



The Tsunami Quilt: Grandfather's Story

Written by Anthony D. Fredericks

Illustrated by Tammy Yee

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April 1, 1946 is a day not forgotten by people living on the Big Island of Hawaii and throughout the state and world. This was the date when a devastating tsunami hit the island of Hawai'i off Laupahoehoe Point. Tsunami survivors and their descendants cannot forget how their lives were changed from this day on.

The Tsunami Quilt: Grandfather's Story is a fictional rendition of this catastrophic event, as told

through the eyes of young Kimo, a nine-year-old boy who deeply loves his grandfather. Kimo and his grandfather spent lots of time together as the best of friends who share stories and enjoy each other's company. As the story opens, the reader is introduced to an annual ritual—Grandfather and Kimo drive to Laupahoehoe Point. They do not talk much and Kimo senses it is a time for quiet solitude and reflection. Grandfather always walks slowly to the marble monument, gazes out at the ocean and places a flower lei on the monument. “He would stand there a long time watching the surf roll in” (p. 4).

We find out that Grandfather is usually a talkative person who spent his entire life as a fisherman. He and his fisherman buddies “talk story” about their experiences; Kimo notices the difference in Grandfather's demeanor at this annual visit to Laupahoehoe Point. Grandfather shares it is a place of both tragedy and remembrance and cautions Kimo that the ocean can be both friend and foe.

Sadly, before Kimo can find out about the place from Grandfather, he passes away. Kimo begs his father to tell him why Laupahoehoe Point was so meaningful to Grandfather and the people of the Hamakua area. We find out that when Grandfather was a child, he and his younger brother attended a school built at the Point. On April 1, 1946, Grandfather, his brother, and all the children noticed there was no water in the ocean! When the children realized it was a giant tsunami, they tried to run to higher ground. Twenty-four students and teachers were killed. Kimo learns the sad truth that Grandfather's younger brother died in the tsunami. Grandfather was helpless as he watched the ocean carry his brother out to sea. He could never forget the tragedies of that day. Kimo then understands what the annual ritual meant to Grandfather. He and his dad carry on the remembrance and make the annual trip to Laupahoehoe Point.

Author Anthony D. Fredericks captures the love and special relationship between a

grandfather and a grandson. The reader is drawn into the powerful sense of place. The events of the tsunami's imminent impact are slowed down as he describes the events from the time the children arrive at school. Fredericks tells the story in a way that young readers can understand how dangerous the ocean can be. He is able to convey the fear and panic that occurred with the rapid progression of waves, receding and surging, from the first wave to the final third wave that left the Hamakua townspeople with destruction and tragedy. Factual events are woven throughout the story, lending authenticity and knowledge about such a catastrophic occurrence, still a realistic possibility in present-day Hawaii. Fredericks is an award-winning author of more than 40 children's books. He is a frequent visitor to Hawaii and it is evident that Fredericks took time to research tsunamis and the Laupahoehoe location. An Author's Note page is provided at the end of the book, and can be easily read for teachers' background information to introduce the book, including information about the Pacific Tsunami Museum.

The museum and its website are an abundant source of information. Teachers can find stories from tsunami survivors that can help students understand a tsunami's devastating impact. There is also a special section for students, which provides factual and interesting information about tsunamis. Local families and visitors can visit the Pacific Tsunami Museum, located in downtown Hilo on Hawaii Island to explore the extensive archives of tsunami survivor accounts and photographs. The museum continues to educate the public about the continued threat of tsunamis in Hawaii.

Hawaii-born illustrator Tammy Yee does an outstanding job of depicting Kimo's and Grandfather's time together, the tsunami event, and how Kimo and his family are able to honor Grandfather. Her detailed watercolor illustrations work harmoniously to help the reader visualize the family's connection to the island. She deftly portrays the tsunami's destruction, without frightening young children who may read the book. Her illustrations connote a respect for the island place and ocean. Yee helps readers understand how Kimo is able to cope with the loss of Grandfather through illustrations of his family's support.

For children in Hawaii, a tsunami can never be taken lightly and is still a present-day possibility. In light of recent global events, such as the Japanese earthquake and tsunami, *The Tsunami Quilt* is an excellent addition to a classroom library and can provide an authentic depiction to help children understand how an ocean can be both "friend and foe." The book might be paired with an older picture book, *The Big Wave* by Pearl S. Buck (1986). Both books speak to the contrast of devastation and danger against a renewal and appreciation for life. Other pairings might be with books recounting the stories associated with the Tsunami of 2004 in the Indian Ocean, such as *Owen and Mzee: The True Story of an Remarkable Friendship* (Isabella Hatkoff, Craig Hatkoff, and Dr. Paula Kahumbu, 2006); *Elephants of the Tsunami* (Jana Laiz, 2007); and *A Walk across the Sun* (Corban Addison, 2012).

Avis Masuda, University of Hawaii-Hilo, Hilo, HI

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