



# The Past, Present and Future

by

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Young children live in the moment. But they do not know it. They are not burdened by memories from the past. Nor do they dream of the distant future. In the first childhood years their soul life is determined by immediate impressions. Light and sound stream into each child. When she enjoys drinking from her mother's breast, we can see by the movements of her feet how the experience passes through her entire body. And when a young child suffers an ear infection, she can do nothing about the pain, for she cannot make the experience objective.

Memories awaken in children as they begin to grow older. Then experiences become repetitions of previous events. And the memories are so direct that they identify something that recurs alongside their momentary sensory experiences.

They also look forward to events in the future. Many of their first memories are actually parts of their first experiences of the future. At first the distance in time plays no role. Their perspective of time is not conscious. What happened two years ago is the same as yesterday. The same is true of the future. What will happen in the future is as unclear for one day as it is for one week ahead.

Experiences of the past do not bother young children. They have no conscious problems. And future experiences do not yet have the power of ideals in them. The future is an objective, simple experience that happens no matter what attitude the child may have. For young children the past and the future are experienced without personal problems. Therefore an "eternal paradise" atmosphere surrounds our children.

Let us compare this with an elderly person's experience of the past, present and future. Often the very oldest people live anchored in the past. They can tell great stories from their youth and childhood. These stories are often very powerful and objective. The elder person has worked through many of the personal problems connected with his memory. The pictures appear in space in such a way that they are beside other pictures that are more eternal. And what about the future? Some will think our elderly have no future. In truth they have merely an insignificant piece of their personal future on this side of the threshold to death. An old person has a clarified experience from the past that rises above his personal ideals and dreams. An objective, spiritual necessity appears. It is the prophet. He sees what will take place in the future of necessity.

With such an experience of the past and future, it is possible to find peace and quiet in the moment. Therefore old people often have a glance of eternity in their eyes that streams directly into the moment.

Between the experiences of the elderly and the young children, human beings must struggle with the past and future each day of their lives. Self-knowledge is gained by finding the important aspects of our own being. The goal is to realize more and more of our being in life, so our true Self appears in our actions.

Let us observe a short phase in which the experience of time first appears with a certain, personal self-consciousness. This is generally between the ages of nine and ten. Up to this time the child lives in the moment. If a child does something wrong, the situation needs to be taken care of immediately. If one waits until the day after, the situation is already out of date. The children wonder why the adult is still talking about it. By the age of nine, children no longer live entirely within the immediate moment. Most children experience conflicts with adults at this age, are bothered by past actions and fear future events. They feel lonely and burdened for weeks and months by personal experiences. They may do wrong things to test their independence through inner opposition to the entire world. Or it can be a legitimate or illegitimate action that the teacher or the parent carried out against them. For a long time, the child is struck by self-pity. For the first time the child carries a piece of the past filled with personal feelings. Therefore a new experience of the past awakens. And at the same time something just as strong awakens in their sense of the future: the great ideals.

By the age of nine young children already "know" what they want to be when they grow up: a constable, a bus-driver, a farmer, a fireman. The pictures of these professions are concrete mental images. Yet these images are not future dreams nor are they ideals.

At roughly the age of nine the transition sets in and colorful experiences in time appear. This is the basis for the first conscious experiences of verbs in time: the future, present and past. Usually we start grammar lessons at this age by introducing the three main parts of speech: verbs, nouns and adjectives. (See article "A Little Introduction to Grammar" in this Journal.)

By telling short stories we can provide examples of verbs in time that take place in the classroom. Here I suggest teachers avoid using the stories to point moralizing fingers at the children. Difficult situations can be camouflaged so they are not so pressing. But you want the children to recognize the actions and the messages so they know they have experienced them.

From your stories the children can find verbs in the various tenses. Ask them to make lists and draw pictures. Another good way to deepen the experiences is to act out the verbs. For example, one child stands before the class and acts out a verb. The others guess what the verb is: he *shovels*, he *zips*, he *cuts*, he *dances*, he *hoes*, he *counts*, and so forth. All of the actions take place in the present.

When that child is finished, he sits on a stool in front of the class and is asked to be silent while the next one stands up to act out a different verb. Now the child on the stool can guess what the other child is acting out. The teacher names the stool the "stool from the past." When the child sitting on the stool guesses correctly, the child that did the pantomime gets to sit on the "stool from the past." She moves from the present into the past. A new child stands before the class and pantomimes another verb. When the child on the "stool from the past" guesses correctly, the teacher asks the child in the present tense role, "What did you do?" The child answers in the past tense and then sits down on the "stool of the past."

