

A close-up photograph of a child's drawing on a piece of paper. The drawing depicts a tsunami with large, horizontal, textured strokes of blue and red. A hand with dark skin is pointing towards the drawing. The background shows more of the drawing, including a yellow sun and green trees.

# *Children Speak: Tsunami*

By Arlene R. Atherton.



December 26th, 2004 at 7:58:49 am local time, a 9.3 earthquake, rupturing a fault 808 miles long (1,300 km) in the Indian Ocean, created a wave 6.2 miles (10km) long, and 100 feet high (30 meters) resulting in the largest Tsunami recorded in history.

This natural disaster claimed 182,340 lives, 129,097 reported missing, and 2,078,591 displaced people in 11 countries. Tsunami of this scale occurs very rarely maybe once every 200-400 years.

The International Humanitarian Aid born only 140 years ago with the founding of the International Red Cross delivered emergency response from agencies around the world to the largest number of countries from a single disaster.

## Children's Drawing and Culture

Children Speak: Tsunami is a collection of children's drawings from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and, Thailand that tells us a story not possible by film, or photography.

The variance in the drawings show geological phenomena previously not reported. Geological studies and simulations support the original observations of the children: a natural phenomena of a receding wave in Thailand, and towering waves in Banda Aceh and Sri Lanka. The color of the water tells us the degree of force by the wave along the bottom of the ocean. And, the children's drawings remain the only recording of whirlpools from Tsunami.

Beyond history, what does looking at these drawings do for us?

### Drawing, Culture, and Globalization

The act of drawing itself varies when people draw the same subject. It is clear that from very early ages our perception, and ability to see is shaped by several factors: our surroundings, visual habits, cultural stylistic norms of image, and our mode of language structure. Language is our framework to organize how to express what we want to say.

*Moreover, through the innocence of a child's hand that draws a picture, these works teach us that as humanity we share the same dreams, desires, and fears in life; yet they also show how we describe differently through the lens of culture, a common event. In this age of globalization, the preservation of heritage is a key concern. The children share how they see their world, the nearness of friends and family, and comfort in their spiritual life.*

### "Draw Me a Picture..."

The simple words 'draw me a picture' yielded some amazing recollections of this event. An open-ended question allows the children to chose their strongest impression; without the instructions of "Where were you?" or "What happened to your family", or "How did you feel". I just asked 'Draw me a picture about Tsunami'. Left to interpret it their own way, they drew what was important to them.



*Sense of Time* - The timelessness is a sense of 'no beginning - no end'. The early Buddhist Art shows symbols floating in space near each other; the objects do not interact or overlap; they are not sequenced; they occupy simultaneous space... future, present, and past - Eternity.

Many of the drawings in Sri Lanka use this mode - as an attempt to explain numerous events happening at once. Several objects occupy the canvas, yet they do not interact. These objects are not organized according to a visual line in a composition, but in the mental vision of memory, so all events are happening at the same time.

Rather than the 'Timelessness' of Sri Lanka, Thailand's simultaneity is separate events sharing the same canvas. The elements go together and do interact, but they are not in the same time period.

This makes the Thailand drawing a bit perplexing to a western viewer trying to comprehend a scene. The drawing is actually different slices of time. The single page has more than one event, like overlapping frames.



The children are also accustomed to seeing a visual representation for several ideas in one image or model. This multi-face Buddha demonstrates an attribute for every face - together you see all of virtues of Buddha. The viewer knows this is not a literal view of a physical appearance.

This adds to their natural mode of putting many events in one composition. Here we see separate three time periods, yet the elements interact.

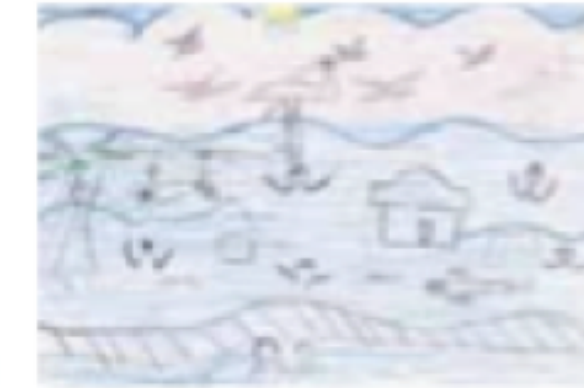


## Drawing Subject

### *Sri Lanka*

The subject matter chosen by the children focus on three areas: the flooding, the train, and helicopters. The impact of the wave itself was not a key image in their memory. The ongoingness of the water flooding the village was the point of destruction.

