

Title	<i>Grandfather's Journey</i>				
Author (Text & Illustration)	Allen Say				
Publication Year	1993	Publisher	Houghton Mifflin Company		
Translated Versions	Japanese translation available				
Words	569	Pages	32	YL Level	0.6
Synopsis					
<p>This is the story of a Japanese man born before the war. Alone, the young man sailed to America. Upon reaching this unfamiliar continent with a vast landscape and people of different race—everything was new to the man. When he eventually got used to life in the New World, he returned to Japan and married his childhood friend. He then crossed the Pacific again with his bride and started a new life in San Francisco. Eventually, they had a baby girl, and the three lived a happy life together; however, they had this constant longing to return to their birthplace. So, they returned home to live a peaceful life in the country with their dear family and friends, but the daughter, who was born in a big city in the United States, grew uncomfortable with both “life in a foreign country” and “life in the countryside.” Her parents later moved to the city to join her. Thereafter, she got married and the author and the narrator, “I,” was born.</p> <p>Grandfather would reminisce about his life in America and tell the author stories of his youth. When the author grew up, he moved to the United States to follow in grandfather’s footsteps. The author stated, “The funny thing is, the moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other. I think I know my grandfather now. I miss him very much.” Thoughts get passed down across generations.</p>					
Introduction					
<p>Just like <i>Tree of Cranes</i> and <i>Tea with Milk</i>, <i>Grandfather's Journey</i> is an autobiographical family story of Yokohama-born author Allen Say (1939–). When <i>Grandfather's Journey</i> was published in the United States, it evoked a tremendous public response. The story of a single Japanese American family was embraced as a universal story in the United States, a country of immigrants, and it even won the Caldecott Medal. It is also widely used as teaching material.</p> <p>The serene and beautiful watercolor paintings in this work depict the turbulent life of Grandpa, and the contrast this creates is quite striking. Reading it feels like flipping through an old</p>					

family album. As Grandpa moves back and forth between Japan and America, between the countryside and the city, between different spaces and cultures, he also experiences the conflict between his motherland, Japan, and his second home, the United States. In contrast to this turmoil, the expressions of the grandfather and his family seem motionless and impassive, like still images. The pictures do not reflect the problems or confusion faced by Grampa and everyone else. This style of portrayal is reminiscent of the misconception that the Japanese often conceal their emotions; in doing so, it invites the reader to try to examine the complex thoughts of the characters hidden behind their expressionless faces.

Those who know what life was like in the past, people who sought new lives in America, can imagine how Grampa felt as he went through those turbulent times; however, the younger generation of readers (i.e., students) who lack sufficient background knowledge could find this work difficult to understand as a realistic story. In an era where people can instantly talk to someone halfway across the world through social networking sites, many may not even know that traveling abroad entailed spending months on a ship.

On the other hand, many readers may have experienced "culture shock" when moving to a city, either because of their grandparents, parents, or their own rural roots. In this way, we can understand the feelings that Say holds dear. Reading this story will make you realize that personal identity is not a simple thing; rather, it is complex and rich. Readers will definitely want to look back and learn more about the stories of the people who influenced them such as their grandparents.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of "immigrants from abroad (i.e., people with different cultural backgrounds) not only in cities, but also in the rural areas of Japan. I hope this book will spark your interest in them.

Notes

A portion of this text is a substantially revised version of the draft frontispiece, "Seeking Inspirational Picture Books" [Ehon o Sagashini] [8] from *English Teachers' Magazine*, November 2019 (Vol. 68, No.9), TAISHUKAN Publishing Co., Ltd.

(Text: Yuka Kusanagi)