

The Big Wave Study Guide

The Big Wave by Pearl S. Buck

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Plot Summary

The Big Wave by Pearl S. Buck is a short novel for children about two young boys who live in Japan. When the big wave comes and takes Jiya's family, Jiya is raised by Kino's parents, but he must make a life decision when people begin rebuilding the fishing village on the deserted beach. The Big Wave is a heartwarming story that exemplifies the theme that life is stronger than death.

Kino, the son of a farmer, and Jiya, the son of a fisherman, often play together in the ocean. Kino does not understand Jiya's fear of the sea, but his father explains that people fear the sea because it is large and they do not understand it. When a storm hits their island, a big wave obliterates the fishing village on the beach. Though Jiya's father had sent him up the hill to Kino's farm, Jiya's family is washed out to sea. Jiya faints when the wave recedes to reveal the empty beach.

When Jiya awakens, he is stricken with grief at the loss of his family, but Kino's family offers him a home with them. The Old Gentleman offers Jiya a home also, wanting the best boy in the village to become his son; however, Jiya refuses the offer because he already has a home on the farm. Kino and his family are happy that Jiya decides to stay with them, and Jiya begins to feel happy again as he is accepted and loved by this family of four who welcome him into their home as part of their family.

Time passes, though the big wave is never forgotten, and Jiya grows into a gentle, strong man. He works on the farm and learns to live with the death of his family, but he never forgets them and often looks out at the sea. When people begin rebuilding the village on the beach, the Old Gentleman insists they are stupid, but Jiya tells him that this is their home, despite the dangers. He also decides to return to the sea.

Learning Jiya's decision, Kino's father begins paying Jiya wages for his work on the farm, and Jiya saves his money to buy a boat. Kino is shocked when he learns that Jiya wants to marry his sister, Setsu, but when they marry and move into a new home on the beach, Kino misses them and visits frequently. He worries about what they will do if the big wave returns, but Jiya shows him that he has cut a panel into the back room of his house which looks out onto the ocean. In doing this, Jiya will be prepared if the big wave returns, and he is not afraid. Kino and his parents return to their farm, leaving Jiya and Setsu at their new home to start their new life.



Section 1: pages 3-24

Section 1: pages 3-24 Summary

The Big Wave by Pearl S. Buck is a short novel for children about two young boys who live in Japan. When the big wave comes and takes Jiya's family, Jiya is raised by Kino's parents, but he must make a life decision when people begin rebuilding the fishing village on the deserted beach. The Big Wave is a heartwarming story that exemplifies the theme that life is stronger than death.

Kino lives on a farm on the side of a mountain in Japan. The fields are layered up the mountain like steps with stone walls encircling them, and the house is situated at the top of the mountain. Though the walk seems hard sometimes, Kino is glad he lives so high and can look down on the sea at the foot of the mountain. At the base of the mountain, there is a small strip of sand which contains a fishing village where Kino's father sells his rice and vegetables and buys his fish. In the village, the houses face one another, but the ones nearest the sea do not have windows facing it. Kino often wonders why since he enjoys looking at the waves, and he learns the reason when he meets Jiya whose father is a fisherman. Jiya tells Kino, "The sea is our enemy" (page 4). This is hard to believe since, on sunny days, Kino and Jiya swim to a small island which belongs to an Old Gentleman who lives in a castle on the mountainside. Sometimes, they see the kind-faced Old Gentleman looking out to sea, yet he never notices the boys. Kino worries about using the island without permission, but Jiya insists the Old Gentleman never uses it and only the sacred deer live here. Though Kino wants to spend the night on the island, Jiya is unwilling. Jiya often looks out to sea to make sure the ocean is not angry because he does not want to be on the island when the ocean rages. When Kino objects that they never do anything to anger the sea, Jiya explains that no one knows why the sea gets angry.

One day, Kino dives and swims down until he reaches still, icy water; this finally allows him to understand why Jiya is afraid of the sea. He returns to the sun but never forgets those icy depths. After searching for pebbles and playing in a cave, Kino and Jiya hurriedly swim home when they notice the sun dipping into the west. Jiya's father waits for them on shore, anxious because they returned so late, and Kino realizes that even the strong fisherman fears the sea's anger. He returns home where his parents and his sister, Setsu, are not worried about him. After supper, Kino asks his father why Jiya fears the sea, and his father explains that the ocean is very big and no one understands it. He also reminds Kino that the land is also fearsome, recalling the volcano their family visited last fall. When Kino wonders if they must always be afraid of something, his father tells him, "We must learn to live with danger" (page 12). The ocean and the volcano are always there, so they must accept it without fear; the way of the good Japanese is to enjoy life and not fear death. Kino enjoys life every day, going to school in the village during the winter and helping his father on the farm during the summer. Jiya also stays busy, helping his father fish, and sometimes, Kino accompanies them. Fishing is exciting to Kino and, at times, he feels Jiya is luckier since his father is a



fisherman, but Jiya's father tells him they need both farmers and fisherman. On days the water heaves, Kino is glad his father is a farmer, never forgetting the cold still water under the warm blue surface.

