



Ano Hi no Koto Koto (The Things That Happened on That Day): Remember March 11, 2011

Written and illustrated by Yoh Shomei
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Ano Hi no Koto (The Things That Happened on That Day): Remember March 11, 2011 (2012), is a Japanese-English bilingual picture book. Through a boy's perspective, the story invites readers to see the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami that happened on March 11, 2011 in the northeastern region of Japan. The central theme of this story is

loss of family, linking with the motifs of separation, social isolation, survival, and hope.

The story begins with the boy's appreciation of the ocean, "I like the sea! My grandpa fishes in the sea. He often said, "We live by the sea, and it gives a living to all of us" (p. 1). Suddenly the sea brings hardship to the boy and other people living near the ocean as a great earthquake and tsunami swallow people, cars, and houses. The disaster happens during school hours, and the boy and other children climb to the school rooftop to survive. During the night, cold and fearful, they wait to be rescued. Afterward, they move to a shelter, staying with unknown people in uncertain and anxiety-producing circumstances. One day, the boy runs into a puppy that is also alone, and they fill each other's void, left by family separation and anxiety. Eventually, the boy reunites with his family but not with his grandfather, who was fishing in the sea alone and swallowed by the tsunami. Even in hard times, the boy gradually goes forward with hope along with a new family member, the puppy. The boy names the puppy "Umi," which means "the sea" in Japanese. The story ends with the boy saying, "I was looking at the sea when I heard the voice of my grandpa saying, "We live by the sea, and it gives a living to all of us" (p. 27).

The illustrations, with gentle gradients and watercolors, truly make this book. The paintings use muted browns and grays to provide heartbreaking images such as massive tsunami waves sweeping away houses and stark landscapes after the tsunami. The last few pages are filled with picturesque portrayals of the sea, the boy, and the puppy with vibrant colors. The figure of the boy, along with his puppy, looking out the horizon, shows the hope and the future he holds.

While the cultural framework of the book is particular to Japan, the basic concerns, such as family separation, can ring true for many readers. Readers can feel an emotional connection with the young Japanese protagonist, and that connection can encourage empathy in readers who are also struggling with difficult circumstances. The story also invites readers to discuss the role of the sea in Japanese culture. Japanese people have known the power and danger of the sea since ancient times; at the same

time, they deeply appreciate the ocean that brings gifts for them. “The sea” has been a significant part of the Japanese cultural fabric for a very long time. As such, March 11, 2011, became a day that Japanese people would never forget. Many people lost family members, homes, and belongings. On the last page of the book, the author gives a message to readers, “It will make me happy if the boy’s story about his grandfather and Umi, the puppy who survived, will give a ray of hope to all my readers.”

The author, Yoh Shomei, born in Japan, is a picture book artist and poet. He studied oil painting at the Art Students League of New York. He debuted with the picture book *Jake* in 1972, and won the Graphic Award at the Bologna International Children’s Book Exhibition with *Wind and Panther* in 1990. His recent books, such as *Call My Name* (2009), have focused on concerns of modern values and awareness of the earth and humanity. Many of his books are Japanese-English bilingual books and are available in the U.S.

This book can be paired with works that pick up separation and isolation caused by natural disasters, such as *Tomo: Friendship through Fiction—Anthology of Japan Teen Stories* by Holly Thompson and Debbie Ridpath Ohi (2012) and *Field of Cole: Remember the Great East Japan Earthquake*, an English-translated manga by Misukoso (2011). *Tsunami!* (2009), a historical fiction children’s book by Kimiko Kajikawa and Ed Young set in Japan about an old man who saves his village from an impending tsunami, and *Flood* (1997), a book by Mary Calhoun and Erick Ingraham, about a Midwestern girl who loses her home in the 1993 flooding of the Mississippi River, are further connections.

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