You can repeat the game until the children are satisfied, and then try it using the future tense. A second stool is set before the class on the other side of the child that pantomimes in the present. This is the "stool of the future." The teacher asks the child who steps forward to whisper what he

will do, for example, “I will saw.” The future is hidden within the child and the teacher. It is unknown. It is a matter of willpower. The action shall appear in the next moment from the hidden intention. “Do it!” says the teacher. The child stands up and carries out the future intention as a present action. The other children forget to raise their hands and shout out, “He saws!” The child that “sawed” sits in the “stool of the future.” Silence. The teacher pretends he has not been paying attention and then suddenly asks again, “What did he do?” The class answers in chorus, “He sawed!”

With this game all the children visualize the stream of time coming from the future as it moves into the present and then into the past. Only the present action is visible. The past comes from a picture in their memory. The future entails latent, willpower intentions.

Now have the children draw pictures of this. The actions are drawn three times each. In order to show that only the actions in the present are visible you can color, for example, a red cloud around the picture in their memory from the past and a blue cloud around the picture of the willpower intention in the future. Then the children can write down all kinds of examples of verbs in columns below, using three separate colors for the columns.

In order to summarize and make an overview of what you have done, find a way to present all three tenses without using the separate examples. Remember not to make this overview before the game. First the children must experience the examples and then you summarize.

There are many ways to summarize the tenses. For example: draw three circles side by side and connect them slightly by overlapping each other. Draw three human figures within the circles, one in the present, one in the past and one in the future. Afterwards, let the children draw arrows from the past circle to the present circle and vice versa, from the present circle into the past circle. Do the same in both directions to the future circle and the present circle. This drawing demonstrates that the human being always stands in the present circle, yet he always has a past person behind him and a future person before him.

Once you have worked with these themes in the grammar block, take up other subjects such as botany, history or zoology and wait some months before presenting the more complicated tenses, such as: the perfect tense,

the past perfect and the future perfect tenses. This gives the children time to let the previous grammar lessons sink into their memory first.

How do all of the tenses relate to each other? There are only three times: the present, past and the future. But there are a number of tenses, each expressing a different action. Some tenses express the actions as they happen and others express the actions as a finished process.

When I say, "I chopped wood," I express that I live in the past action as it unfolds. If I say, "I had chopped wood," I express, in the past perfect tense, that I remember a time in the past when the action was already completed. I create a completed picture of the event that is projected into the past. It is more of a thoughtful, reflected expression compared with the past action where I continue to live with my feelings and willpower within the past events. When I say, "I have chopped wood," I express in the perfect tense an action that is now a completed thought in the moment. Therefore the helping verb *have* is in the present tense.

We can ask whether the perfect or the past tense is closer to the present in terms of time. The answer is neither of them! This question is incorrectly asked but it occurs in many schematic presentations of grammar. The past and the perfect are just as close and just as far away, but in different ways. They belong to two different aspects.

The perfect, the past perfect and the future perfect (*I will have chopped wood*) are verbal actions expressed in three times (present, past and future) as completed, reflected thoughts. In other words, they are the thinking aspect of all three times, while present, past and future are the feeling and willpower aspects of verbal actions.

In the fifth grade we learn the more complicated tenses with a series of examples. Two children stand in front of the class. One sits on the "stool of the future." The other stands behind it. The first one says, "I will paint" (future tense). The child behind says, "Soon he will have painted a complete painting" (future perfect tense). The first child stands up and pantomimes painting and says, "I paint" (present). Then he stops painting and the children in the class say in chorus, "Now he has painted completely" (perfect tense). The first child sits on the "stool of the past" and says, "I painted." The other child stands behind the "stool of the past" and says, "Awhile ago I had already painted completely" (past perfect tense). Then the teacher can ask many questions that require the pupils to use the various tenses.

In this way we make each action visible for the children. And they understand both aspects (represented by both children in the game) that appear in all three time phases.

Now the children are ready to write down a series of examples and they can deepen their experience of the actions by drawing them. The drawings can also be simplified into a graphic overview. You can create the graphic overview by drawing a horizontal line with three points highlighted; one is the future, the next the present and the third the past. Then draw three vertical lines that pass through the highlighted points. Name them the future perfect, the perfect and the past perfect tenses. The vertical line that meets the horizontal line in the past point is the past perfect. The two other vertical lines that cross the horizontal line

In the present point and the future point are the perfect points and the future perfect points respectfully. When this is well-practiced by the children, we can approach it from new perspectives. Otherwise you end up in grammar drills.

It is also valuable for the teacher to realize that the forms we have in the English language are not eternal laws but a short moment in the historic development of the language. The development of language is always a spiritual battle. Only grown, mature individualities can participate in the battle for mankind's further development that takes place between the past and the future within every day's present moment.

Yet children already experience a preparatory stage that entails the same qualities. And in grammar lessons these qualities are worked upon with age-appropriate methods.