

5.5 Grammar

Past Simple: was/were, could

I can talk about the past with the verbs be and can.

- 1 In pairs, look at the photo in text A and answer the questions. Then read text A and check.
- Who is the person in the photo?
 - What do you know about him?
 - What is he most famous for?

THE STARS AND SCHOOL

A **JOHNNY DEPP** is a famous film star now, but what was he like at school? Was he a good student? School **wasn't** a good experience for Johnny. The problem was that he **was** at over twenty different schools and often the students **weren't** very friendly. So school was often a lonely place for Johnny. His two favourite things **were** music and acting. He **couldn't** play the piano, but he **could** play the guitar. He could also sing very well and he was in a band called The Kids. His dream was to be a musician after school. His band was successful, but they **couldn't** get a record deal. Luckily, Johnny was also a great actor.



B **KRISTEN STEWART** is a famous actress. But when she **was** / **were** younger, things **wasn't** / **weren't** always easy. She **wasn't** / **weren't** happy at high school because she **couldn't** / **couldn't** talk to other kids her age. They **was** / **were** interested in different things and so they **wasn't** / **weren't** very friendly to her. They **were** / **weren't** often jealous because Kristen **couldn't** / **couldn't** act really well.



C **ALBERT EINSTEIN** was a very famous scientist. From an early age, he **was** good at Maths and Science and he **could** play the violin well. But at school, he **wasn't** good at all subjects. History and Geography **were** easy for him and he **was** good at foreign languages. But Einstein **wasn't** a genius and scientists are still studying his brain to help them understand about intelligence.



- 2 Read GRAMMAR FOCUS 1 and 2 and complete the examples with the verbs in blue in text A. Then find more examples in the text.

GRAMMAR FOCUS 1

Past Simple: be

- + I/He/She **was** a good student.
You/We/They **were** good students.
- I/He/She **wasn't** a good student.
You/We/They **weren't** good students.
- ? **Was** I/he/she a good student?
Yes, I/he/she **was**. / No, I/he/she **wasn't**.
Were you/we/they good students?
Yes, you/we/they **were**. / No, you/we/they **weren't**.
What **was** he good at?
What **were** they good at?

Note:

- You also use **was/wasn't** with **it**: *It was lonely for him.*
- wasn't** = was not, **weren't** = were not

GRAMMAR FOCUS 2

Past Simple: can

- + He **could** play the guitar.
- He **couldn't** play the piano.
- ? **Could** he play the piano?

Note:

- Could** is the same for all persons (I, you, he, she, it, we, they).
- couldn't** = could not

- 3 Read text A again and correct the sentences.

- School was fun for Johnny.
School wasn't fun for Johnny. It wasn't a good experience.
- The other students were always nice.
- Johnny was always happy.
- Johnny's favourite things were Maths and History.
- Johnny couldn't sing well.
- The band wasn't very successful.

- 4 **CD+2.38 MP3-94** Read text B and choose the correct options. Then listen and check.

- 5 **CD+2.39 MP3-95** In pairs, complete text C with **was/wasn't, were/weren't** or **could/couldn't**. Then listen and check.

- 6 Complete the questions with **was, were** or **could**. Then ask and answer in pairs. Write down the answers.

When you were at primary school:

- were** the other students friendly?
- was** your teacher nice?
- could** you speak English?
- were** you good at Science?
- could** you understand everything?
- were** you quiet or noisy?
- was** school fun?
- could** you good at sports?

- 7 Tell the class about your partner.

When Ricardo was at primary school, the other students were friendly. His teacher was ...