

The Big Wave

by Pearl S. Buck

Classroom Favorites

Teacher's Guide by Denise K. Schnitzer

A Perma-Bound Production

Synopsis

Kino and Jiya are best friends who live in Japan. Kino lives in the hills overlooking the sea with his family of farmers. Jiya lives in a village by the ocean with his family who make their living by fishing. Kino and Jiya often play together. They swim out to a privately owned island and explore there. Kino is puzzled by the fact that none of the people in the fishing village have windows in their houses that look out on the sea. Jiya explains to him that the sea is not their friend. This, too, puzzles Kino until one day a tidal wave comes and destroys the fishing village and most of its inhabitants. A few seek refuge in the castle of the Old Gentleman who lives high above the sea.

Jiya is saved from the devastation of the tidal wave by going to Kino's house. He witnesses the fury and destruction of the wave from this vantage point. His family is killed and his home is destroyed. Jiya falls unconscious after witnessing this event. Kino's family adopts Jiya as a son, nursing him back to physical and psychological health. Jiya remains with Kino's family and learns farming from Kino's father. The boys grow up together and Jiya's wounds from the loss of his family are healed although he never forgets them or the wave.

One day, years later, Jiya and Kino notice that people are beginning to build new homes where the ones destroyed by the big wave had once stood. These people are children of the families who had survived the wave. They realize that the wave may come again but that they must continue what their parents before them had begun. Jiya, too, decides to go back to the fishing village and build a home on the site of his parents' home. In doing so, Jiya lives out the philosophy seen throughout the book "life is stronger than death."

Biographical Sketch

Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973) has written many distinguished books for children and adults. She was born in West Virginia in 1892, the daughter of missionary parents. She lived in the United States only five months before her parents were sent to China. She did not return to the United States until she was 17 years old. She learned to speak Chinese before English and was educated until age 17 in China. She then returned to the United States to further her education. Many of the books tell about incidents and life in China and Japan.

Her books reflect an unusual awareness of Oriental tradition and culture. She has won such distinguished awards as the Child Study Association's Children's Book Awards for *The Big Wave*, the Pulitzer Prize for *The Good Earth* and the Nobel Prize for literature. Other books by this author include *The Chinese Children Next*

Door, The Water-Buffalo Children, The Dragon Fish, and The Big Fight. (Information drawn from *Contemporary Authors*)

Objectives

1. To demonstrate a knowledge of Japanese culture, traditions and customs
2. To use context clues to figure out unknown words
3. To understand the importance setting plays in a novel
4. To evaluate the events and characters in a novel in order to make judgments about characterization in relationship to the plot
5. To demonstrate a knowledge of the sequence of events in the novel
6. To analyze the two central characters' actions and motives in relation to the plot and other characters

Vocabulary Study

Below are words that have particular meaning in the book. Explain the meaning that each has. Page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the word is taken.

1. knoll (p. 5)
(a small, round hill)
2. bamboo (p. 5)
(a type of woody grass having a hollow stem; often used for building, utensils and food)
3. fathomless (p. 7)
(unable to be measured)
4. phosphorescent (p. 8)
(a glowing caused by the absorption of radiation that continues after the radiation has stopped)
5. ruddy (p. 8)
(having a reddish color)
6. terraces (p. 13)
(a level, usually narrow, plain with a steep front bordering a river or the sea; used for farming difficult, hilly areas)

7. zenith (p. 39)
(the highest point)
8. musing (p. 48)
(in deep thought)

Pre-reading Discussion Questions

1. What do you think "the big wave" is in the title of this book?
(Since this is an "open question," you may accept any answer the student can justify. The idea is to create discussion and elicit background knowledge concerning the title.)
2. By looking at the cover, where do you think this book takes place? Why do you think so?
(Clues that this story takes place in Japan or another far eastern country include the ethnicity of the characters, types of dress, and the oriental symbol. Some students may recognize the artistic style.)
3. What do you know about Japan and its customs? Make a list of as many words as you can.
(Accept any answers students can justify. As students brainstorm a list of words about Japan, record them for future reference.)
4. Where is Japan located? What surrounds it? Why would this be important to this book?
(Japan is an island chain located in the western Pacific Ocean off the eastern coast of Asia. It is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. Since this book is about a wave, it is important that the novel takes place close to water.)