One day, fires rage in the earth, steam rising from the mouth of the volcano. Kino points this out to his father who anxiously keeps watch all night, and in the morning, cinders and ash fall from the volcano making the ground hot under Kino's feet. Kino wonders if they will have an earthquake because the sea is calm but gray. His father warns, "Sea and earth and sky- if they work together against man, it will be dangerous indeed for us" (page 17). He explains that sometimes the gods leave man to see how well he can take care of himself, and man must be able, though fear makes him weak. Kino's father keeps watch all day, and Kino stays at his side, though no one stirs in the village below. At noon, Kino notices a red flag at the Old Gentleman's castle, and his father says the Old Gentleman is telling everyone to be ready for whatever happens. He has seen the flag twice before, both times before Kino was born. At 2 o'clock that afternoon, the sky blackens, and a bell tolls as the Old Gentleman invites the villagers to take shelter in the castle walls. Kino's father says many of the villagers will stay to protect their boats. Kino wants Jiya to join them so he and his father stand on the terrace, waving a white girdle cloth. Jiya sees the two figures as he climbs, fighting tears because he did not want to leave his parents and his older brother; however, his father insisted he go to the castle because he must live after them. Since Jiya loves Kino's parents next to his own and thinks Setsu is the prettiest girl he has ever seen, he goes to the farm instead. As Jiya reaches Kino, a hurricane wind breaks from the ocean, and the boys cling to Kino's father. Kino wonders if the villagers know what is about to happen since their windows do not face the ocean.

As the earth yields to the internal fire, a big wave rises higher and higher. Jiya yearns to warn his father, but Kino's father will not let him leave because it is too late. The wave encompasses the village, reaching the terrace wall where they stand before receding to sea. The village is gone as if no humans ever lived there. Jiya lets out a cry and slips to the ground unconscious because, "What he knew, he could not bear. His family and his home was gone" (page 22). Kino cries as his father carries Jiya into the house and places him on a mattress. Kino's parents sit by Jiya, waiting for him to wake of his own will. Kino's mother heats soup for Kino because he is cold. Setsu enters, but she had not seen the big wave because her mother drew the curtains. Setsu asks if Jiya is dead, uncertain why Kino is crying if Jiya still lives. Her father says she asks too many questions and sends her to the kitchen to help her mother. Though he stops crying, Kino is still sad and frightened, and when he asks what they will say to Jiya when he wakes, his father says they will not talk; they will give him food and make him understand he has a home on the farm. Kino's father has always wanted another son, and Jiya will be that son. They will help him understand what happened as soon as he knows this is his home.



Section 1: pages 3-24 Analysis

The Big Wave opens by introducing Kino and Jiya and explaining where they live on the islands of Japan. This section of the book describes the fishing village where Jiya and his family lives, as well as the farm on the side of the mountain above the village where Kino lives with his family. The fact that Kino often wonders why the houses in the village do not have windows facing the sea foreshadows that the action will involve the sea, and it also foreshadows Jiya's sliding panel at the end of the story. Jiya's fear of the sea foreshadows the coming of the big wave, and Kino's eventual understanding of Jiya's fear also foreshadows this catastrophic event. Kino and Jiya often play on the island where the Old Gentleman's castle is located, and this serves to introduce the Old Gentleman who plays a fairly significant role in this novel. Jiya's fear of the sea is caused by his understanding of the ocean's dangers which result from his father being a fisherman. When Kino realizes that even Jiya's father, a strong fisherman, fears the sea, he asks his father about this anomaly, and Kino's father explains that people fear the sea because no one truly understands it. He also reminds his son that the land has its own dangers, such as the volcano. He teaches his son that their people must learn to live with danger, but this is what makes the Japanese strong. Because the sea and the volcano are always there, they must accept them without fear. Kino continues to enjoy his life without fear, but on days that the sea heaves, he is glad that his father is not a fisherman, now understanding the danger that the ocean poses.

The steam rising from the volcano foreshadows the natural disaster that follows, and this combined with the earlier foreshadowing indicates that the sea will rage. Kino's father warns Kino that it will be very dangerous for man if the sea, earth and sky work together against man. The Old Gentleman's kindness is seen when he summons the villagers to take shelter in his castle, but many of the villagers do not heed his warning for fear of losing their livelihood. Jiya joins Kino and his father when Jiya's father sends him up the mountain to safety, claiming his son must live after them. This foreshadows Jiya's acceptance into Kino's family. Rather than go to the Old Gentleman's castle, Jiya chooses to go to Kino's farm because he loves Kino's family next to his own. As the storm rages, Kino wonders if the villagers are prepared since their windows do not face the sea, again foreshadowing Jiya's sliding panel in the future. Fulfilling the earlier foreshadowing, the big wave comes and demolishes the fishing village. Jiya slips into unconsciousness as his family and home disappears into the sea. Kino's father carries Jiya inside and tells Kino that Jiya will be very sad when he wakes, but they must let him know that he will have a home with them now, fulfilling the foreshadowing that Jiya would be accepted into Kino's family after he loses his own.



Section 2: pages 24-30

Section 2: pages 24-30 Summary

As they wait for Jiya to wake, Kino does not think his friend can ever be happy again, but his father says Jiya will be happy someday "for life is always stronger than death" (page 24). Jiya will feel he can never be happy again when he wakes, and he will cry but the crying will lessen over time. Kino's family will allow him to be sad, continuing to live as they always do, and one day, Jiya will begin to feel better, crying only at night. Over time, his body will renew itself, and his mind will begin thinking, making him live. Jiya cannot and should not forget his family, but he will someday accept their deaths as part of his life and learn to live with them dead as he lived with them alive, carrying them in his memories and knowing they will live in him as long as he is alive. The big wave came but is now gone, and the sun shines and the sea is calm once again. When Kino notes that it seems cruel for the sky to be clear and the sea to be calm, his father says it is wonderful because they did not make the evil storm. No one knows who makes them, only that they come and man must live through them bravely, feeling how wonderful life is once they are gone. "Every day of life is more valuable now than it was before the storm" (page 26). Kino cannot forget the dead, but his father says they must now think of Jiya for he will soon wake.