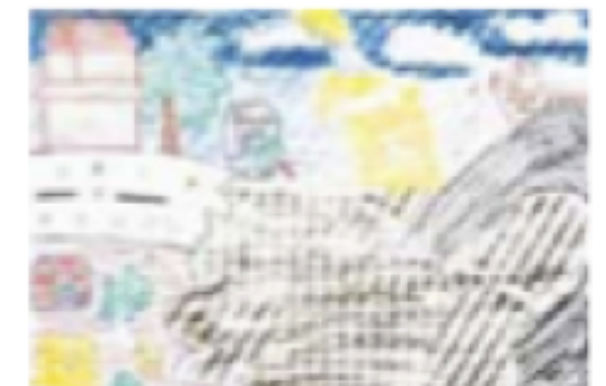
The Train from Colombo to Telwatha was over-turned by the Tsunami wave, claiming over 1000 souls. Passengers traveling by train are known to ride inside the carriage, on top of the roof, and holding onto the sides near the stairway.



### *Indonesia*

Scenes of flight are key signifiers representing the impact of trauma, congested roads, and the numbers of people seeking to escape.

Subject is not as significant as timing - Indonesia Children are focused on 'the Moment the wave strikes the land.' One Large wave the color BLACK. All scenes drawn are of their community, the drawings take in as much of their 'world' they can fit on a piece of paper.



### *Thailand*

Of significance to Thailand is the fish and sealife deposited on the beach from fast receding water. The children had all lost their homes and were moved to DP camps (displaced persons). It not surprising they would often draw their home or what happened to their home.





The Sri Lanka Children often show the viewpoint from the beach. The entire island is surrounded by coastline of sandy beaches, no cliffs, few rocks, no mountains, or hills until the center of the island - the shoreline is flat. Therefore, the flow of the water extended inland for 2 miles with a wave height of 5ft., with few natural obstacles to stop the water, or prevent it from channeling to one area. It had the effect of sweeping over the island as a gigantic flood.



Persons Killed: 35,322  
Persons Injured: 21,441  
Persons Displaced: 516,150

Value of Property Damage:  
900 Million US dollars

The Tsunami Wave traveled 1000 km from its epicenter. It was reported to be 5-foot high, and reached 3-4 km inland.

### *Sri Lank Style - All Over*

The most common style of composition is an "all-over", meaning using all the display space of the canvas.

The children use an aerial view to help them explain the perspective of flooding over a vast area.

These drawings often have little or no horizon line.

Children draw two waves - a small one first, and big one coming second.

Whatever was knocked loose with the first wave was washed away by the second larger wave. The water is BLUE and clear.



The Buddhist caves of Dambullala:  
This style of visual representation depicts an interior experience.

# *Sri Lanka*

### *Sri Lanka Style - Drawing people*

Sri Lanka is the only location to draw full figure for people. Sri Lanka is an intimate life in terms of relationship, each one must depend on the others, with a social fabric rich in conduct to acknowledge your value, and place in society. A casual greeting is 'ayeboan' meaning, "may you have long life", "I recognize your spirit, and continuity in the world" spoken with hands pressed together and small bow. The origins are "namaste" Sanskrit of Buddhism.

Sri Lanka children bow to their teacher at the end of the day, then kneel at her feet in appreciation of receiving the gift of learning.



M. Pradeep Kumara  
Grade 11  
Pinasatta Maha  
Vidyalaya School

*The most sophisticated drawing in the group is a watercolor - each child chose their own materials to draw. The addition of twist and curves emphasizes the power of the destruction. An Astounding chronicle of the train wreck near the school.*

*This young child is attempting the same scene. Note the spatial arrangement and location of the water are the same. Only their young age prevents them from fully articulating their experience, unable to draw details in the forms. Yet, the power remains in the drawing for this young child.*





Public School #17



Persons Killed: 168,340  
 Persons Missing: 116,000  
 Persons Displaced: 417,124

Value of Property Damage:  
 900 Million US dollars

The Tsunami Wave epicenter 90 miles (160 km) from west coast of Sumatra. In the ocean depths the surface water height changed by as little as 30 centimeters. 40 minutes later it reached the shore, the Tsunami was reported to be 90 ft high, and reached 5-6 km inland.



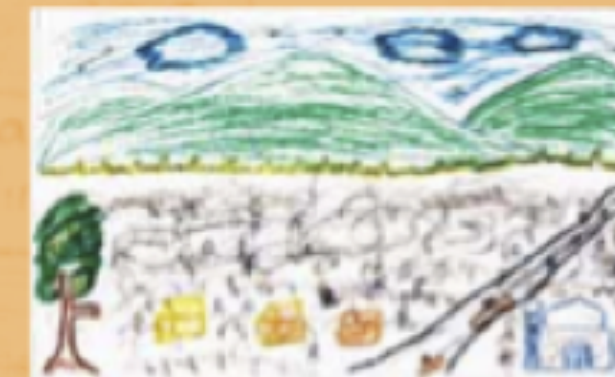
## Banda Aceh, Indonesia

Banda Aceh is 90 miles southwest from the epicenter of the 9.3 quake that generate the Tsunami.