Discussion Questions

Pages 3-24

1. Where does Kino live? How does he feel about this place?
(Kino lives on a farm on the side of a mountain in Japan. He likes living there because he has a good vantage point to see the ocean and surrounding village.)
2. Where does Jiya live? How does he feel about this place?
(Jiya lives in a village next to the ocean. He feels that the sea is his enemy.)
3. Why do you think the people in the village did not like the sea?
(Answers may vary. The answer should center around the fact that the sea can be an enemy as well as a friend because the sea can cause destruction with flooding, tidal waves, etc.)
4. How can the sea be both a friend and an enemy?
(The sea can be both a friend and an enemy because it gives people a livelihood and food (friend) and it can cause destruction with its powerful forces (enemy).)
5. What does it mean that "the ocean is not angry"? (page 6)
(*"The ocean is not angry"* means that the ocean is calm and providing food and work for the people in the fishing village.)
6. Who is the Old Gentleman? Describe the place in which he lives.
(The Old Gentleman is a wealthy man who lives in a castle on an island. The castle is lovely, clean and surrounded by pine trees and bamboos.)
7. Why was Jiya's father angry that the boys were late coming home from the island?
(Jiya's father was angry because the sea was rough or "angry" and he understood the fury of the sea and how it could harm people.)
8. Was Kino's father afraid of the sea? Why or why not?
(Kino's father was not afraid of the sea because he did not have experience with the anger of the sea. He did understand that the sea could be harmful, but he accepted that as part of the ongoing process of life.)
9. Why was Kino afraid of the land?
(Kino was afraid of the land because he had seen a volcano and the smoke and trembling earth caused by the volcano left a lasting impression on Kino.)
10. What does Kino's father mean when he says, "We must accept this fact, but without fear." (page 12)
(Answers will vary, but should be concerned with the idea that life should be lived to the fullest despite all the threats and destruction that are possible. All humans must eventually die, but they should not let this fact keep them from enjoying and living life to its fullest.)
11. How did Kino feel about the fishing trip with Jiya and his father?
(Kino was excited about his fishing trip because it was a novelty for him.)
12. Jiya's father says, "We need both farmers and fishermen." What does he mean by this?
(*"We need both farmers and fishermen"* means that both groups of workers are important for people's survival in life. The farmers provide crops and food of one type while the fishermen provide food from the sea.)
13. What caused "the big wave"?
(The big wave was caused by the volcano's eruption or by the land.)
14. What did the red flag at the castle mean?
(The red flag at the castle was a signal to the people to ready themselves for a disaster (in this case, the wave).)
15. What did the ringing of the bell mean?
(The ringing of the bell signals the Old Gentleman's invitation to all of the people in the fishing village to come to his castle for shelter and protection from the "big wave.")
16. How did the Old Gentleman try to help the people of the village?
(He offered shelter, protection and refuge to any of the villagers who desired to leave their homes and come to his castle.)
17. What did Jiya do when the big wave came?
(He left his village home as his father instructed. However,

instead of going to the Old Gentleman's Castle, he went to Kino's farm.)

18. What happened to the fishing village?
(The fishing village was totally destroyed by the wave.)
19. How did Jiya react to the destruction of the village?
(Jiya fainted at the sight of the wave's destruction.)
20. How were Kino's family going to help Jiya?
(They were going to accept him as another son of the family and make their home, his home.)

Pages 24-30

1. How did Kino's father say Jiya would act when he woke up? Why?
(Kino's father said that Jiya would be sad, quiet and would often cry when he first awoke, but that he would eventually be happy again.)
2. How did Kino's father explain the storm and wave?
(He explained that the wave came and then went away. He further explained that although the wave caused destruction, the sea was now calm and the sky was blue. It was not the ocean nor the sky that caused the wave. The destruction was caused by the wave so that life would be even more precious to those who survived.)
3. How did Kino's family explain to Jiya about what had happened to his family?
(They told Jiya that they would now be his mother and father and the children would be his brother and sister.)
4. How did Jiya react to his family's death and the destruction of his home?
(He reacted with silence as if he were asleep inside although his eyes were open. His mind did not allow itself to fully think about or comprehend what had happened.)