Kino's father instructs Kino to call his mother and Setsu so Jiya will know they are his family now. As Kino fetches his mother and sister, Jiya begins sobbing in his sleep, and he does not know where he is when he wakes. He looks at Kino's family as though they are strangers, but they remain silent until Setsu, who cannot keep quiet, tells Jiya she is glad he has come back. Her voice fully wakes Jiya who recalls his mother and father. Kino's parents tell Jiya they will be his mother and father now, and Kino will be his brother. Setsu is excited that Jiya will live with them. Now understanding, Jiya goes to the door and looks down at the beach where the village once stood, and his new family follows. Kino does not know what to say to his friend and new brother, but Setsu offers to give Jiya her pet duck. Their parents convince them to eat, but as they sit at the table, Jiya feels asleep though he is awake. He is too tired to speak, and he tries not to think of his family. When Kino urges him to eat, Jiya drinks the soup though he is not hungry, and his body is glad for the food, though his mind still cannot think. After they eat, Kino suggests going up the hillside, but Jiya wants to sleep again, and Kino's father agrees that sleep is good for him. He puts Jiya to bed, telling Kino that Jiya is not yet ready to live so they must wait.

Section 2: pages 24-30 Analysis

Kino worries that Jiya will never be happy again since his family is dead, but his father says Jiya will be happy again, someday, stating the novel's theme that life is stronger than death for the first time. Kino's father explains to his son how Jiya will heal, growing less sad and recovering over time. He insists that they allow Jiya to recover on his own



time schedule. Kino's father uses this opportunity to teach Kino several life lessons, such as that Jiya will learn to accept the deaths of his family and realize that they will always live in Jiya. When Kino is distressed by the calmness of the sea now, his father tells him that they must learn to value life even more after the losses they have suffered during the storm and the big wave. He tells his son they must now focus on Jiya who will soon wake, showing his loving nature and his dedication to providing Jiya with a new home. When Jiya wakes, Kino's entire family is waiting for him, and they tell Jiya they will be his family now. Setsu is excited that Jiya will join their family, foreshadowing their future romantic relationship. Jiya is distraught as he remembers that he has lost his family, and while he looks at the empty beach where his home once stood, Setsu tries to comfort him by offering her pet duck to Jiya. During dinner, Kino encourages his new brother to eat, and Jiya's body is glad for the food, though he does not feel hungry; this emphasizes the truth of what Kino's father told him about Jiya's body healing itself. After dinner, Jiya wants to sleep, rather than play with Kino, and Kino's father agrees that this is good for Jiya, explaining to Kino that Jiya is not ready to live yet. The events with Jiya show the accuracy of Kino's father's life lessons, and this foreshadows that Jiya will recover and be ready to live again someday.



Section 3: pages 30-46

Section 3: pages 30-46 Summary

Jiya's body heals first, and Kino's father assures Kino that Jiya's mind and soul will follow because life is stronger than death. Jiya is still tired, waking only to eat and then going back to sleep. Kino works with his father in the fields during these days, but he does not feel like playing. One evening, he climbs the hill to look at the volcano, and he feels glad that the volcano is no longer angry as he returns to the house. Kino's father tells him that sleep is good for Jiya because it will strengthen him and allow him to be able to think and remember; "Only when he dares to remember his parents will he be happy again" (page 31). Kino suggests they are unfortunate to live in Japan since the volcano is behind their house and the ocean is in front, and these two forces work together to make evil, leaving them helpless and taking the lives of many. His father claims living in the midst of danger helps them know how good life is and makes them brave and strong. This is why their people do not fear death. They see it too often and know that to die sooner or later does not matter. The Japanese are a fortunate people because they live bravely and love life because they live in danger, and they do not fear death because they understand it is a necessary part of life. Kino's father further explains that death is the great gateway, recalling how hard Kino thought it was to be born as he passed through the great gateway of life. Kino was afraid because he did not know anything about life, but he has been happy. Now, Kino is only afraid of death because he does not know anything about it.

As they talk, the Old Gentleman comes up the hill, asking to see Jiya. Kino's father refuses to wake the boy, but the Old Gentleman only wants to look at him. The Old Gentleman sees that Jiya is beautiful, and he can see the intelligence in the boy's face. After the big waves come, he often cares for the orphans left behind, but the Old Gentleman wishes to make Jiya his son if Jiya is as good as he is handsome. Kino objects that Jiya is part of their family now, but his father says the Old Gentleman can provide better for Jiya than they can. He tells the Old Gentleman that he will tell Jiya of the kind offer when he wakes and allow Jiya to decide. The Old Gentleman asks that Jiya report his decision personally. Though Kino is upset at the idea of losing Jiya as his brother, his father forbids him to speak to Jiya about the matter because they must allow Jiya to make his own decision. In the morning, Kino is eager to know Jiya's decision, but his friend is not yet awake, and Kino's father says he will speak to Jiya alone to explain the benefits that the Old Gentleman can offer. Kino works alone in the field while his father talks to Jiya. When they appear at the door, Kino can see that Jiya has been crying, but his father says the tears are good for him. Kino's father insists Jiya see the inside of the Old Gentleman's castle before making his decision, and he sends Kino with Jiya, telling his son he must persuade Jiya to stay at the castle for his own sake.

