

Hamaguchi

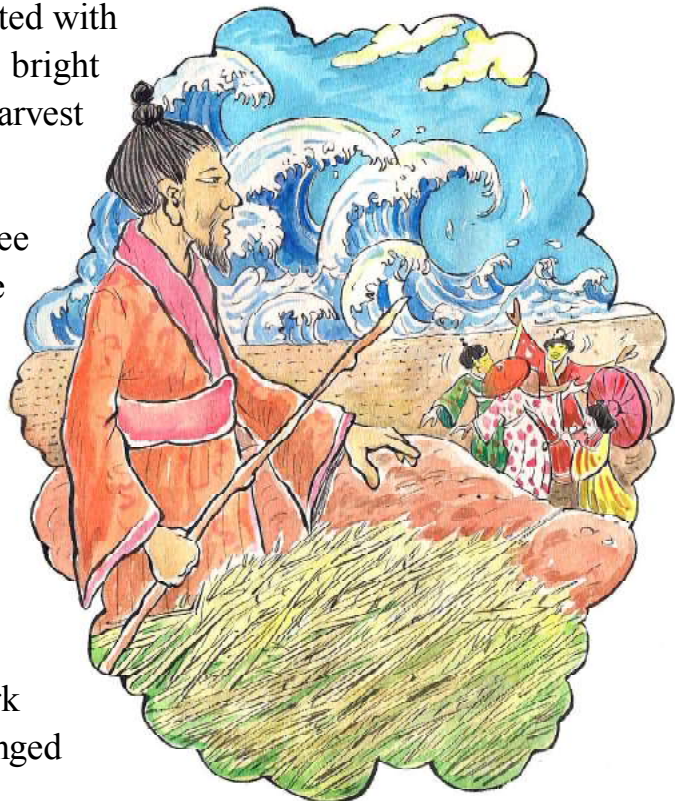
Along the sea coast in Japan, earthquakes are sometimes followed by terrible tidal waves called Tsunami. This wonderful story of sacrifice and alertness tells of such a tidal wave that struck a small village in Japan.

Long ago, an old man whose name was Hamaguchi, lived in a village in Japan. His farmhouse stood on the edge of a plateau, a flat open space high up on the side of a mountain. Behind his house, the mountain stood still higher and full of dense forests. In front, it sloped gently down to the sea. At the foot of the mountain, along the shore, was the little village made up of about a hundred thatched houses. A little apart from them, stood the temple.

One afternoon, Hamaguchi sat with his grandson on the balcony of his house, watching the people of the village below enjoying the harvest festival. The rice crop had been very good and the villagers were very happy. All the shops and houses were gaily decorated with paper lanterns. The villagers wearing bright coloured clothes were about to start the harvest dance.

From his balcony, Hamaguchi could see the vast sea curling over waves in the bright afternoon sun. Suddenly, Hamaguchi felt a slight movement. The house rocked three or four times and then stood still. Hamaguchi had seen many earthquakes in his life and he was not frightened at all until he looked towards the sea.

The sea had become a menacing dark green and very rough. The tide had changed



all of a sudden. Instead of the waves rolling on to the beach, the water was now running away from the beach. The villagers stopped dancing and ran towards the seashore to see more of the peculiar and strange sight! None of them knew what this strange thing meant. But the old man on the mountainside had seen one such sight when he was a little boy. He knew what the sea would do. There was no time to send a message to the village, nor to ring the bell in the temple, and yet he knew that the people on the seashore had to be warned.

“Yone,” he called his grandson, “Light a torch! Quick!”

