals in the ground fill in the gaps or even replace the hard bits of the organism, capturing them in the rock for millions of years.

Jurassic Coast Trust have amazing resources where you can find out more about fossils

<https://jurassiccoast.org/what-is-the-jurassic-coast/all-about-fossils/what-are-fossils/>

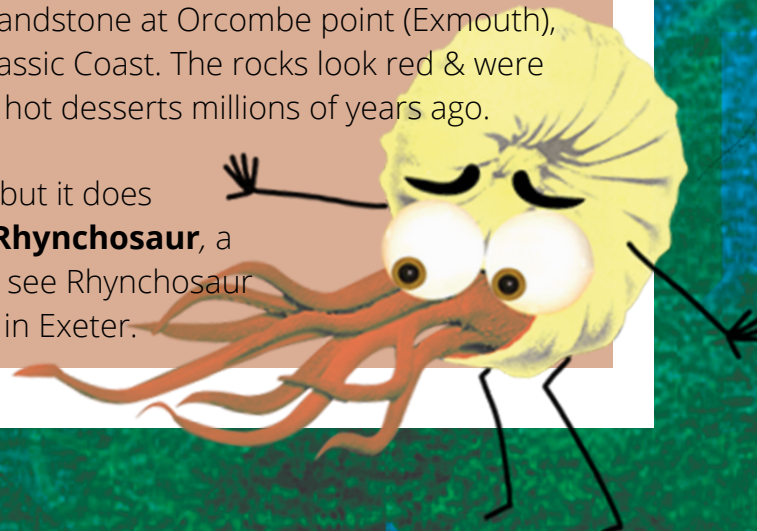
During the show, Rhia & Magda travel back through deep time to see what Devon was like in the Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous & Pleistocene era. Here are some fascinating facts from DJ Deep Time!



In the **Triassic Era** (252-201 million years ago) Devon was part of one huge mega continent called **Pangea**. And if we had been alive then we would have been baking hot, because Devon was once a Desert!

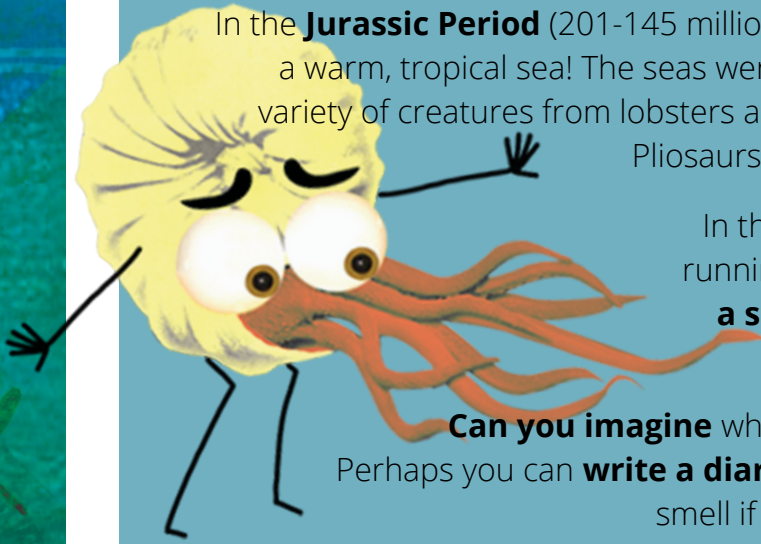
You can see Triassic sandstone at Orcombe point (Exmouth), at the start of the Jurassic Coast. The rocks look red & were formed in baking hot deserts millions of years ago.

It's rare to find fossils in these Triassic rocks, but it does sometimes happen! In the show, we meet a **Rhynchosaur**, a Triassic reptile with a beak like nose. You can see Rhynchosaur fossils at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter.





In the **Jurassic Period** (201-145 million years ago), Devon would have been under a warm, tropical sea! The seas were rich in nutrients and so supported a huge variety of creatures from lobsters and starfish to sharks, Ichthyosaurs and even Pliosaurus, the mega-predators of the Jurassic oceans.



In the show, we meet some Ammonites who are running away from predators in the ocean. **Write a scene** between two ammonites- what does a day in the life of an ammonite look like?

**Can you imagine** what life would be like if we had been alive then? Perhaps you can **write a diary entry** of what you might see, feel, hear and smell if you time travelled back to the Jurassic Period.

In the **Cretaceous Period** (145-66 million years ago) sea levels rose, fell and rose again, & for long periods Devon was covered in forest, swamps and lagoons.

Lots of vegetation to eat meant lots of BIG dinosaurs, and this is the time that T-Rex roamed the earth!



In the show, DJ Deep Time fast forwards the Deep Time Disco to the **Pleistocene** (2.5 million- 11,500 years ago), a period that featured freezing ice ages and warm spells.

It's here that Rhia & Magda get to meet the Honiton Hippos! That's right-there used to be **hippos in Honiton!**

You can see fossilized Hippo bones at the RAMM in Exeter, that were found when a new road was being built in Honiton.

At the end, Rhia finds a Fool's Gold Ammonite at the beach

Fool's Gold Ammonites are actually not gold- they're made of Iron Pyrite



You might find one yourself if you go fossil hunting at the Jurassic Coast- especially at Charmouth

You can polish up an Iron Pyrite Ammonite to shine like gold