At the Old Gentleman's castle, the gardener leads Kino and Jiya inside. Though Kino sadly notes the beauty of the garden and the interior of the castle, seeing no hope that Jiya will not want to stay with the Old Gentleman, Jiya remains silent. They approach



the Old Gentleman who is transcribing a poem written by a man from India. The Old Gentleman asks Jiya to be his son, but Jiya refuses because he already has a home on the farm. Although Kino is filled with joy at his friend's words, he reminds Jiya that his family is poor, and the Old Gentleman agrees, claiming Jiya could have everything as his son and he would even allow him to give money to Kino's family. Jiya asks why the Old Gentleman did not ask the other orphans from the village to be his sons and daughters, and when the Old Gentleman says he heard Jiya was the best boy in the village, Jiya objects that he is no better than the others, so the Old Gentleman says he will do without a son. Walking the boys out of the castle, the Old Gentleman's servant tells Jiya that he is foolish because his master is kind and Jiya could have had everything. Jiya says the Old Gentleman could not offer him everything. When Jiya and Kino return to the farm, Setsu greets them joyfully, happy that Jiya came home. Jiya hugs Setsu, feeling comfort in his sad heart for the first time. Kino and his parents are also happy that Jiya decided to return, and happiness begins to live in Jiya's heart as he is surrounded by these four people who lovingly welcome him into their family.

Section 3: pages 30-46 Analysis

Jiya's body heals, and Kino's father assures Kino that Jiya's mind and soul will follow, reiterating the theme that life is stronger than death. He also tells his son that sleep is good for Jiya, but Jiya will not be happy again until he dares to remember his parents. When Kino expresses fear and the belief that the Japanese are unlucky to live in the midst of danger from the volcano and the sea, his father tells him that their proximity to danger make them brave and strong and helps them to appreciate life more fully. He continues to compare death to being born, claiming Kino only fears death because he does not understand it. The Old Gentleman approaches Kino's father, fulfilling earlier foreshadowing of his importance in the story. He wants to adopt Jiya, but Kino's father insists that the decision is Jiya's to make. The Old Gentleman's request that Jiya inform him of the decision personally foreshadows Jiya's visit to the castle. Kino is devastated at the idea of losing Jiya as his brother, but his father tells him they must allow Jiya to make an unbiased decision because the Old Gentleman is rich and can provide for Jiya better than Kino's poor family can. Kino's father sends the boys to the castle, insisting Jiya see inside the castle before making his decision, and he entrusts Kino with the responsibility of persuading Jiya to stay with the Old Gentleman for his own sake. At the castle, Kino is sure Jiya will become the Old Gentleman's son, and though he does not want to lose Jiya as a brother, he demonstrates his selfless nature by trying to persuade his friend to stay at the castle; however, Jiya refuses because he already has a home and a family. When the Old Gentleman claims he wants Jiya for a son because he is the best boy from the village, Jiya shows modesty by insisting he is no better than the others. Kino is happy when Jiya refuses the Old Gentleman's offer and returns to the farm with him. Setsu and Kino's parents are also glad that Jiya decides to return. The fact that Setsu provides Jiya with comfort for the first time foreshadows their romantic relationship. Kino's father's words prove true as Jiya begins to find happiness again as he is welcomed into Kino's family, fulfilling the foreshadowing that Kino's father's words initiated.



Section 4: pages 46-57

Section 4: pages 46-57 Summary

As time passes, Jiya and Kino grow into strong young men, and Setsu grows into a pretty, willful girl. Time is split into before and after the big wave because it had changed everyone's lives. No one lives on the beach for many years, though there is never another wave like the big wave. The surviving fishermen move to new shores, telling themselves no beach is as good as the old one. Kino and Jiya rarely visit the deserted beach, swimming in the ocean on the other side of the hill, but Jiya looks at the empty beach every morning as if searching for something. One day, he calls Kino to see that two men are building a house on the beach. The boys run to the beach where the elder man explains that they lived here with their father and have lived in the outhouses of the castle since the big wave; however, they are tired of not having their own home. When Kino asks what they will do if the big wave returns, the men explain that there had been a big wave in their great-grandfather's time, but their grandfather had come back, and though there had been a big wave in their father's time, they are now coming back also. "The big wave may never come back" (page 48). Jiya does not speak. He has learned to live with his family's deaths, but he has not been a child since the big wave. He attends school earnestly and works hard on the farm. Jiya cannot abide cruelty because the big wave was so cruel, and he has grown into a kind, gentle man who never speaks of his loneliness because he does not want anyone to be sad because of his sadness. Jiya feels delight watching the new house being built on the beach, but he wonders if it is right for people to rebuild the village.

A commotion on the hillside reveals the Old Gentleman's slow approach down the path. He is obviously angry, and when he reaches the group, he yells at the foolish children for leaving the safety of his walls and building a house on the dangerous shore. He claims the big wave will come back. The Old Gentleman has spent his whole life trying to save foolish people from the big wave, but they will not be saved. Jiya interjects, "This is our home. Dangerous as it is, threatened by the volcano and by the sea, it is here we were born" (page 50). Recognizing Jiya, the Old Gentleman says it is a shame Jiya would not be his son because he could live in the castle safely where the big wave never reaches, but Jiya objects that the castle is not safe either because it will crumble if the earth shakes hard enough. Jiya point out that there is no refuge for those who live on these islands; "We are brave because we must be" (page 51). The men resume building their house, and though the Old Gentleman tells them not to expect him to save them if the big wave returns, Jiya says he will save them because he is so kind. The Old Gentleman says it is a pity Jiya would not be his son before returning to his castle.

