



Tsunami Hits Sumatran Coast Set 14 (509 words)

A recount: written by Angela Weeks and illustrated by Dick Weigall

Special words

Christmas, Indonesia, tsunami, Aceh, minutes, half, two, their, roar, towards, who, fruits, woman, carried, building, mosque, through, bodies, were

In 2004, three days after Christmas, Dan, a press photographer, left for Indonesia to report on the devastating tsunami that had just hit the northern tip of Sumatra. Dan's translator on this trip was Amat, who met him at Jakarta airport. Together, they flew to Banda Aceh and the next day, they drove to the coast.

Dan was horrified by what he saw. Entire villages and towns had been reduced to rubble, the wreckage piled metres high, as if a bomb had landed there. The only people to be seen were volunteers looking for corpses and locals hoping to find remnants of the life they once knew.

Witnesses told Dan that as the tsunami approached, water was first dragged hundreds of metres back from the shore, stranding fish and boats on the sand. Then about five minutes later, a wall of water, travelling at high speed and rising to thirty-five metres, hit the beach. The first wave was followed within half an hour by two more huge waves. Water rushed inland, extending as far as five kilometres across low-lying land sweeping away almost everything in its path. People were drowned as they tried to reach higher ground, and others trapped in their homes or on the beach. Witnesses compared the sound of the tsunami to three freight trains or the roar of a jet.

Amidst the horror, there were tales of survival: the fisherman who turned his boat into the giant waves, while those who steered away died; and the young woman who was dragged out to sea by the retreating waters of the tsunami and survived for five days by clinging onto a sago palm and eating its fruits and bark. Although she saw several sharks, they didn't attack her.

Another woman grabbed a floating wooden beam as she was being carried by the turbulent water. Others clung to trees, and a baby was found alive on her mattress, floating amidst the remains of her home. A 20-year old man drifted for eight days. He was rescued by a container vessel about 180 kilometres from his home in Banda Aceh, clinging onto a floating tree trunk, frantically waving for help. He was sunburnt, dehydrated and starving and had survived on rainwater and coconuts.

In contrast to the large number of people who died, few animal bodies were found after the tsunami. Locals reported that both wild and domestic animals fled to higher ground before the tsunami arrived. They seemed to know that disaster was imminent.

The only building in Banda Aceh that withstood the tsunami was the mosque where many people took refuge. They were crammed together on the roof for hours, their numbers increasing as people were pulled out of the swirling water as it rushed past.

They say that a picture tells a thousand words and Dan hoped that his photographs would bring home to the world the terrible plight of the people of Aceh and their desperate need for help, lots of help, to support the province through the long process of recovery and rebuilding.

Questions

After reading the text, or the relevant page, ask students one or more of the following questions. If students are working in pairs, alternate Partner 1, then Partner 2.

- How do you think you would have felt if you had arrived at the scene of the tsunami just days after it happened?
- What is a tsunami? Find out what happens when a tsunami hits land.
- How did Dan feel when he saw the effects of the tsunami?
- Describe the method that one of the survivors used to stay alive?
- Why were very few dead animals found?
- Why did the number of people on the roof of the mosque get bigger and bigger?
- What did Dan hope to achieve through his photos?
- Describe a disaster that you have heard about or seen on television
- Find Banda Aceh on a map of Indonesia.
- Choose 3 of the following words and phrases and ask the student/s what they mean: the long process of recovery and rebuilding, devastating, entire, volunteer, horrified, wreckage, entire, corpse, remnants, rubble, freight, survival, retreating, turbulent, dehydrated, refuge, imminent, frantically, plight.