Pages 30-46

1. How did Kino feel about the sea now?
(He was afraid of the sea.)
2. How did Kino's father explain death to him?
(He explained that death makes people brave and strong. It is important to live a brave life and to love living. Death is like a great gateway and people who understand and accept death are not afraid of it.)
3. How did Kino's father explain fear to him?
(Fear is centered around not knowing or lack of information about a subject. We all have a "fear of the unknown.")
4. What did the Old Gentleman want to do for Jiya?
(The Old Gentleman wanted Jiya to come and live at the castle as his son.)
5. Who decided what would happen to Jiya?
(Jiya would make that decision.)

6. What advantages would Jiya have by going to live with the Old Gentleman?
(The advantages that Jiya would have include a beautiful house to live in, fine clothes, a good education and the opportunity to become a great man and an honor to the nation.)
7. What advantages would Jiya have by staying with Kino's family?
(The advantages that Jiya would have by staying with Kino's family include the love of an entire family, a brother and sister, and the opportunity to learn about the land.)
8. Describe the inside of the Old Gentleman's castle.
(The walls were of fine polished wood. The floors were covered with fine woven, padded mats. The house included lots of beautiful rooms where there were flowers, scrolls and pieces of dark polished furniture.)
9. What did Jiya decide to do? Why do you think he decided this?
(Jiya decided to stay with Kino's family. He decided this because he felt that he was no better than any of the other villagers whom the Old Gentleman had not taken in as sons and daughters.)
10. How did Kino feel about Jiya's decision?
(Kino was happy that he made this decision and that Jiya would be his brother.)

Pages 46-57

1. What began to happen at the sea as time passed?
(People began to build homes.)
2. How did Jiya react to the sea as time passed?
(He began to go back to the shore and look for signs of life and activity.)
3. How did Jiya feel about his family as time passed?
(He learned to live with the fact that his family was dead, but he did not forget them. He thought of them daily and remembered their faces, voices and laughter.)
4. How did the Old Gentleman feel about the people building houses by the sea? Why do you think he felt this way?
(He was angry because he felt that the people were stupid to build homes where there was danger of destruction by a "big wave." He felt that he had given his life to saving people from the wave and yet those who chose to build next to the sea did not appreciate his efforts.)
5. Why do you think Jiya decided to return to live by the sea?
(Accept any answer students can justify. Answers may include ideas such as Jiya had the sea "in his blood" or he needed to not fear the thing that had killed his family and this was the way to alleviate that fear.)
6. Why did Jiya put a window in his house to look upon the sea?
(He wants to be able to see the ocean at all times so that he will be prepared if the wave comes again.)

After Reading Discussion Questions

1. Why were the fishermen's houses built with "no windows toward the sea"?
(The fishermen were afraid of the sea and felt that by not being able to see the ocean from their houses, they could perhaps avoid the destruction that could be caused by the sea. It was as if they could avoid having to deal with something by not knowing about it.)
2. Why did Jiya "open his house to the ocean"?
(He refused to be intimidated by the sea. He wished to know everything about it at all times and to be prepared.)
3. What is meant by "Life is stronger than death"?
(Answers will vary, they may include the idea that the desire to live is stronger than the desire to let go and die. Life is precious to all and we fight to hold onto it.)
4. What did you learn about the customs and ways of the Japanese people from this book?
(Accept any answers students can support with facts and ideas from the novel.)
5. What did you learn about how the Japanese people feel about nature from this book?
(The Japanese people are afraid of nature and the destruction it can cause. They hold great respect for nature and are often unwilling to attempt to fight back against nature but accept what it gives.)
6. What was the author trying to explain to the reader in this book?
(Answers will vary, but may include such ideas as the meaning of life and death, the role that nature plays in life and death, and how humans accept and deal with death.)

Student Involvement Activities

1. Writing
 - a. Write a new ending for the novel. Suppose that Jiya remained a farmer rather than going back to live by the sea.
 - b. Write a new ending for the novel. Explain what would happen if Jiya decided to go to live in the castle with the Old Gentleman.
 - c. Write a haiku with the sea as its subject.
2. Research (Science)
 - a. Using the library, find out all you can about tidal waves. Be sure to include such things as what causes them, what are some of the ones that have been recorded, and how destructive they have been.

