

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Big Wave

by  
Pearl S. Buck

### Book Information

Pearl S. Buck, The Big Wave

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57 Pages

Book Level: 5.2

Interest Level: MG

A Japanese boy learns the joy of living after surviving a tidal wave that tragically destroys his family and his village.

**Award:** Misc./Other

**Topics:** Adventure, Survival; Countries/Regions, Japan; Disasters, Floods; Family Life, Growing Up; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Just Connect: Relationships

### Main Characters

Father Uchiyama the philosophical and brave father of Kino, who helps both Jiya and Kino appreciate life despite its dangers

Jiya the son of a fisherman who loses his family to the big wave; he grows up with Kino's family but eventually returns to the beach and makes Setsu his wife

Jiya's father the kind fisherman who teaches Jiya to fear the ocean and commands Jiya to climb up the mountainside to safety while the rest of the family awaits their fate on the beach

Kino Uchiyama the son of a farmer; he wants his friend Jiya to be his brother after Jiya becomes an orphan

Mother Uchiyama Kino's gentle mother, who welcomes Jiya as her son after the big wave destroys the village

Old Gentleman a wealthy scholar who gives the villagers shelter in his castle when the big wave comes; he is annoyed when Jiya rejects his offer to adopt him

Setsu Uchiyama Kino's mischievous little sister, who wins the heart of Jiya

### Vocabulary

**commotion** disturbance

**exquisite** excellent in quality

**fathom** six feet, a measurement often used to determine the depth of the sea

**musings** thoughtful

**refuge** safe place

**zenith** the highest point, often used to describe the point of the sky that is directly overhead

### Synopsis

On the coast of Japan, Kino, a farmer's son, often plays in the ocean with Jiya, a fisherman's son. One day Jiya's father scolds Jiya for staying out late because he is afraid of the ocean's anger. When Kino asks his father about this, Kino's father explains the dangers of nature on both land and sea. Kino is worried, but his father tells him that danger makes people appreciate life more.

One day, Kino notices that the volcano is burning. When a bell rings the next day, his father says that the Old Gentleman, a local wealthy scholar, wants the people to take shelter in his castle. Kino's father says that many fisherfolk will insist on staying with their boats and families. Kino signals for Jiya to climb the mountain to him.

Down below, Jiya is already climbing, weeping because his father forced him to leave his family on the beach. Soon after Jiya reaches Kino, Kino's father has to restrain Jiya when an enormous wave obliterates the fishing village, killing all its inhabitants. Jiya faints and Kino's father carries Jiya to bed. While Kino weeps, his sister Setsu enters and asks about Jiya. Kino's father shushes her.

Later, Kino's father advises Kino to let Jiya sleep and cry as much as he wants. He tells Kino that they are now Jiya's family, but Jiya will be sad for a long time until he learns to appreciate life again. When Jiya awakens, he sees that the village is gone. Some days later while Jiya sleeps, the Old Gentleman visits. He wants to make Jiya his son,

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and Kino's father promises to send Jiya to the castle to let Jiya make his own choice. Kino worries that Jiya may leave him.

The next day, Kino accompanies Jiya to the castle. When the Old Gentleman asks if Jiya will be his son, Jiya chooses to stay with Kino's family. Jiya suggests that the Old Gentleman adopt one of the other orphans, but the Old Gentleman says he wants only Jiya for his son, even though he will provide for the other orphans. Kino's family welcomes Jiya when the two boys return to the farm.

Years pass, and one day Jiya sees fisherfolk building a house on the beach. Jiya and Kino go to speak with them. Suddenly, the Old Gentleman arrives and scolds the people for building there. He reminds them that he has spent his life saving people from the big wave and claims he will not do it anymore. Jiya tells the Old Gentleman that the fisherfolk must return to their homes on the beach because it is where they were born and where they belong. He says that the Old Gentleman will save the people again because he is so good. The Old Gentleman again regrets that Jiya would not be his son.

After this, Jiya becomes restless. When Kino's father inquires, Jiya tells him he wants a fishing boat. Kino's father promises to pay Jiya wages for his labor. When Jiya has enough money, he asks Kino if Setsu would be afraid to live on the beach. Kino is puzzled by Jiya's interest in his silly sister, but Jiya tells him that Setsu made him forget the big wave. Later, Kino's father explains that while Setsu annoys Kino, she makes Jiya happy.

In summer, Jiya and Setsu marry and go to their new house on the beach. When Kino asks Jiya what he will do if the big wave returns, Jiya shows him a window facing the ocean. He tells Kino that he will be ready to face the big wave if it returns.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

How does Kino feel when he finds out Jiya's family considers the sea their enemy?

*Kino is at first confused and shocked that Jiya thinks the beautiful ocean is an enemy. Kino feels that Jiya is ungrateful since the sea provides a living for his family. However, after Kino sees that Jiya's father is also afraid of the sea, Kino realizes that the fear is justified.*

### Literary Analysis

What kind of person does Jiya become as an adult?

*Jiya is very quiet and thoughtful, but he appreciates people who make him laugh. He wants to enjoy life, so he marries a woman who is lively and playful. He also opens his house to the ocean so that he can appreciate its beauty and face it bravely if the big wave comes again. He is serious about honoring the memory of his father, so he chooses to be a fisherman. Jiya exhibits insightfulness and diplomacy when he says that the Old Gentleman will always help the villagers because he is so good.*

### Inferential Comprehension

What are the most likely reasons the Old Gentleman wants a son?

*First, the Old Gentleman lives a rather lonely life in the castle. He has no family and mainly keeps to himself. Second, the Old Gentleman has a great deal of wealth and probably wants someone to inherit this wealth. Finally, the Old Gentleman considers himself guardian of the community. Adopting Jiya probably appeals to the Old Gentleman because Jiya's intelligence and goodness indicate a capacity to carry on the Old Gentleman's role as guardian.*

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### Constructing Meaning

How does the Old Gentleman try to persuade Jiya to be his son?

*He emphasizes that Kino's family is poor, but he is wealthy; Jiya will have much more if he chooses to live with him. He also tells Jiya that Kino can visit him and Jiya will be allowed to give the family some money. Finally, he says that he wants Jiya as his son because he is handsome and bright.*

### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The tsunami, or big wave, as it is called in Japan, affects the lives of all the characters in this story. Have the students read about tsunamis to learn more about their causes, their frequency, and their potential for damage. Also, have the students look at some Japanese paintings of tsunamis and then discuss how these paintings reflect both the beauty of the ocean and the threat of the big wave as shown in both this story and their extended reading.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** Kino's father mentions that the gods sometimes test people to see if they can survive dangerous situations. Have the students read about Shinto and write a short summary explaining how the beliefs of Shinto affect Japanese society.

**Comparing and Contrasting** Jiya changes greatly as a result of the big wave. Have students review the story carefully and identify textual evidence that shows the change that takes place in Jiya. Have them compile this information in a chart labeled "Before" and "After."

**Identifying Persuasive Language** Jiya worries that Setsu fears living on the beach. Have the students write a dialogue that depicts what Jiya may have said to Setsu to persuade her to be his wife and to live on the beach with him.