Kino and Jiya return to the farmhouse, but Kino's family can see that Jiya is restless from that day forward. Kino's father thought Jiya would be a farmer, but Jiya falls into a mood of forgetfulness, so he asks what is on Jiya's mind. Jiya confesses that he wants to return to fishing, causing Kino's father to note, "Life is stronger than death" (page 52). Kino's family knows that Jiya will someday return to the sea as people return and rebuild



the village on the beach. The corner spot that belonged to Jiya's father remains bare because it now belongs to Jiya. Jiya claims he will build his house on the spot once he has a boat, so Kino's father says he will start paying Jiya wages for working on the farm because Jiya is now a man. Jiya saves his wages and buys a boat, and though Kino still cannot forget the cold waters, he does not want to spoil Jiya's joy by hinting at fear. Jiya has always known he had to return to the sea. Turning red, Jiya asks Kino if he thinks Setsu would be afraid to come and live on the beach where he will build his house because he wants Setsu to be his wife. Kino believes Jiya would be very foolish to marry Setsu, but Jiya does not agree; he wants her because she makes him laugh and made him forget the big wave, and he tells Kino, "For me- she is life" (page 54). Kino objects that Setsu cannot cook. She always burns the rice because she runs outside to look at something, but Jiya claims he does not mind burned rice, and he will run outside with Setsu to see what she sees. Shocked, Kino mentions Jiya's desire to marry Setsu to his father when he returns home, but his father is not surprised. Kino's father says he has seen looks pass between Jiya and Setsu. When Kino argues that Setsu is not good enough for Jiya and she will tease him and make him miserable, his father says she is pretty and "what makes you miserable will make him happy" (page 55). Kino does not understand, but his father says he will someday, reminding him that life is stronger than death and telling him Jiya is ready to live again.

Jiya and Setsu are married in the early summer. Kino still does not understand because Setsu continues to be naughty and mischievous, hiding his hairbrush even on her wedding day. When Kino tells Setsu he feels bad for Jiya because she is too silly to be married, Setsu claims she will always be nice to Jiya. Kino is sad and lonely after Jiya and Setsu move to the beach. He visits them every day because he misses his sister and his friend. One day, Kino, worrying about the big wave returning, asks what Jiya will do if the big wave returns. Jiya claims he is prepared for the big wave to return, and he leads Kino and his family to the back room of his house, closest to the ocean. There, he reveals a panel which opens to show them the sea. Jiya claims he has opened his home to the ocean and will be ready to face the big wave if it ever returns. He is not afraid. Kino's father agrees that Jiya is strong and brave. Kino and his parents return to the farm, leaving Jiya and Setsu "to make a new life in the new home on the old beach" (page 57).

Section 4: pages 46-57 Analysis

Kino and Jiya grow into strong young men, but life is separated into the time before and after the big wave because it affects everyone's lives so strongly. When Jiya sees two men building a house on the beach, this foreshadows that the village will be rebuilt and that Jiya will return to his father's profession as a fisherman. He is delighted that people are rebuilding on the beach. The Old Gentleman chides the men for being so foolish, warning them that the big wave will return and destroy them. He recognizes Jiya and feels it is a shame Jiya would not be his son as Jiya reveals his wisdom by telling the Old Gentleman that his castle is not safe either because an earthquake would destroy it. Jiya also recognizes the Old Gentleman's kindness, disputing him when he claims he will not save them if the big wave returns. From that day, Jiya grows restless on the



farm, further foreshadowing his return to the sea, and when he confesses this desire to Kino's father, Kino's father begins paying him wages, reiterating the theme that life is stronger than death. Jiya saves his money to buy a boat, fulfilling the foreshadowing that he would return to his lifestyle as a fisherman. Jiya's conversation about his desire to marry Setsu fulfills the foreshadowing regarding their romantic relationship. Kino does not understand why his friend is interested in his sister, but his father is not surprised by the news, reminding him again that life is stronger than death and telling Kino that Jiya is finally ready to live again. When Jiya marries Setsu, Kino still does not understand why his friend would want his silly sister, but Setsu claims she will always be good to Jiya. Kino misses his friend and his sister when they move into a new house on the beach, and he worries what will happen if the big wave returns; however, Jiya is prepared for such an eventuality. He shows Kino and his parents a sliding panel in his back room which opens to look on the ocean. He has welcomed the sea into his home so he will be ready if the big wave returns, and he is not afraid. Kino and his parents leave Jiya and Setsu to begin their new life.



Characters

Jiya

Jiya is the main character in *The Big Wave*. He is the son of a fisherman, but his family is swept away and killed when the big wave comes. Jiya and Kino often play together in the ocean. Kino does not understand Jiya's fear of the sea, but his father explains that people fear the sea because it is large and they do not understand it. When a storm hits their island, a big wave obliterates the fishing village on the beach. Though Jiya's father sends him up the hill to Kino's farm, Jiya's family is washed out to sea. Jiya faints when the wave recedes to reveal the empty beach. When Jiya awakes, he is stricken with grief at the loss of his family, but Kino's family offers him a home with them. The Old Gentleman offers Jiya a home also, wanting the best boy in the village to become his son; however, Jiya refuses the offers because he already has a home on the farm. Kino and his family are happy that Jiya decides to stay with them, and Jiya begins to feel happy again as he is accepted and loved by this family of four who welcome him into their home as part of their family.

Time passes, though the big wave is never forgotten, and Jiya grows into a gentle, strong man. He works on the farm and learns to live with the death of his family, but he never forgets them and often looks out at the sea. When people begin rebuilding the village on the beach, the Old Gentleman insists they are stupid, but Jiya tells him that this is their home, despite the dangers. He also decides to return to the sea. Learning Jiya's decision, Kino's father begins paying Jiya wages for his work on the farm, and Jiya saves his money to buy a boat. Kino is shocked when he learns that Jiya wants to marry his sister, Setsu, but when they marry and move into a new home on the beach, Kino misses them and visits frequently. He worries about what they will do if the big wave returns, but Jiya shows him that he has cut a panel into the back room of his house which looks out onto the ocean. In doing this, Jiya will be prepared if the big wave returns, and he is not afraid. Kino and his parents return to their farm, leaving Jiya and Setsu at their new home to start their new life.

