



When You Were Little

Classroom Guide

The past is a place you can visit — and it looks a lot like now

CASEL Competency: Social Awareness

Grade Level: Pre-K–3

Duration: 40–50 minutes

Category: Stories Together

Learning Objectives

- Discover that grandparents were once children with the same feelings and dreams
 - Learn that the world looked different but people felt the same
 - Understand that knowing where you come from helps you understand who you are
 - Practice empathy across time — connecting to someone's childhood self
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Overview & Preparation

Key Vocabulary

Past • Memory • Childhood • Generation • Same • Different • Connect • History • Empathy • Time

Materials Needed

- The personalized story
- Old vs. new picture cards
- Paper and crayons
- Optional: old photos from families
- Interview question cards

Before Reading

Connection Question

What do you think your grandparent was like as a kid? Do you think they were anything like you?

Background Building

The hero asks: "What was it like when YOU were little?" — and the story travels back in time to the grandparent's childhood. Different toys, different clothes, different technology — but the SAME feelings: excitement about friends, fear of the dark, love of ice cream, nervousness about school. The hero discovers that time changes the outside but not the inside.

During Reading — Pause Points

- **When the grandparent's childhood world looks so different** — Look how different things were! No phones, different clothes, different toys. What would YOU miss most if you went back in time?
- **When the hero notices the grandparent felt the same things they feel** — The grandparent was nervous about school too! They loved playing with friends too! Why is it surprising that feelings stay the same across time?
- **When the hero returns home with a deeper connection** — The hero knows something new about their grandparent now. How does understanding someone's childhood change how you see them?

Discussion Questions

1. The outside changed (toys, clothes, technology) but the inside (feelings, dreams, fears) stayed the same. Why?

↳ What feelings do ALL kids share, no matter when they grew up?

2. The hero was surprised that their grandparent was nervous about school. Why is it hard to imagine adults as kids?

↳ How does knowing your grandparent was once scared help you?

3. What can we learn about OURSELVES by learning about our grandparents' childhoods?

↳ If your grandchild asked about YOUR childhood, what would you want them to know?

4. The story says knowing where you come from helps you understand who you are. How?

↳ What from your family's past do you see in yourself?

Facilitation Tips

Bring in "then and now" comparisons: a rotary phone vs. a smartphone, a chalkboard vs. a tablet. The visual contrast makes the lesson tangible. If possible, invite an elder to share their childhood memories.

Emotional Payoff

Time is a river that changes the surface but not the depth. The grandparent's childhood fears, joys, and dreams are the hero's own — just in different packaging. This connection across time makes the hero feel less alone and more rooted in a story bigger than their own.

After Reading Activities

Then & Now Cards

Duration: 10 min | Materials: Picture cards showing old vs. modern versions of things

Match old things to their modern versions: record player/streaming, handwritten letter/text message, horse/car. Discuss: the TOOL changed, but the NEED (music, communication, travel) stayed the same.

Interview a Time Traveler

Duration: 15 min | Materials: Question cards, paper

Write questions for a "time traveler" (grandparent/elder): "What games did you play?" "What was your school like?" "What scared you?" "What made you happy?" Practice in pairs. Take questions home for a real interview.

Same Feelings, Different Times

Duration: 10 min | Materials: Paper, crayons

Draw two scenes: a kid from "back then" and a kid from "now" experiencing the SAME feeling (first day of school, making a friend, losing a game). See: different outside, same inside.

Writing Prompts

- If you could visit your grandparent's childhood for one day, what would you want to see?
- Write about one thing that's different between then and now, and one thing that's exactly the same.
- Draw yourself and your grandparent at the same age, side by side. What do you have in common?

Home Connection

Family Letter

Dear Families,

Today we read "When You Were Little," a time-travel story exploring a grandparent's childhood. Your child discovered that while the world looked very different, the FEELINGS were the same. They have interview questions ready — please help them connect with an elder to hear firsthand stories.

Here is how you can continue this learning at home:

- Let your child interview a grandparent or elder using their practice questions
- Show old family photos and tell the stories behind them
- Compare: "When I was your age, we didn't have _____, but we DID have _____."

With warmth,

Your Child's Teacher

Related Books

- When I Was Young in the Mountains by Cynthia Rylant
- The Hundred-Year-Old Man by Jonas Jonasson (simplified)
- My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother by Patricia Polacco
- Grandfather's Journey by Allen Say