



The Big Wave

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Long ago in Japan, there was a landowner whose family had owned an estate on a hillside above a prosperous fishing village for hundreds of years. He was old and his ten years old grandson lived with him. One day the landlord looked down at the village and then out to sea. The tide had gone out much further than it had ever done before, on the sea a huge wave was forming. Everything seemed still, as if frozen. The old landlord realised that this was 'The Big Wave' that his father and grandfather had told him about.

There was no time to waste. He immediately sent his grandson to bring two flaming brands from the fire and the pair set light to the rice in front of the house and then to the fields on the right and the left. It was time for the rice harvest, and the villagers would have come to very next morning to his fields to cut the rice.

The watchman down in the village saw the flames and rang the big gong at the temple. As soon as they saw the flames, everyone knew what to do and in no time young and old were racing up the slope carrying water in anything they could grab. The landlord smiled, not a soul was left in the village by the time the wave struck with the sound of thunder and swept away everything, boats, houses, the temple and all of the trees.

Only when the villagers turn to look down did they realise what their good landlord had done for them, setting his own rice on fire to get them away from the village as soon as possible. Some of the rice was saved and until they could rebuild the village they stayed on their landlord estate. So grateful were they that many years later, when the old man died, the villagers built a shrine in his memory. And the story is still told of how he remembered what his father and grandfather had told about 'The Big Wave' and how he saved four hundred people by sacrificing his rice fields.

Suggested activities

If you want to give the pupils something visual to help them focus on the story, you can print a copy of Hokusai's 'The Great Wave'.

Sound picture:

A sound picture is a retelling of the story (or part of it) using only sound. With voice, body and a few percussions you can make a sound picture of this tale. Follow this pattern:

Stillness
Fire noises
The watchman bangs the gong
The scurry in the village
The race towards the fire
The Big Wave rolls in
The destruction of the village

I went to the village and I saw:

You can also play a sound/word version of 'I went to Paris and I saw':

Arrange the children in a circle. Someone starts by saying
'I went to the village and I saw/smelled/heard/did...'

Then they have to mention something that people in the villages could have seen/smelled/heard/done when the alarm was raised

E.g. I went to the village and I heard a gong ringing.

The second person has to repeat and then add something

E.g. I went to the village and I heard a bell ringing and I saw the fire roaring.

The next person continues

E.g. I went to the village and I heard a bell ringing and I saw the fire roaring and I felt scared.

Every child adds something until you are re-telling the story from the point of view of the inhabitants of the village.