Kino

Kino is Jiya's best friend and adopted brother. He is the son of a farmer. Kino and Jiya often play together in the ocean. Kino does not understand Jiya's fear of the sea, but his father explains that people fear the sea because it is large and they do not understand it. When a storm hits their island, a big wave obliterates the fishing village on the beach. Though Jiya's father sends him up the hill to Kino's farm, Jiya's family is washed out to sea. Jiya faints when the wave recedes to reveal the empty beach. When Jiya awakes, he is stricken with grief at the loss of his family, but Kino's family offers him a home with them. Kino and his family are happy that Jiya decides to stay with them.



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Setsu

Setsu is Kino's mischievous younger sister. She comforts Jiya after his family is killed by the big wave. Setsu marries Jiya and lives with him on the new house on the beach when the fishing village is rebuilt.

Kino's Father

Kino's father is a farmer. He teaches his son that life is stronger than death. Kino's father takes Jiya in as his second son after the big wave kills Jiya's family.

Kino's Mother

Kino's mother welcomes Jiya into her family after the big wave kills Jiya's family.

Old Gentleman

The Old Gentleman lives in a castle on the hill. Before the big wave, he tolls the bell to invite the villagers to take shelter in the castle walls. The Old Gentleman wants to adopt Jiya as his son, but Jiya refuses because he already has a home with Kino's family. The Old Gentleman allows the orphans to live in the castle outhouses after the big wave, but he thinks they are foolish for rebuilding the village on the beach many years later.

Jiya's Father

Jiya's father is a fisherman who sends Jiya up the hill before the big wave. He is swept out to sea and killed when the big wave strikes the beach.

Jiya's Mother

Jiya's mother is swept out to sea and killed when the big wave strikes the beach.



Jiya's Brother

Jiya's brother is swept out to sea and killed when the big wave strikes the beach.

Two Men on the Beach

The two men on the beach are orphaned by the big wave. Since then, they have lived in the outhouses of the Old Gentleman's castle, but they decide to rebuild their home on the beach and return to the sea, though the Old Gentleman thinks they are foolish for doing so. These two men inspire Jiya to return to the sea also.



Objects/Places

Fishing Village

The fishing village sits on a small strip of sand at the foot of the mountain where Kino's family's farm is located. The houses in the village do not have windows facing the ocean. They are swept away, out to sea, when the big wave hits the beach.

Kino's Family's Farm

Kino's family's farm sits on the mountain above the village, overlooking the sea. After the big wave, Jiya lives on the farm with Kino and his family.

Old Gentleman's Castle

The Old Gentleman's castle sits on a hill, safe from the big wave. Before the big wave, the Old Gentleman summons the villagers to safety within his walls. He wants Jiya to be his son, and he allows the other orphans to live in the castle outhouses.

Big Wave

The big wave comes during a storm brought on by fires deep in the earth. It obliterates the fishing village on the beach. Jiya's life is divided into the time before and after the big wave since it kills his entire family.

Japan

Japan is the main setting of The Big Wave. This is the home of Kino and Jiya.

Ocean

Jiya feels a deep fear and respect for the ocean, though his father is a fisherman. Kino does not understand this fear until he feels the still, icy water below the ocean's warm surface. Those residing on the islands live in constant danger between the ocean and the volcano.

Volcano

There is a volcano near the fishing village where Jiya lives. It smokes the day before the big wave. The people residing on these islands live in constant danger between the volcano and the ocean.



Empty Plot in Village

When people rebuild the village years after the big wave, a corner plot remains empty the longest because it belonged to Jiya's father and now belongs to Jiya.

Jiya's New Home

Once he becomes an adult, Jiya builds a new home on the corner lot his father once owned. Setsu marries Jiya and lives with him in his new home once he returns to the fishing lifestyle as a young man.

Sliding Panel

When Jiya builds a new house on the beach, he includes a sliding panel in his back room, nearest the ocean, so he will be prepared in case the big wave returns.



Themes

Life is Stronger than Death

Possibly the most important theme in *The Big Wave* is the concept that life is stronger than death. This message is repeated numerous times throughout the story as Kino's father teaches Kino about life, death, fear and recovery from grief. After the big wave kills Jiya's parents, Kino's father tells his son that Jiya will learn how to live with his parents' deaths as part of his life because life is stronger than death. As Jiya's body begins to heal, Kino's father notes that his body will also heal his mind and soul because life is stronger than death, even though Jiya is not yet ready to live. This foreshadows the fact that Jiya's mind and soul will heal, and then, he will be ready to live again.

As the years pass, Jiya grows strong and tall, proving that life is stronger than death. His decision to return to the sea also proves this message, as Jiya overcomes his fear of the ocean and his grief over his family's deaths to return to the lifestyle that his father lived before him, as a fisherman. Kino's father is not surprised by Jiya's decision because life is stronger than death. When Jiya mentions his desire to marry Setsu, Kino is very surprised, claiming Setsu is not good enough for his friend; however, his father claims that Jiya has decided to marry Setsu because he has decided to live again. He has overcome his grief at the loss of his family, and he now wants to begin a new life for himself, with Setsu. Jiya decides to return to his father's occupation, as a fisherman, because the life he was raised to takes precedence over his grief caused by the deaths of his family, thus proving again that life is stronger than death. Because of his past experiences, Jiya welcomes the sea into his home by installing a sliding panel into his back room. He decides to accept the sea as part of life, knowing that otherwise it will cause death, but also realizing that life is stronger than death.

