

# The Way It Was

by Dot Meharry

illustrated by Spike Wademan

## Overview

In this story, a young girl compares her life with that of her great-grandmother. The illustrations are based on the period 1910–1920, but be aware that the dates of birth of your children’s great-grandparents will vary. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2005*.

## Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of making connections, visualising, inferring, and asking questions. It provides a good model of comparing and contrasting information. The historical information has strong links to social studies.

## Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the comparisons between the present and the past, emphasised by the contrast between sepia and the coloured illustrations
- the first-person narrator
- the indicators of time — “every day”, “Once a week”, “when it got dark”, “When it gets d
- the changes from the past to the present tense
- the short, humorous ending
- the irregular past-tense verbs — “did”, “had”, “lit”, “made”, “rode”, “were”
- the compound words — “grandma”, “microwave”, “sometimes”
- the variety of initial consonant blends
- the use of an ellipsis for impact on page 9
- the use of commas for phrasing
- the use of the adverb “too”.

## Setting the scene

If possible, bring along an old black and white (or sepia) photograph to show to the children. Explain that you have a book for them to read about the olden days and talk to them about your photograph. Move on to the cover illustration. *What can you see in this picture that tells you it’s about the olden days?* Prompt the children if necessary: *Where are the cars? Where are the power lines?* Read the title and explain what it means. *What do you think this book might tell us? What are some questions you would like to ask?* Record the children’s questions to refer to after the reading.

## The first reading

Read the names of the author and the illustrator.

Title page — Note that the girl is looking at the “photograph” on the front cover. Encourage the children to infer what the connection between the girl and the photograph might be.

Listen to the children read the text themselves, offering support as necessary. Allow plenty of opportunities for discussion.

Page 2 — *Who is telling the story?* This page clarifies the relationship between the narrator and the girl in the “photograph”.

Page 3 — Draw out the idea that this is a comparison. *How are the pictures different? Why is page 3 in colour? Who is telling the story? How does she know what her great-grandma did?*

Pages 4 to 7 — Encourage the children to discuss the comparisons and to make connections with their knowledge of the past and with their own present-day experiences. Note that the illustrations are now showing Great-grandma as an adult.

Page 8 — Discuss the concept of silent movies and the reason for having the words on the screen and a piano player in the theatre.

Page 9 — *How does the author want you to read this sentence?* Model how the pause indicated by the ellipsis helps to emphasise the comparison between the two pages.

Page 10 — You will probably need to explain what a copper is. Spend some time talking through the ideas on this page, for example, the need to light a fire. Note other details, such as Great-grandma’s apron, the chimney, the big box of soap, and the wringer. *Why would Great-grandma only do the washing once a week?*

Page 12 — *Why would she have her bath in the kitchen?*

Page 13 — Savour the humorous, snappy ending!

Return to the questions on the chart and discuss what the children have found out from the reading. The children could do this as a think-pair-share activity.

## Ideas for revisiting the text

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Listen to the children reread the text. Observe their use of strategies and their attention to the punctuation to support phrasing. If any children have difficulty with the changes of tense, check that they understand that each double-page spread is moving from the past to the present. If necessary, follow this up with some explicit teaching (see below).

Return to the questions on the chart. *What did we find out?* Link this discussion to the comprehension strategy of visualising. *What would it be like to have your bath in the kitchen?* Encourage the children to imagine the experience. Use the same discussion framework to think about another page.

Focus on a left-hand page and ask the children to identify the past-tense verb(s). *What word tells you what Great-grandma did?* Compare the past-tense verb(s) with the present-tense verb(s) on the facing page.

Focus on the irregular past-tense verbs. Explain that there are some verbs that can’t have “ed” added to them and that the children need to use their knowledge of spoken English to help them when they’re reading. *Does “maked” sound right? Do we say “do-ed”?* For ESOL children, who are less likely to be able to draw on this knowledge, you could practise using these verbs in oral sentences.

Identify the indicators of time on pages 6 and 7, 10 and 11. Talk about how they provide extra information for the reader.

Focus on any of the initial consonant blends or digraphs that the children may have been unsure of. List words that start the same way.

Locate the compound words in the text and split them. Talk about their meanings. Remind the children of the strategy of looking for the biggest familiar “chunk” when they are working out new words.

Reread the sentence on page 5 that contains the homophones “to” and “too”. Clarify that “too” means “as well” in this sentence. Ask the children to find other examples on pages 7 and 9.

## Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2005*.

Select one aspect of the text, for example, doing the washing, and create a “Then and Now” comparative chart together.

Find non-fiction books in the school library that show the way things were. Add new information to the “Then and Now” chart.

Ask the children to talk with older relatives about their experiences of earlier times. Encourage them to bring old family photographs to school to share. Scan them for a slide show or write captions to accompany them for a wall display.

Have the children compare old and new technologies, for example, pens, bicycles, or telephones.

Link this text to a unit of work based on the social studies strand Time, Continuity, and Change. Visit a museum to experience earlier technologies.