NEWS LESSON

The Grandmother You Book by the Hour



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What practical skill would you like an older person to teach you?
2. Can someone feel like family without being related?
3. Would you ask for advice from someone with a very different life?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**variety**	☐	A	a number of different things or experiences
2	**guidance**	☐	B	help and advice about what to do
3	**demanding**	☐	C	silly, or showing poor judgement
4	**awkward**	☐	D	tests whether an idea is true or fair
5	**accidental**	☐	E	difficult, or making you feel uncomfortable
6	**foolish**	☐	F	kept apart, not together
7	**separated**	☐	G	needing a lot of time or effort
8	**challenges**	☐	H	happening by chance, not planned

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

OK! Obaachan has matched customers with experienced older women since 2011. For the workers it can mean income, variety and a reason to leave the house.

1 Japan has an unusual answer to the problem of needing a calm, experienced person nearby: hire a grandmother. Through a service called OK! Obaachan, customers can arrange for an older woman to visit them, help with everyday tasks or pass on practical knowledge. The idea sounds like a comedy sketch, but the business has been running since 2011.

2 The company behind the service, Client Partners, provides a wide range of personal assistance. Workers may cook, sort out belongings, offer guidance or accompany somebody on an outing. Some customers are looking for companionship, while others simply need a hand from someone patient and experienced who will not make them feel foolish. The women are paid professionals, and the company does not pretend they are substitutes for a customer's relatives.

3 In a 2025 Australian news interview, worker Taeko Kaji described enjoying the variety the job brings. For older people, employment of this kind can mean extra income as well as a sense of purpose. Work of this sort keeps people moving, out of the house and in regular contact with others, which matters when the alternative is a long and very quiet day. It also challenges the assumption that retirement means stepping away from useful work.

4 The service has attracted attention partly because of Japan's ageing population and growing concerns about social isolation. Families may be separated by distance, demanding work schedules or personal circumstances, and keeping in touch takes effort that busy people do not always have. Meanwhile, younger adults rarely get the chance to spend meaningful time with anyone several decades older than themselves.

5 Critics might argue that companionship should never be turned into a product. There is an uncomfortable difference between being listened to by someone who chooses to be there and someone whose time is being paid for by the hour. Yet plenty of valuable relationships already involve professional boundaries, including those with teachers, counsellors and care workers, and few people regard those as fake. The discomfort many of us feel may say rather more about our expectations of friendship than about the service itself.

6 Perhaps the service is best understood not as friendship for sale but as a practical way of connecting people whose needs happen to fit together. Its success raises an awkward question for every society: if contact between the generations is genuinely valuable, why do we so often leave it to chance? Schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods rarely bring young and old together on purpose, so whatever contact does happen tends to be accidental.

Sources: ABC Australia. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer says professional relationships are always fake. T F NG
2. Taeko Kaji liked the variety in her work. T F NG
3. The service has expanded outside Japan. T F NG
4. The company is clear that the workers are not family substitutes. T F NG
5. The writer thinks schools and workplaces usually bring young and old together on purpose. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

assumption **boundaries** **employment** **isolation** **outing** **reassurance** **retirement** **substitutes**

1. Many people hold the _____ that older workers cannot learn new skills.
2. Living alone, far from family, can lead to loneliness and social _____ .
3. After years of full-time _____ , she wanted something less stressful.
4. Teachers and doctors keep clear professional _____ with the people they help.
5. Friends and neighbours are rarely _____ for trained care workers.
6. At 65, many people look forward to _____ and more free time.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. The business _____ since 2011, and customers still book it. (RUN)
2. If families lived closer together, they _____ in touch more easily. (KEEP)
3. The company _____ that its workers can replace a family. (NOT PRETEND)
4. The grandmothers _____ by the hour, not by the day. (BOOK)
5. Customers _____ that the visit is a paid job. (SHOULD / UNDERSTAND)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many phrasal verbs have a meaning you cannot guess from the parts. Learn the whole verb, and notice whether it takes an object.

come	cut	fall	hold	look	set	take

1. Researchers will _____ into why so many older people live alone.
2. Two friends decided to _____ up a service like this in their own city.
3. While travelling, you may _____ across all kinds of people.
4. Many older people _____ on part-time work after they retire.
5. He decided to _____ down his working hours to spend more time with family.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What could make paid help feel warm without pretending it was family?
2. Which kinds of experience become more valuable with age?
3. What could different generations enjoy doing together?

9 Role-play: should we hire a grandmother?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the daughter

Your father lives alone and you live far away. You want to book a paid visitor from a service like OK! Obaachan for two hours a week. Explain why it could help, listen to his worries and try to agree a plan.

Student B · the father

You're proud and independent. You think paid company is strange, and you'd rather see your family. Say what worries you. You can say no, or agree to try it if the conditions are right.

Useful phrases

I'm worried you're on your own too much.

It's only a trial, so we could try it once.

I don't want a stranger in my house.

She'd help with the cooking, and she'd be good company.

I'd rather see you than pay someone.

Let's try it for a month and see how it goes.

Afterwards, tell the class: did the father agree, and what changed his mind?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 B · 3 G · 4 E · 5 H · 6 C · 7 F · 8 D

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 assumption · 2 isolation · 3 employment · 4 boundaries · 5 substitutes · 6 retirement

6 Verb forms

1 has been running or has run · 2 would keep · 3 does not pretend or doesn't pretend · 4 are booked · 5 should understand

7 Language focus

1 look · 2 set · 3 come · 4 take · 5 cut

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