Happiness

An important theme in *The Big Wave* is the theme of happiness. This theme recurs throughout the text as Jiya copes with the deaths of his family. In the beginning of the story, Kino and Jiya play together and live happily in their home, despite the dangerous threats presented by the sea and the volcano. Unfortunately, the big wave comes and takes Jiya's family, as well as his happiness. Kino's father warns his son that Jiya will not be happy again until he dares to remember his family, but he assures Kino that Jiya will be happy again someday, though he will not feel like it when he wakes. As Jiya's body heals, his mind and his soul follow suit. He finds enough joy in Setsu's happiness that he returns to their farm instead of becoming the Old Gentleman's son. Kino and his parents are also happy when Jiya returns to the farm, and happiness begins to live in Jiya's heart again as he is welcomed into Kino's family and home.



As he grows older, Jiya accepts the deaths of his family, but he tries to remain cheerful because he does not want others to be sad because he is sad and lonely. When the men on the beach begin building houses and restoring the fishing village, Jiya also finds happiness, especially after he makes the decision to return to the sea. Kino's father supports Jiya's decision, noting that life is stronger than death. Returning to the life of a fisherman, Jiya is also happy when Setsu and her family agree to their marriage. They move into Jiya's new house on the beach and begin their happy, new life together.

Fear and Bravery

In *The Big Wave*, fear and bravery is a predominant theme that repetitiously appears, especially as Kino's father teaches Kino lessons about life. As a young child, Kino does not understand Jiya's fear of the sea until he feels the still, icy water below the warm surface. Then, he understands the fear of the sea, and he never forgets it. Kino notes that even Jiya's father, a strong fisherman, fears the sea when Jiya's father chides them for coming home so late one day. Kino's father explains to his son that people fear the sea because it is large and no one understands it. He points out that people also fear the volcano, but they must accept the danger of the sea and the volcano without fear because the way of a good Japanese is to enjoy life and not fear death.

When the volcano smokes, Kino's father warns Kino that fear makes men weak, and after the big wave, he tells his son that they must live bravely through storms and appreciate life even more afterward. Kino's father tells Kino that living in the presence of danger constantly makes the Japanese enjoy life and not fear death. When Jiya decides to build a house on the beach and return to the lifestyle of a fisherman, he builds a sliding panel in his back room, facing the sea. He explains that he has opened his home to the sea so he will be prepared if the big wave returns; he is not afraid.



Style

Point of View

In *The Big Wave*, the point of view is third person and omniscient. This is proven by the fact that the narrator is privy to the thoughts and feelings of all the characters, in addition to the events and dialogue which transpire. This point of view is also reliable since nothing they say is ever disputed. The use of this particular point of view is important to the story because it allows readers to share the characters' thoughts and feelings, providing readers with a better understanding of the decisions that characters make and the reasons behind these decisions.

In this story, the use of exposition and dialogue is distributed fairly equally, and this is effective because it allows the reader to receive a description of the events as well as the conversations. Access to the conversations in *The Big Wave* is especially important since Kino's father teaches Kino many life lessons throughout the book. The viewpoint of this novel is loosely focused on Kino with occasional detours to Jiya.

Setting

This book is set in the real world, in the islands of Japan. The characters are natives to the island, and they consist of a combination of farmers and fishermen, as well as their families. Kino is the son of a farmer, while Jiya is the son of a fisherman. The fishing village sits on a small strip of sand at the foot of the mountain where Kino's family's farm is located. The houses in the village do not have windows facing the ocean. They are swept away, out to sea, when the big wave hits the beach. Kino's family's farm sits on the mountain above the village, overlooking the sea. After the big wave, Jiya lives on the farm with Kino and his family. The Old Gentleman's castle sits on a hill, safe from the big wave. Before the big wave, the Old Gentleman summons the villagers to safety within his walls. He wants Jiya to be his son, and he allows the other orphans to live in the castle outhouses.

The big wave comes during a storm brought on by fires deep in the earth. It obliterates the fishing village on the beach. Jiya's life is divided into the time before and after the big wave since it kills his entire family. Jiya feels a deep fear and respect for the ocean, though his father is a fisherman. Kino does not understand this fear until he feels the still, icy water below the ocean's warm surface. Those residing on the islands live in constant danger between the ocean and the volcano. Japan is the main setting of *The Big Wave*. This is the home of Kino and Jiya. When people rebuild the village years after the big wave, a corner plot remains empty the longest because it belonged to Jiya's father and now belongs to Jiya. There is a volcano near the fishing village where Jiya lives. It smokes the day before the big wave. The people residing on these islands live in constant danger between the volcano and the ocean. Once he becomes an adult,



Jiya builds a new home on the corner lot his father once owned. Setsu marries Jiya and lives with him in his new home once he returns to the fishing lifestyle as a young man.

Language and Meaning

The language used in *The Big Wave* is fairly casual and informal, though the sentences are constructed quite properly for the most part. This style of writing is quite appropriate for children, the target audience. It is also useful in focusing on the lessons that Kino's father teaches Kino about life, as well as in conveying Jiya's acceptance of his grief after the deaths of his family. The language aids comprehension of the short novel because it makes it easy to understand and accessible to young children. The language and messages in this book characterize Japanese culture.

In this story, the use of exposition and dialogue is distributed fairly equally, and this is effective since it allows the reader to receive a description of the events as well as the conversations. Access to the conversations in *The Big Wave* is especially important since Kino's father teaches Kino many life lessons throughout the book. Though the translation into English makes the language in *The Big Wave* quite simplistic, it is also useful in aiding children's comprehension of the themes. The author also uses repetition to reinforce the novel's themes. Overall, the language is easy to comprehend and very effective in conveying the author's messages about life.