Research (Social Studies)

 - b. Find out all that you can about Japanese customs. Did you learn of these customs in the novel? Tell about them. Also, tell about the customs that you did not find in the novel.
3. Art
Find out what you can about Japanese art forms. Using paint and parchment, draw a representation of how Kino felt about the sea at the beginning of the novel or at the end of the novel.
4. Music
Find out about Japanese music. Do a reading from *The Big Wave* with Japanese music in the background. Be sure to read with expression.

Vocabulary Test

A. Complete the following puzzle by using the list of vocabulary words from *The Big Wave* to complete each sentence and then to fill in the blanks in the puzzle.

1. ___ T _____
2. ___ H _____
 E
3. ___ B ___
4. ___ I ___
 G

 W
5. ___ A _____
 V
6. ___ E _____

1. I could not see the bottom of the hole, it was _____.
2. The minerals were _____, glowing in the dark room.
3. He used a pole made of _____ to go fishing.
4. Sally had a strange, _____ look on her face as she thought about the test tomorrow.
5. The land was laid out in the wide _____ where many beautiful flowers grew.
6. Thomas had finally reached the _____ of his career when he performed at Carnegie Hall.

B. Complete each sentence below by filling in the word from the list that makes sense in the sentence. Please note that not every word will be used.

1. The moon was at its _____ as I walked home on that lonely, October night.
2. I believed that his knowledge was _____ because he could answer every question I asked.
3. Jerry and I were tired after a day of playing and climbing the _____ behind the house.
4. All of the corn was planted on _____ so that the horses had an easy time with the plowing.
5. His face was _____ after his teacher asked him an embarrassing question.

knoll	phosphorescent	zenith
bamboo	ruddy	musings
fathomless	terraces	

Comprehension Test

Part I: True or False (20 points - 2 points each)

In the space provided, write **True** if the statement is completely true or **False** if any part of the statement is false.

- _____ 1. At the beginning of the novel, Kino loved the sea and was not afraid of it.
- _____ 2. The people in the fishing village were not afraid of the sea because they made a living from it.
- _____ 3. The sea can be both a friend and an enemy.
- _____ 4. The Old Gentleman loved the people in the village.
- _____ 5. Kino was afraid of the land because he had seen a volcano.
- _____ 6. Jiya went to live with the Old Gentleman.
- _____ 7. Jiya went to the Old Gentleman's castle in order to escape the wave.
- _____ 8. Jiya decided to stay with Kino's family rather than to live permanently with the Old Gentleman.
- _____ 9. Jiya's brother survived the wave and became the Old Gentleman's son.
- _____ 10. Jiya put a window in his new house that he built by the sea.

Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points - 2 points each)

Choose the best answer for each question. Write the letter of the answer in the space in front of the question.

- _____ 1. Why did Jiya come to live with Kino's family?
 - (A) He did not like his family any longer.
 - (B) His family moved to the United States.
 - (C) His family was killed by the wave.
 - (D) His family was too poor to feed him.
- _____ 2. Who is Setsu?
 - (A) Kino's mother
 - (B) Kino's sister
 - (C) Jiya's cousin
 - (D) Kino's wife
- _____ 3. Where does Kino live?
 - (A) by the sea
 - (B) by the forest
 - (C) on the desert
 - (D) on a mountainside
- _____ 4. What does the Old Gentleman's house look like?
 - (A) It is a lovely castle.
 - (B) It is a cabin in the woods.
 - (C) It looks like Kino's house.
 - (D) It looks like Jiya's house.
- _____ 5. How did Jiya remember his family?
 - (A) He thought about them every day.
 - (B) He kept pictures of them by his bed.
 - (C) He talked about them with Kino.
 - (D) He visited them every weekend.

