

Build Your Own Memory Box

A Family Starter Kit — inspired by The Memory Box & Charlotte's Big Surprise

In *The Memory Box & Charlotte's Big Surprise*, Charlotte builds a box of photographs and small keepsakes to help her grandfather find his way back to moments of connection. This kit walks your family through building a Memory Box of your own — a simple, hands-on project that often opens more conversation, and does more quiet emotional work, than words alone.

There's no wrong way to build one. This guide is a starting point, not a rulebook — the finished box should look like whatever your child, or your family, wants it to look like.

AT A GLANCE

The Box

- A blank wooden box, or honestly — any box: a shoebox, a cigar box, an empty tin, a cardboard gift box you already have.

Paint & Color

- Water-based or acrylic paint, any color
- Fast-drying paint markers — best for a single-day project

Decorating Supplies

- Stencils
- Bedazzle gems / rhinestones
- Costume jewelry or trinkets from home
- Fast-drying craft glue

Two Memory Boxes made by real kids — one covered in painted flowers, one wrapped in favorite characters and rhinestones. Neither is more “right” than the other.



Hand-painted flowers, gems at every corner.



Favorite characters, rhinestone trim, all her own choices.

Before You Start

Decorating the box is entirely the choice of the creator. If your child wants a box covered top to bottom in rhinestones, or one that's simply painted a single favorite color with no embellishment at all, both are exactly right. The goal isn't a polished craft project — it's a box that feels personal to whoever made it and whoever it's for.

If your child is building this box for or with a grandparent, it can help to talk for a minute first about what that person loves — a favorite color, flower, hobby, or memory — before deciding how to decorate.

“There's no wrong way to build one.”

Step-by-Step: Building Your Memory Box

01 Choose your box.

Wooden box, shoebox, tin, or gift box — anything with a lid or a way to close works well.

02 Gather your decorating supplies.

Lay everything out first — paint or paint markers, stencils, gems, jewelry, trinkets, and glue — so your child can see all their options before starting.

03 Plan the design (optional).

Some kids like to sketch a quick plan or trace a stencil outline first; others prefer to dive straight in. Either approach works — follow your child's lead.

04 Paint the box.

If you're using acrylic or water-based paint, allow it to dry according to the product's instructions before decorating further. If you're using fast-drying paint markers, you can move on almost right away — which is what makes them ideal for a single-day project.

05 Decorate.

Glue on bedazzle gems, costume jewelry, and trinkets. Use stencils for any lettering or patterns. This is the step where the box really becomes personal — let your child add as much or as little as they want.

06 Let it dry completely.

Give glued embellishments time to set fully before handling the box or adding contents, especially if heavier items like costume jewelry were used.

07 Fill the box.

Once it's finished and dry, fill it with photographs, small keepsakes, notes, or anything that helps tell a story about the person it's for.

Ideas for What to Put Inside

- Photographs from favorite memories or family events
- A small drawing or handwritten note from your child
- Ticket stubs, postcards, or souvenirs from a shared trip
- A favorite small object that reminds your child of that person
- A recipe card, a pressed flower, or a specific shared memory

A Note for Parents and Educators

This project is a craft, but it's also a bridge. Building something with their hands, and choosing what goes inside, often gives children an easier way to process a grandparent's memory loss than direct conversation alone. Let the box be imperfect. Let it take longer than expected. The time spent building it together is doing as much good as the finished object.

For more guidance on talking with your child about memory loss at every age, visit the Parent Discovery Resource Center at homerhartage.com/parent-resource/. For classroom or small-group use, see the Curriculum & Educator Resource Center at homerhartage.com/curriculum-resource/.



Inspired by The Memory Box & Charlotte's Big Surprise by Homer L. Hartage — available wherever books are sold.

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