Structure

The Big Wave consists of fifty-seven pages which are not separated into chapters. The story is divided into four sections by extra spacing between paragraphs, and these divisions occur to denote a gap in time or after the occurrence of a major event, such as the big wave. The novel as a whole is quite short and vague. The story spans quite a few years in the lives of Kino and Jiya, but it focuses on a short span of time, briefly skimming over larger amounts of time by summarizing the events that occur.

The Big Wave by Pearl S. Buck is a short novel for children about two young boys who live in Japan. When the big wave comes and takes Jiya's family, Jiya is raised by Kino's parents, but he must make a life decision when people begin rebuilding the fishing village on the deserted beach. *The Big Wave* is a heartwarming story that exemplifies the theme that life is stronger than death. The story is quite quick-paced. It is easy to read, making it appropriate for its intended audience, children. The story is linear, though the second half frequently refers to the big wave in the past. Overall, *The Big Wave* is a short and sentimental story for children which emphasizes its main theme, that life is stronger than death.



Quotes

"The sea is our enemy."
Jiya, page 4

"Sometimes the old ocean god begins to roll in his ocean bed and to heave up his head and shoulders, and the waves run back and forth. Then he stands upright and roars and the earth shakes under the water. I don't want to be on the island then."
Jiya, page 6

"Ocean is there and volcano is there. It is true that on any day ocean may rise into storm and volcano may burst into flame. We must accept this fact, but without fear. We must say, 'Someday I shall die, and does it matter whether it is by ocean or volcano, or whether I grow old and weak?'... It is right for you not to think about them. Then do not be afraid. When you are afraid, you are thinking about them all the time. Enjoy life and do not fear death- that is the way of a good Japanese."
Kino's father, page 12

"We must be able. Fear alone makes man weak. If you are afraid, your hands tremble, your feet falter, and your brain cannot tell hands and feet what to do."
Kino's father, page 17

"We must divide ourselves. If the ocean yields to the fires you must live after us."
Jiya's father, page 20

"What [Jiya] had seen was too much for him. What he knew, he could not bear. His family and his home were gone."
Narrator, page 22

"I have always wanted another son, and Jiya will be that son. As soon as he knows that this is his home, then we must help him to understand what has happened."
Kino's father, page 24

"Yes, he will be happy someday, for life is always stronger than death. Jiya will feel when he wakes that he can never be happy again. He will cry and cry and we must let him cry. But he cannot always cry. After a few days he will stop crying all the time. He will cry only part of the time. He will sit sad and quiet. We must allow him to be sad and we must not make him speak. But we will do our work and live as always we do. Then one day he will be hungry and he will eat something that our mother cooks, something special, and he will begin to feel better. He will not cry any more in the daytime but only at night. We must let him cry at night. But all the time his body will be renewing itself. His blood flowing in his veins, his growing bones, his mind beginning to think again, will make him live."
Kino's father, pages 24-25



"He cannot and he should not forget them. Just as he lived with them alive, he will live with them dead. Someday he will accept their death as part of his life. He will weep no more. He will carry them in his memory and his thoughts. His flesh and blood are part of them. So long as he is alive, they, too, will live in him."

Kino's father, page 25

"Jiya is not ready yet to live. We must wait."

Kino's father, page 30

"Only when he dares to remember his parents will he be happy again."

Kino's father, page 31

"To live in the presence of death makes us brave and strong. That is why our people never fear death. We see it too often and we do not fear it. To die a little later or a little sooner does not matter. But to live bravely, to love life, to see how beautiful the trees are and the mountains, yes, and even the sea, to enjoy work because it produces food for life- in these things we Japanese are a fortunate people. We love life because we live in danger. We do not fear death because we understand that life and death are necessary to each other."

Kino's father, page 32

"You are only afraid because you don't know anything about death. But someday you will wonder why you were afraid, even as today you wonder why you feared to be born."

Kino's father, page 33

"Jiya, you must not mind it that you cry easily. Until now you could not cry because you were not fully alive. You had been hurt too much. But today you are beginning to live and so your tears flow. It is good for you. Let your tears come and do not stop them."

Kino's father, page 39

"I will say, - no! I thank you but I have a home- on the farm."

Jiya, page 43

"There was a big wave in our great-grandfather's time. All the houses were swept away, but our grandfather came back. In our father's time the big wave came again, but now we come back. The big wave may never come back."

Men on the beach, page 48

"You foolish children! You have left the safety of my walls and come back to this dangerous shore to make your home, as your fathers did before you. The big wave will come back and sweep you into the ocean again! It will come! I have spent my whole life in trying to save foolish people from the big wave. But you will not be saved."

Old Gentleman, page 50

"This is our home. Dangerous as it is, threatened by the volcano and by the sea, it is here we were born."

Jiya, page 50



"Your castle is not safe either. If the earth shakes hard enough, your castle will crumble, too. There is no refuge for us who live on these islands. We are brave because we must be."

Jiya, page 51

"I knew all the time that I had to come back to the sea."

Jiya, page 53

"It is [Setsu] who made me forget the big wave. For me- she is life."

Jiya, page 54

"I have opened my house to the ocean. If ever the big wave comes back, I shall be ready. I face it. I am not afraid."

Jiya, page 57



Topics for Discussion

Why is Jiya afraid of the ocean?

What happens when the big wave comes?

Why does Jiya refuse to be the Old Gentleman's son?

How does Jiya feel when he sees people building a house on the beach?

Why does Kino's father begin paying Jiya wages for working on the farm?

How does the Old Gentleman feel about people rebuilding homes on the beach, and how does Jiya respond?

What does Kino think about Jiya's desire to marry Setsu, and how does he feel after they are married?

How does Jiya prepare in case the big wave returns?