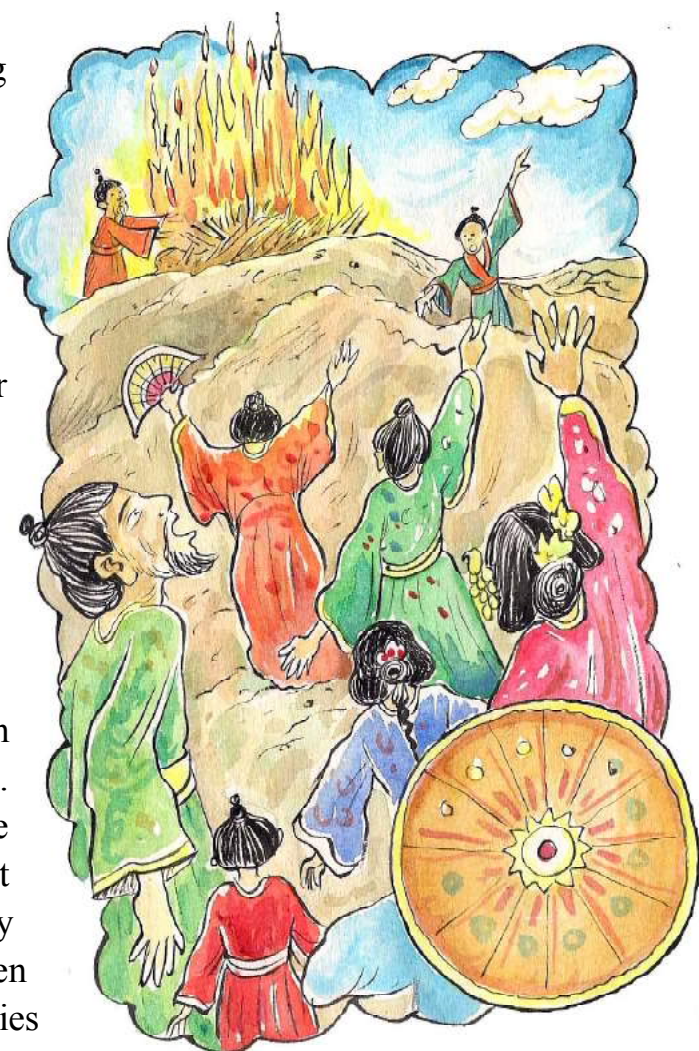
The young boy was puzzled, but he asked no questions. He lit the torch at once. The old man ran to the fields, where hundreds of rice sacks were stacked. He ran from one sack to another, applying the torch to each. The dry sacks caught fire quickly. Soon the flames were shooting upwards and the smoke was rising in great columns to join the clouds in the sky.


Yone ran after his grandfather, shouting and crying. “Grandfather! Why are you setting fire to the rice?”

The old man had no time to answer. He just kept putting one stack after another on fire. The strong wind carried the sparks farther and farther till the whole field was ablaze.

The priest in the temple saw the fire and started ringing the big bell. The people turned from the sea to see why the bell was ringing all of a sudden.

In Japan, it is the duty of everyone in the village to help when there is a fire. No sooner did the people see Hamaguchi’s stacks of rice on fire, that they ran towards his fields like an army of ants. Young men and boys, women and girls, old folks, mothers with babies





on their backs, even little children, they all climbed the mountain to join the race to put out the fire.

But, by the time they reached the plateau, it was already too late. The flames had destroyed the entire harvest and turned everything to ash.

“It is too bad!” the people exclaimed. “How did this happen?”

“Grandfather did it!” cried the young boy. “He lit each stack of rice. He has gone mad!”

The people were amazed. They couldn’t believe what they had heard! They stared at Hamaguchi. “You did this?” they cried. “You set fire to your own fields?”

“Look towards the sea,” said the old man, “and you will know why I did it.”

The people turned and looked. Far out they saw a great wall of water sweeping towards them with great force and speed. It was the returning sea! The people shrieked, but their voices were lost in the great sound, louder than any thunder they had ever heard, as the water struck the side of the mountain. The hills shook and they were drenched in a great burst of foam.

When the cloud of spray had disappeared, the people saw a wild sea roaring over what was once their village. Great angry waves tumbled above the housetops, rolling, roaring and tearing off houses, trees, anything that came in its way. Great big rocks were torn away like they were pebbles being tossed around. Again the wall of water struck, and again but with less force each time. At last, it fell back in its former place.

The people stood speechless like statues on the side of the mountain. The village was gone, the temple was no more and the fields had been torn away. Nothing was left of their homes, but a few straw roofs that floated on the water. However, precious human lives were saved on the mountainside by this timely act.

The people now realized why old Hamaguchi had set fire to the rice. There he stood among them, as poor as any. Full of gratitude, all these people, fell on their knees to thank him.

Lafcadio Hearn

About the author



Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) became a Japanese citizen, taking the name Yakumo Koizumi. In his book '*Gleanings in Buddha*', published in 1897, Hearn has written about Japanese culture, Buddhist practices and many historical events. One of the most remarkable historical events in this book is that in which Hamaguchi Gohei saves all the villagers of his village from a tsunami.

