All those women having jobs: hard to imagine, now, but thousands of them had jobs, millions. It was considered the normal thing. Now it's like remembering the paper money, when they still had that. My mother kept some of it, pasted into her scrapbook along with the early photos. It was obsolete by then, you couldn't buy anything with it. Pieces of paper, thickish[1], greasy to the touch, green-coloured, with pictures on each side, some old man in a wig[2] and on the other side a pyramid with an eye above it. It said In God We Trust. My mother said people used to have signs beside their cash registers, for a joke: In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash. That would be blasphemy now.

You had to take those pieces of paper with you when you went shopping, though by the time I was nine or ten most people used plastic cards. Not for the groceries though, that came later. It seems so primitive, totemistic even, like cowrie shells[3]. I must have used that kind of money myself, a little, before everything went on the Compubank.

I guess that's how they were able to do it, in the way they did, all at once, without anyone knowing beforehand. If there had still been portable money, it would have been more difficult.

It was after the catastrophe, when they shot the President and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic fanatics, at the time.

[1] *épais*
[2] *perruque*
[3] shiny shells of sea snails

Keep calm, they said on television. Everything is under control.

I was stunned[4]. Everyone was, I know that. It was hard to believe. The entire government, gone like that. How did they get in, how did it happen?

That was when they suspended the Constitution. They said it would be temporary. There wasn't even any rioting[5] in the streets. People stayed home at night, watching television, looking for some direction. There wasn't even an enemy you could put your finger on.

Look out, said Moira to me, over the phone. Here it comes.

Here what comes? I said.

You wait, she said. They've been building up to this. It's you and me up against the wall, baby. She was quoting an expression of my mother's, but she wasn't intending to be funny.

Things continued in that state of suspended animation for weeks, although some things did happen. Newspapers were censored and some were closed down, for security reasons they said. The roadblocks began to appear, and Identipasses. Everyone approved of that, since it was obvious you couldn't be too careful. They said that new elections would be held, but that it would take some time to prepare for them. The thing to do, they said, was to continue on as usual.

Margaret Atwood

The Handmaid's Tale, 1985

[4] shocked
[5] *émeute*

LIVEWORKSHEETS

A. Read the text.
- Highlight in yellow the elements that used to be part of a normal world.
- Highlight in green the elements that are the norm now.

B. Identify the turning point between "then" and "now". Highlight in pink in the text.

C. Tick the events that made mass control easier.
- ☐ the abolition of the use of dollar bills
- ☐ the use of credit cards
- ☐ the freedom of speech
- ☐ ending television news
- ☐ the control of the media
- ☐ limiting people's movements

D. Write a short chronology of events.
E. Identify what part of the population was targeted by those changes. How do you know?
F. Pick out the elements showing that the country is now governed by religious laws.
G. Sum up the story orally. Write keywords first to help you.

LIVEWORKSHEETS