**When I Was Little: A Four-Year-Old’s Memoir of Her Youth**

Written by Jamie Lee Curtis  
Illustrated by Laura Cornell

*Published: 1993    ISBN: 978-0-06-021    Length: 30 pages*

**Genre:** Narrative, Memoir  
**Subjects:** Writing, Reading  
**Educational Themes:** Compare and Contrast, Repetitive Story Structure

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**SUMMARY**

*When I Was Little* is a young girl’s celebration of being grown up. Each page begins with the phrase, “When I was little…” and juxtaposes the young girls’ accomplishments with her less capable younger sibling, who must eat mush-not spaghetti, swim naked-not in a swim suit, and needs to be helped constantly rather than being helpful. Jaime Lee Curtis weaves pre-school age achievements with a grown up dose of humor and Laura Cornell’s illustrations delightfully depict a little girl, who is still little, yet feels so big.

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**WHAT’S INSIDE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6-Traits</th>
<th>Writer’s Craft</th>
<th>Habits of Mind</th>
<th>Hawaiian Value</th>
<th>General Learner Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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**6-TRAITS**

**IDEAS:** *When I Was Little* is a memoir written from the perspective of a small child, a mentor text that helps students understand how a narrative can describe one’s memories of a time that once was.  
**ORGANIZATION:** Each page begins with “When I was little...” Students can recreate this repeating pattern in books of their own, choosing several memories to include.  
**CONVENTIONS:** This story provides students the opportunity to study past tense and present tense verbs. These can be written out on a tree map for students to see more clearly.

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**WRITER’S CRAFT**

**PERSPECTIVE:** The story is told from the perspective of a pre-school aged child. Students can think about how the story would be different if told from the perspective of the child’s mother or younger sibling.  
**COMPARE AND CONTRAST:** Each page in the story is a contrast of where we all start off with where we are today.

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**HABITS OF MIND**

**PERSISTANCE:** The main character arrives at her present level of achievement through practicing doing grown up girl things. Continuing to persist will lead her to being even more grown up.

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Book Reviewer: Alestra Menendez, Literacy Resource Teacher  
Date Reviewed: July 6, 2009
# Hawaiian Value

**KŪPONO (Excellence):** The young girl strives for excellence (and to be grown up) in all that she does.

**KULEANA (Responsibility):** Since she is now more responsible, she is also granted more privileges.

## General Learner Outcomes

**Self Directed Learner:** This story models that when children take it upon themselves to learn and grow, they are granted more grown up responsibilities and privileges.

## Things to Talk About and Notice...

- Students can participate in a discussion of the author’s comparison between then and now with respect to language and action.
- Discussion can extend to predictions of accomplishments once the young girl is older and even more capable of independence.
- It is significant to point out how the author ends the story, because it breaks the normal pattern of repetition drawing the reader in, and ending satisfactorily.

## Sample Questions

- Compare the ways that the little girl has changed to ways that you have also changed from when you were little?
- Predict how this story would continue if the little girl was your age. What new things would she be able to do and celebrate?
- Can you infer why the author chose to write an ending that was different from the rest of the book’s pattern?

## Other Related Books

- *My Big Sister* by Valorie Fisher
- *My Big Brother* by Valorie Fisher
- *Do you Know What I’ll do?* by Charlotte Zolotow
- *When I was young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant,
- *No David* by David Shannon

## Possible Connection Activities

- **Memoir Writing:** Students can write their own memoirs with a repeating pattern and compare and contrast structure in the writing workshop.
- **Letter Writing:** Students can write a letter to someone younger than themselves about all the exciting things they will be able to do when they “grow up.”
- **Flow Map or Timeline:** Students can create a flow map or timeline of their accomplishments, organized chronologically.