



Assembly



Tsunami

Aim:

- to consider a response to natural disasters (the enormity of the situation in Japan) and reflect on a creator God and man's place in the world.

Introduction

Choose one of the suggested ways to introduce the assembly.

The Great Wave off Kanagawa



<http://en.wikipedia.org/>

- Display a picture of the poster The Great Wave off Kanagawa, by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). It is commonly available on the internet. You can find it at either of these websites. The first website has a link to YouTube films about wave formation.

<http://www.art-landscape.blogspot.com/2011/03/story-of-great-wave-off-kanagawa.html>

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/JP1847>

The Great Wave off Kanagawa was not a Tsunami wave (which would be distinguishable by its distinctive shape), but the picture does help us understand the dangers and uncertainties which are normal for those living around the coast of Japan.

In the picture, note:

- The importance (and danger) of Mount Fuji, in the background – one of many Japanese volcanoes which could erupt at any time
 - The dangers of massive waves encountered around the Japanese coast, (without even considering tsunamis)
 - The fragility of life for Japanese fishermen (see them clinging to the deck of the boat) – here in two boats, battling to land Bonito tuna at the start of the fishing season
- Ask pupils to silently bring to mind images which they have seen on the TV or in newspapers, of the tsunami which hit the north east coast of Japan on Friday 11th March 2011. Encourage them to reflect on its power and the destruction it has caused.

Looking Deeper

Japan

Think of things that your family owns which come from Japanese companies such as Honda, Toyota, Sony, etc. Japan is one of the most advanced technological and industrial societies in the world with one of the world's strongest and biggest economies. All this has been achieved in 70 years since Japan was devastated and reduced to a struggling economy after the atomic bombs dropped on the country in the 2nd World War.

Yet, only 10% of the land area in Japan is habitable. Much of the land area is volcanic mountains, with excessively steep slopes, unsuitable for settlement. Consequently, a huge proportion of the population of Japan live in villages, towns and cities along the coast line.

Japan sits on what is known as the 'Pacific Ring of Fire' – the ring of 452 volcanoes circling the Pacific Ocean. The country of Japan is made up of a series of volcanic islands created by



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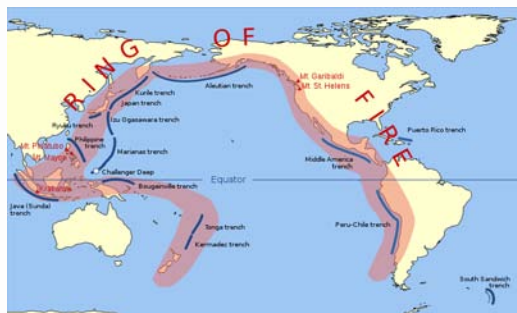
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tectonic activity where major plates in the earth's crust crash against each other.



<http://en.wikipedia.org/>

People living in Japan, particularly in the coastal areas, live with the constant knowledge that their lives are at risk from:

- Volcanoes
- Earthquakes and aftershocks
- Tsunamis

A Japanese saying is, 'Expect catastrophe'. Many follow the Shinto religion which has great respect for the spirits which they believe occupy the natural world. People there are very aware of the potentially huge destructive power of nature through volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis. Yet the Japanese people have adapted their lives to live with that deep respect for the natural forces and the consequent risk.

Japanese society is one of the most advanced and highly organised. Earthquake, volcano and tsunami warning systems are in place. Buildings are constructed to withstand the most severe quake or blast. Earthquakes shake their cities regularly and buildings sway, but rarely collapse; in the event of an earthquake, life pauses, everyone takes a deep breath and then gets on, 'business as usual'.

But not this time! The death toll is huge, many people will never be accounted for. In the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26th December 2004, over 250,000 people were missing, nearly 1/3 of that number were never

found. In Japan, whole cities have been obliterated. The death toll is likely to be in the tens of thousands. This time, Japan has suffered the 'perfect storm' – a massive underwater earthquake, repeated aftershocks, tsunami, fracturing of the infrastructure providing communications, food and water, and now, potential radiation leaking from damaged nuclear installations. Even for a well organised country like Japan, now asking for help from the international community, this is an almost unimaginable situation.

The Japanese Ambassador to London said on radio on Monday, "We are humbled by the power of nature."

The big question: 'Why?'

- The Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in December 2004
- The Suchan (China) earthquake in 2008
- The Indonesian tsunami in 2009
- The earthquake in Haiti in January 2010
- The volcanic eruption and ash cloud in Iceland in April 2010
- The earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand in February 2011

We can now understand 'why' such events happen – the earth movements are due to the shifting of seismic plates in the earth's crust. Scientists tell us that the very same seismic activities which cause these human disasters are exactly the same seismic events which formed our universe, created the rich mineral deposits which we depend on and enabled and sustained life on earth. Eminent scientists reflect that the incredible forces which formed and continue to shape our world, also account for the possibility of human life on the planet. Professor Stephen Hawking writes in *A brief history of time* (page 144), 'It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in such a



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way, except as the act of a God who intended to create human beings.'

Professor Brian Cox, having explored the wonders of the solar system, said at the end of his TV series *Wonders of the Solar System* in 2010, 'I suppose it is a miracle that we exist at all!'

Human disasters

Earthquakes and tsunamis change from being simply seismic events to being 'disasters' when they affect human life and property.

Events such as these cause people to fear, to grieve, to be angry and to ask, 'Why does God allow these disasters to happen?'

The Bible account of God's creation of the world, in the book of Genesis, makes it clear that God gave people the responsibility of looking after the amazing world that he had created. So, since people today benefit from the products of earth forming seismic events and have the ability to exploit and become rich on the resulting mineral wealth, an alternative question might be, 'Should we not also use that ability and intelligence to look after our planet as God intended, to conserve its resources, build disaster proof settlements, and locate them in less dangerous areas?'

Just like the Japanese fishermen in *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (see introduction), who knew the risks of fishing in the huge waves, and turned their boats to ride the wave, governments can weigh the risks and make decisions about whether it is wise to locate settlements at sea level, or in river flood plains, or build dams and reservoirs above settlements, and locate nuclear power installations on fault lines or in earthquake zones.

It seems that God created an amazing universe into which he placed human beings. We surely have the responsibility to

care for each other and this amazing world, and not take it for granted or use its resources irresponsibly.

Reflection

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Professor Brian Cox, having explored the wonders of the solar system, said at the end of his TV series *Wonders of the Solar System* in 2010, "I suppose it is a miracle that we exist at all!"

Prayer

Great God, when events like this happen, we are overawed by the incredible forces and power which formed our world. We are humbled by the forces of the natural world that you created. Yet we believe that you created people to take care of this world, and that you love them.

Today, we pray for the people of Japan:

- Bring comfort to each person in fear and distress, and to those who mourn.
- Give courage, strength and perseverance to those working to rescue people and restore some degree of normal life.
- Give knowledge and wisdom to national and world leaders working to solve the ongoing problems.
- Give hope to replace fear in people's hearts and courage to face the future.

Amen

Keywords

Japan	Earthquake
Tsunami	Radiation leak
Human disaster	Natural disaster