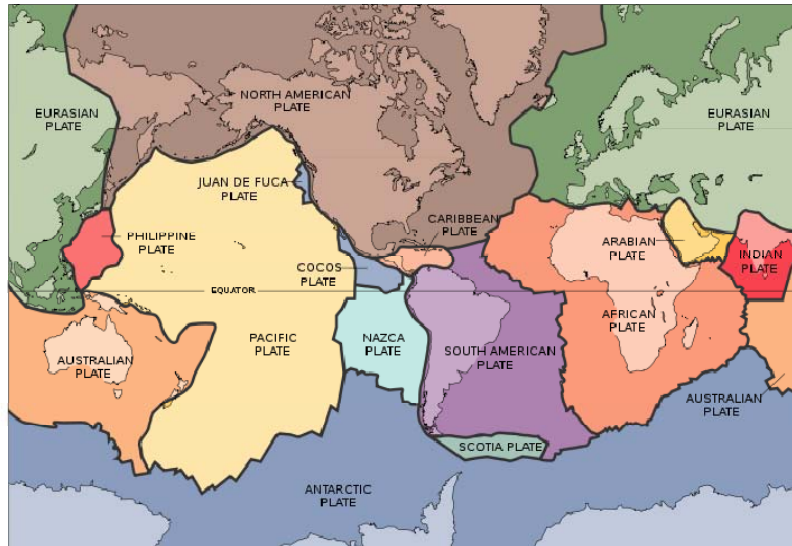


The Day the Earth Shook

By A.P. Raj



Hideki always thought of the ground as being solid. The earth was the earth—no one could move it. Even the biggest machines, like tractors and tanks, couldn't do that. You might hear a rumbling sound in a car, but that was the sound of the car, not the ground. The ground was so solid that Hideki had heard his dad talking to a friend about a business once, saying it was "as solid as the earth under your feet." How could anything be more solid than that?

But it turned out that the ground was not as solid as Hideki thought. One day, when he was in math class, he looked away from Mr. Humphrey and noticed a picture on the wall was rattling. It was a drawing of three types of triangles. Now all the triangles were dancing around. Hideki would have thought that was funny, but a moment later he felt the floor rumbling. He looked around at his classmates, and he could tell by their faces that they had felt it too.

Mr. Humphrey stopped drawing on the chalkboard in the middle of a long division problem. Hideki thought he looked scared.

"Students! Do you remember our disaster-preparedness drill?" Everyone nodded, and Hideki did too. "Good!" Mr. Humphrey said. "Everybody get under your desk! Drop, cover, and hold on!"

Hideki dropped down underneath his desk and huddled up with his hands behind his neck, just like he had practiced a hundred times. Soon the whole classroom was shaking, hard. Hideki could hear pencils and notebooks falling onto the floor. Some of his classmates were crying. He had never been so scared in his whole life.

Soon the shaking stopped. Hideki looked at his watch and saw it had only been one minute. But it had felt like an hour.

Mr. Humphrey had the pupils wait under their desk for a few more minutes. Soon after that, Principal Wechsler's voice came on over the speaker and announced classes were cancelled for the rest of the day. Principal Wechsler explained that it was safer to wait until it was certain there would be no "aftershocks."

Hideki's mom came and picked him up from school, and they went home. While they were driving home, Hideki asked his mom what an "aftershock" was.

"You should ask your sister," his mom said. "She's studying seismology at college."

That night, at dinner, Hideki asked his sister about it. She patted him on the head, which he always hated, and said he was getting ahead of himself.

"Don't you want to know what an earthquake is first, silly?" she asked.

"Okay," he said. "What's an earthquake?"

"An earthquake is what happened at your school today. And not just in your school, but all over town. It's when the ground starts shaking. It can be very dangerous, but luckily nobody was hurt today."

"But why does it happen?" Hideki asked, between bites of his sandwich.

"Well here, I'll show you," his sister said. She took a plate, put it in the center of the table, and poured some tortilla chips onto it. Then she took some of the chips and broke them into smaller pieces, putting them on top of the bigger chips.

