



Lesson & Activity Ideas for Is Was

by Deborah Freedman

Learn more about Deborah, her books, and find more teaching resources at www.deborahfreedman.net

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Dear parents and educators,

*Full disclosure—I do not have any experience or expertise as a teacher or writer of curriculum! The ideas below come from my process and imagination as an author and illustrator, and I hope that they inspire you to follow up your reading of **Is Was** with one of the hands-on activities here, or one of your own.*

This is a work in progress. I welcome your input.

*Many thanks for sharing my book with children!
Deborah*



Themes

- Change
 - Small, everyday change—
 - More consequential, far-reaching transformation
 - Even while some things change, others stay constant
- Heart
 - Literal “beat” of the text
 - Metaphorical heartbeat of the story
- Loss
- Comfort

STEAM Activities

- Ecosystems
 - Name 3 different microenvironments in the book
 - Name 3 different kinds of weather in the book—describe the textures used to convey weather
 - Name 3 different times of day—describe the colors used to convey time
 - Identify 6 animals in the book’s ecosystem
 - How do they relate to their physical environments?
 - How do they relate to each other?
 - Which are predators? Which are prey?
 - What sounds do they make?
- Keep a nature journal
 - Make your own journal
 - Recycle! Use recycled cardboard (like an old cereal or shipping box) as the cover & decorate
 - Paper bags can be cut up for sturdy pages
 - Punch holes and bind with twine, string, ribbon, or yarn
 - Listen & describe:
 - What sounds do you hear? List 5 different sounds.
 - Which are natural? Which are human-made?
 - Focus on one natural sound—can you guess what it is?
 - Describe the sound
 - Follow the sound—can you see it? Describe what you see
 - What is it?
 - What is it doing?



- Look & sketch
 - Observe the sky over one week. Sketch the different kinds of clouds and weather that you see.
 - Watch one spot over the course of a day
 - What activity do you see there?
 - What colors? Do they change during one day?
 - Add more drawings of the same spot in different kinds of weather.
 - Draw the Seasons (draw same spot during each of the four seasons—see [National Geographic's Arts and Crafts](#) ideas)
 - Observe a single kind of animal over one week. Draw all the different things it does.
 - Vary your perspective
 - Climb up and look down
 - Get all the way down on the ground and look up
- Touch
 - Notice different textures
 - Make rubbings of the bark of different trees. How are they different? Can you identify trees by their bark?
 - Make rubbings of leaves. Can you identify trees by the patterns in their leaves?
- Collect natural objects from the ground outside
 - Leaves and flowers can be pressed and put into your nature journal
 - Look up the scientific names for what you've found
- Ask lots of questions... and find the answers!



Reading & Writing

- Look—follow one animal through the book
 - What sounds does that animal make?
 - What words are in the text that relate to that animal?
 - What words are *not* there? What is? What was? What will happen next?
Tell the animal's story in your own words.

- Listen to the world around you—
 - Discuss *onomatopoeia* and its use through the book
 - Write down sounds that you hear
 - Do the sounds you hear spark words?
 - Write a poem using sounds and those words.

- Collect natural objects from the ground outside
 - Describe using vivid language
 - Use them as prompts for poems

- Make your own list of “is” and “was”
 - Little things that perhaps you never noticed before
 - Think of one big change that felt difficult
 - What helped you through that change?
 - What stays the same? What begins again?

- What *will be*?
 - What do you think comes next in this story?



Further Reading

- **Things That Go Away**, Beatrice Alemagna
- **An Ordinary Day**, Elana K. Arnold & Elizabet Vukovic
- **The Blue House**, Phoebe Wahl
- **Life**, Cynthia Rylant & Brendan Wenzel
- **Goodbye, Friend! Hello, Friend!** Cori Doerrfeld
- **Little Tree**, Loren Long
- **Ten Beautiful Things**, Molly Beth Griffin & Maribel Lechuga
- **Outside, Inside**, LeUyen Pham
- **The Old Truck**, Jarrett Pumphrey and Jerome Pumphrey
- **Making a Friend**, Alison McGhee & Marc Rosenthal
- **Waiting**, Kevin Henkes

For more about the books above, see my "[Guide to Picturebooks About Change](#)" posted on Instagram!

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