

The Wave: A Japanese Folktale  
Grade Level **K-2**

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Purpose:

This traditional folktale introduces young children to the culture of Japan and emphasizes the message of “go to high ground” after feeling an earthquake in a non-threatening way. It provides good discussion questions for young learners, to make observations about aspects of the story and draw conclusions from them. The outcome of this story reinforces the importance of recognizing the natural warning sign of an impending tsunami and taking action.

Time: Part A (movie and discussion questions) one 30 to 40 minute session

Educational Standards:

SS1, SS.1.4, SS2.2, SS2.5, SS6, 2-ESS1-1, 2-ESS2-1, ESS3.B,  
R1.2.1, W.2.8,

Materials: The Wave movie (9 minutes) <https://youtu.be/lvbfNfnX6So>

Procedure:

For the teacher: an overview of the movie, *The Wave A Japanese Folktale*. *This Japanese folktale tells the story of Ojiisan, Tada and a huge wave. One day, Ojiisan, standing on a hill overlooking his village, feels a strong earthquake. He knows that earthquakes can cause a tsunami. He sets fire to the village rice fields. Tada didn't know what to think. Did his grandfather go mad? Enraged, the villagers race up the hill to save the rice. Suddenly, the old man points to the sea and cries, "Look." As a huge wave engulfs their village, the people realize that Ojiisan burned the rice to save their lives.*

**A. Movie!** Tell students they are going to watch and listen to a story from Japan, from long ago. Ask students to watch listen carefully during the story as you are going to have a discussion afterwards on the people in the story and the events that take place.

Possible discussion questions:

1. Who is Ojiisan? (grandfather)
2. Who is Tada? (grandson)
3. Where is the story set? (in a small village in Japan)
4. How long ago did the story in this video happen?

Look for clues in the video. Did the people have cars? What kind of clothes are they wearing? (probably a long time ago – people are wearing traditional clothing, there is nothing modern in the video)

5. What time of year did this earthquake and tsunami occur? Ask students if there are clues in the video? (probably in the late fall after the rice harvest)

6. Why did Ojiisan set the rice on fire? (to draw people up the hill)

7. Why was Tada upset when Ojiisan set the rice on fire? (because the rice is very important – it is the main food for the people in the winter)

8. How did Ojiisan know that a tsunami might follow the earthquake? (he knew that an earthquake that shakes a long time can cause a tsunami)

9. Why was Ojiisan the only one in his village to know about tsunamis? (he was very old and may have had a memory of other earthquakes and tsunamis, or may have known more about the oral traditions of people who lived there long ago)

10. Would you consider Ojiisan a good citizen for warning the people of the tsunami? (yes, he could be considered a hero for his selfless actions)

11. How did Ojiisan's actions make a difference in the lives of the people in the village in Japan? (he saved their lives from the tsunami by drawing them up the hill to his burning rice fields)

12. What are the signs that a tsunami might be coming? (in this story there are two – earthquake that shakes a long time and water retreating.)

*Tell students: Other signs are loud noise or roar coming from the ocean or a sudden change in the character of the ocean like quickly becoming frothy)*

13. What happened when the water began retreating? (people went out to gather shells)

13. About how much time passes between feeling the earthquake and the first tsunami wave? (only enough time for Ojiisan to set the rice on fire – perhaps about 10 minutes.)

*Tell students: There is no easy rule about how much time will pass between feeling an earthquake and the first tsunami surges. It could be as short as a few minutes or as long as an hour depending on where the earthquake is. We tell people to begin moving to a safe area as soon as the shaking lessens enough to safely walk.*

14. In the story, they put up a bell to help warn of a tsunami in a future earthquake. Do you think this is a good idea? (the bell is a good reminder that tsunamis can occur and is an important educational tool. The combination of feeling the ground

shaking and hearing the bell will help get people to evacuate. But people shouldn't just rely on the bell – if people feel an earthquake, they should evacuate.)

15. If an earthquake happened today in Japan, how do you think people would know if a tsunami was coming? (Feeling the shaking is still the best warning for people close to the epicenter, but there is now an official warning system that tells people to evacuate if they are too far away to feel the shaking)

Extension Activities:

1. Here is a somewhat similar story from the native peoples of Washington State

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAiwcZXfUGw>

2. Review this illustrated story and compare it to the Wave movie in a discussion with students

[http://www.hiroi.iii.u-tokyo.ac.jp/index-genzai\\_no\\_sigoto-tunami\\_joho-link-inamuranohi02.pdf](http://www.hiroi.iii.u-tokyo.ac.jp/index-genzai_no_sigoto-tunami_joho-link-inamuranohi02.pdf)

3. For the teacher to read on tsunamis:

[http://www2.humboldt.edu/shakyground/info/why\\_care/northern\\_california\\_coast/](http://www2.humboldt.edu/shakyground/info/why_care/northern_california_coast/)

A DVD of this video is available from the Phoenix Learning Group:

<https://phoenixlearninggroup.com/product/wave-japanese-folktale/>