“Do you know what a continent is?” she asked.

Hideki did know. “North America is a continent—a big mass of land connected together,” he said.

“Good! Then pretend these smaller chips on top are continents. The continents are on top of bigger plates of earth under the ocean, called ‘tectonic plates’.”

“What does ‘tectonic’ mean?” Hideki asked.

“It has to do with building,” she said. “Anyway, these tectonic plates are always moving, drifting by each other very, very slowly.”

Hideki thought he understood. “So they slide past each other sometimes or run into each other?”

“Exactly!” his sister said. “When they run into each other head-on, that’s how we get mountains. But when they slide past each other—”

“It can make an earthquake,” Hideki said.

“Right!” she said, and patted his head again. Hideki scowled at her, then grabbed one of the big chips and crunched it in his mouth.

“If it’s so dangerous, why don’t we do anything to stop it?” Hideki said, after a little while.

“Well, we can’t really do anything to stop it entirely,” his sister said. “That’s just how the earth works. But we can build buildings that are made to be strong when it happens, like your school.”

Hideki thought that was pretty scary. And next time he heard someone say something was “as solid as the ground under your feet,” he would know better.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What turns out not to be as solid as Hideki thought?

- A his feet
- B the ground
- C a chalkboard
- D an earthquake

2. What is the main event in the story?

- A Hideki getting picked up from school by his mom
- B Hideki getting upset when his sister pats him on the head
- C Hideki's dad telling a friend that a business is "as solid as the earth under your feet"
- D an earthquake that happens while Hideki is in class

3. The ground does not always stay still, as Hideki believed.

What evidence from the story supports this statement?

- A The ground shakes during an earthquake.
- B Hideki's dad tells a friend that a business is "as solid as the earth under your feet."
- C Mr. Humphrey asks his students whether they remember their disaster-preparedness drill.
- D Hideki's sister pats him on the head.

4. How do Hideki and his classmates respond to the earthquake?

- A They are so used to earthquakes that they do not even notice it happening.
- B They are so scared that they run outside of the school into the street.
- C They are scared but take cover in the way that they are supposed to.
- D They are scared by the earthquake at first but decide to ignore it after thirty seconds.

5. What is this story mainly about?

- A a math teacher who tells his students what to do during an earthquake
- B a young woman studying seismology in college
- C a boy who experiences an earthquake and learns about earthquakes
- D a business that turns out not be a solid as someone says it is

6. Read the following sentences: "One day, when he was in math class, he looked away from Mr. Humphrey and noticed a picture on the wall was rattling. It was a drawing of three types of triangles. Now all **the triangles were dancing around.**"

What does the author mean by writing that "**the triangles were dancing around**"?

- A The picture fell off the wall and hit the floor.
- B The picture was shaking so much that the triangles appeared to be moving.
- C There was music playing in the room, and it looked like the triangles were moving to it.
- D The picture was actually a screen playing a cartoon of dancing triangles.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Hideki learns what an earthquake is _____ he lives through one.

- A after
- B before
- C although
- D consequently

8. Why does Hideki think of the ground as solid at the beginning of the story? Support your answer with evidence from the passage.

9. What does Hideki learn about the cause of earthquakes from his sister?

10. Does Hideki still think of the ground as being solid at the end of the story? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the passage.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 680

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8. Why does Hideki think of the ground as solid at the beginning of the story? Support your answer with evidence from the passage.

Suggested answer: Answers should include at least one piece of evidence from the story. For example, students may respond that the ground seems solid to Hideki because big machines like tractors and tanks cannot move it.

9. What does Hideki learn about the cause of earthquakes from his sister?

Suggested answer: Answers may vary but should mention the connection between sliding tectonic plates and the occurrence of earthquakes.

10. Does Hideki still think of the ground as being solid at the end of the story? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the passage.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, though all should recognize that Hideki no longer thinks of the ground as solid. Students may cite the explanation of earthquakes that he receives from his sister as a reason for this change in belief. They may also cite the earthquake he lived through as a reason.