- _____ 6. What happened to the fishing village after the wave?
(A) It lost only the church and school to the wave's destruction.
(B) The houses sustained minor damage.
(C) All of the houses in the village were destroyed.
(D) The people in the village followed an old custom and broke out a window in each house.
- _____ 7. What did the red flag at the castle mean?
(A) The enemies of the villagers were coming to attack.
(B) It was the Old Gentleman's signal to be ready for whatever happens.
(C) It meant that winter was coming.
(D) It was a signal for the people that the Old Gentleman has died.
- _____ 8. What words describe the Old Gentleman?
(A) kind and wealthy
(B) mean and stubborn
(C) wealthy and mean
(D) poor and helpful
- _____ 9. Who decided whether or not Jiya would live with the Old Gentleman?
(A) Jiya's father
(B) Kino's father
(C) Setsu
(D) Jiya
- _____ 10. How did Kino feel about having Jiya as a brother?
(A) afraid
(B) satisfied
(C) upset
(D) nervous

Part III: Sequence (10 points - 2 points each)

The events from the story listed below are mixed up. Show the order in which they actually happened by writing a number in the space in front of the event. Number 1 will be the first event and number 5 will be the last event.

- _____ A. The fishing village is destroyed by the wave.
_____ B. Kino goes on a fishing trip with Jiya.
_____ C. The Old Gentleman asks Jiya to be his son.
_____ D. Jiya marries Setsu.
_____ E. The red flag is raised at the castle.

Part IV Essay (40 points - 8 points each)

1. Explain Jiya's feelings about the sea before and after the big wave.
2. Why did Kino feel differently about the sea after the wave than he did before the wave?
3. How did Kino's father feel about death? How does this compare to the way you feel about death?
4. Why do you think that Jiya chose to live with Kino's family rather than with the Old Gentleman? Give details from the novel to support your view.
5. Why did Jiya build his new house with a window on the sea? Do you think this was a good idea? Why or why not?

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Test

A.

1. FATHOMLESS
2. PHOSPHORESCENT
E
3. BAMBOO
4. MUSING
G

W

5. TERRACES
V
6. ZENITH

B.

1. zenith
2. fathomless
3. knoll
4. terraces
5. ruddy

Comprehension Test

Part I: True or False (20 points)

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. True | 6. False |
| 2. False | 7. False |
| 3. True | 8. True |
| 4. True | 9. False |
| 5. True | 10. True |

Part II: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. C |
| 2. B | 7. B |
| 3. D | 8. A |
| 4. A | 9. D |
| 5. A | 10. B |

Part III Sequence (10 points)

- A. 3
- B. 1
- C. 4
- D. 5
- E. 2

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

1. Jiya always believed that the sea was evil even before the big wave destroyed his village. This was because he constantly heard this from his father and the other villagers. After the big wave, Jiya still knew of the evil in the sea and the destruction the sea could cause but he also came to respect the sea for what it could give him. He also knew that he must closely watch the sea and guard against its evil.
2. Kino had never experienced the destruction of the sea before the big wave. Therefore he could not understand why Jiya and the other villagers were afraid of the sea. Before the big wave, Kino only saw the sea as a place for pleasure and adventure. However, after the wave, Kino was afraid of the sea because he now realized the destruction it could cause.
3. Kino's father was not afraid of death. He believed that if people knew about death and were not afraid of it, they were better prepared to face their own deaths as well as the deaths of those they loved. He also believed that death was a gateway to a world that may be better than the one in which he was now living. Accept any reasonable and justifiable answer to the second part of the question.
4. Jiya probably chose to live with Kino's family because they were like his own family. They had the same type of home and existence and Jiya probably felt more comfortable with them than he would have living with the Old Gentleman. Jiya also wanted to be in a family where he would have a mother, father, brother and sister. He could not have this with the Old Gentleman. Finally, Jiya chose to live with Kino's family because he did not like the way the Old Gentleman chose him to be his son but turned others away.
5. Jiya built his new house with a window on the sea so that he could constantly monitor what was happening with the ocean. He wanted to know if there were going to be storms or other big waves so he put a window in his new home. This window would allow him to always have a view of the sea. Accept any justifiable answer to the second part of the question.

TEACHER'S NOTES

TEACHER'S NOTES



Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650

Toll free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169

PERMA-BOUND CANADA • Box 517, Station A • Willowdale, Ontario M2N 5T1

Toll free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-705-876-9703