Meanings in context

- tsunami : a series of water waves in sea or ocean caused by the displacement of a large volume water
- tidal wave : very large wave, usually caused by earthquake under the sea
- thatched : roofs made of straw
- menacing : frightening
- plateau : raised ground

Comprehension

I. Answer the following questions.

1. What similarities and differences do you find between the celebration of harvest festival described in the lesson and that celebrated in your village/town?
2. Hamaguchi was frightened by the tsunami. Why? Write down the expressions which convey his fear.
3. Tada said that his grandfather was mad. Comment on Yone's use of the word 'mad' for his grandfather.
4. What, do you think, the bells in the temple conveyed to the villagers?
5. How would you describe Hamaguchi?
6. Describe the effect of the tsunami on the village. You can take the description from the text and also from your imagination.
7. What do you think would have been the efforts that the villagers would have made to bring life back to normal?

II. Group activity

Present a mute show on the story you have read in this lesson.

Vocabulary

tsunami



flood



cyclone



- I. Look at the pictures given above. They show different water related natural disasters. How are tsunami, flood and cyclone different? List other natural disasters.
- II. The first letter of the word, 'tsunami' is silent. Speak these words aloud and circle the silent letter(s).

would, could, dumb, tomb, know, listen, comb, honest, hour bomb, doubt, thumb, often, debt, receipt, limb, column, sign, design, tongue, write, daughter, wrist, knife.

Grammar

Read the following paragraph from the story 'Hamaguchi'.

Long ago, **an** old man whose name was Hamaguchi, lived in **a** village in Japan. His farmhouse stood on **the** edge of **a** plateau, **a** flat open space high up on **the** side of **a** mountain. Behind his house, **the** mountain stood still higher and full of dense forests. In front, it sloped gently down to **the** sea. At **the** foot of **the** mountain, along **the** shore, was **the** little village made up of about **a** hundred thatched houses.

The words in bold are articles.

Fill in the blanks with 'a', 'an', or 'the'.

Once upon a time there lived $\frac{1}{1}$ old man with his five sons. As $\frac{2}{2}$ man was getting old and weak he wanted all his sons to join his business and work together. But $\frac{3}{3}$ sons were perpetually quarrelling among themselves.

Once it so happened that they fought so much among themselves that they cut each other's moustache. When $\frac{4}{4}$ old man failed to settle their disputes by his exhortations, he determined to give them $\frac{5}{5}$ practical illustration of $\frac{6}{6}$ evils of lack of union. He asked each one of his sons to bring $\frac{7}{7}$ stick to him. The man tied all $\frac{8}{8}$ five sticks in to $\frac{9}{9}$ bundle. When he had done so, he placed $\frac{10}{10}$ faggot into the hands of each one of them in succession, and ordered them to break it in to pieces. They tried with all their strength, and were not able to do it.

He next opened $\frac{11}{11}$ faggot, took $\frac{12}{12}$ sticks separately, one by one, and again put them into his sons' hands. The sons could easily break them now.

Writing

Study the following paragraph.

Onam is the most important festival of the state of Kerala. It is a harvest festival. The festival is celebrated to welcome King Mahabali, whose spirit is said to visit Kerala during Onam. Onam is celebrated in the month of August-September. Elaborate feasts, folk songs, elegant dances, energetic games, boat race and floral rangoli mark the celebration of Onam. The feast includes a variety of vegetarian dishes served on a banana leaf. The boats are decorated for the boat race and rowed by hundreds of boatmen who sing while the spectators cheer them.

Let's analyse the paragraph.


As you can see, the paragraph provides answers to the following questions.

Where is Onam celebrated?

Why is Onam celebrated?

When is Onam celebrated?

How is Onam celebrated?



Now write a paragraph on a harvest festival celebrated in your region/area/state. Try to include the features listed above.

Project Work

Work in groups and collect information about various festivals celebrated in your area during the whole year and talk about the significance of each one of them. You may talk to the elders in the family and your neighbourhood. Also categorize the festival month-wise and say which is the most festive month in a year.

Hints : (You can use this grid while you collect information.)

Months	Festivals	Importance