Flying over the area you quickly see a geography that accelerates the disaster.

Here we see a variety of viewpoints. The harbor is ringed by hills. The mouth of the bay caught the water, and channeled it into the city, where two to three story buildings further propelled the water along the streets.

It was Sunday on the day of Tsunami. The children of Public School No. #17 live in a variety of locations; some in the city of Banda Aceh itself, others in mountain villages with a birds-eye view, while a few live at the beachside with surrounding hills to escape. Their own school six km inland was flooded leaving watermarks five feet high, sweeping away desks, blackboards, chairs and cabinets.



# Indonesia

## Indonesia Style Feature - Scale & Sound

Paramount in the Indonesian drawings is SCALE. People are tiny, represented by tiny stick-figures. Only a few drawings show an entire face.

Keeping perspective they are smaller than other objects.

There are no scenes of rescue operation in Banda Aceh: no helicopters, no military. The children most often draw the moment of the wave's descent. (The military base located near the center of the city was compromised during the disaster.)

The Indonesia drawings are the only ones to indicate SOUND.

The voice of those around them.





Yusnidar  
Grade III  
Banda Aceh School #17

*This image is one of the most riveting of the collection, demonstrating a feature unique to the Indonesian children's drawing - the description of sound. The ability to distinguish the voice of those they love because a primary memory.*

*Why only in Banda Aceh do the children draw the calls for help? Gathering for prayer five times a day gives you an ability to know your sister is three persons away, your auntie in the back rows. You know their voice.*

*The process of the recitation of the Koran is an intricate articulation of tones and pronunciation. Training the ear to nuances and subtleties teaches them to distinguish sound.*

*This drawing shows the speech in three languages, the prayer language of Islam, English, and Acehenese; further there is the sound of an infant crying. This makes the action of those who are struggling all the more poignant.*





Persons Killed: 5,395  
 Persons Missing: 4,449  
 Persons Displaced: 60,340

Thailand is 500 miles from the epicenter of the Tsunami, Wave height reported at 30 ft (1/3 the height of Banda Aceh) traveling at speeds of 25 -45 mph, and reaching 1 km inland.



## Khao Lak, Thailand

Thailand's Coastline varies so pockets were affected based on the shoreline and elevation. The village of Khao Lak had the greatest loss of life, approx. 4000 of the over 5,400 persons were lost on their shores. The land is a gradually rising sandy beach going upward to the hills. A natural break was the highway. Looking to the west devastation and east the buildings were somewhat intact. The village of Khao Lak supports both tourism and fishing.

Though it is a beach area like Sri Lanka, you will find the topography different. The palm leaves are a single leaf with serrated edges as compared to Sri Lanka multiple fronds.

# Thailand

While both have similar beaches ... the depicting of flooding was prominent in Sri Lanka, while in Thailand - the depiction of three wave fronts are emblematic.

The rooftops of the houses are palm thatch, not corrugated tin of Sri Lanka, or clay tile of Banda Ache.

It is the only location that shows objects in the wave when it first arrives to the shore (people, trees, cars, TVs, furniture).





## Geological phenomena of Thai Tsunami

Aspects unique to Thailand are the drawing of 'Whirlpools'; this occurs when a sudden inflow of water encounters and outflow of water.



When one factors the three incoming waves entering and receding, it is understandable that the 'whirlpool' effect could be produced.

Thailand is the only area where the Tsunami onset is by a receding wave; thus, the frequent drawing of fish and sealife. The distance from the epicenter and depth of the sea made the water BROWN.

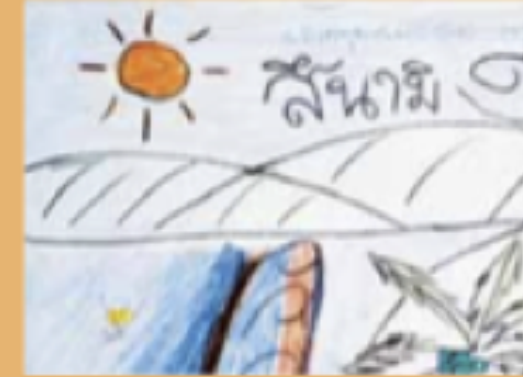


## Thai Style of Drawing

*Thai Style of Drawing - Color, Negative space, time*  
Thailand shows a different style of perception, in time, composition, and use of color. It is the only location where children chose to draw in a single color, as an illustration. Though they had options to chose many coloring tools: color pencils, pastels, color markers, crayons, the children often chose one item focusing on one or fewer colors. Color is used more as accent or signifier rather than "fill in" for a shape.

Thailand use of negative space: "White space", negative space, also called discursive space, is used more often than the other two countries.

The emphasis is on a minimal articulation of objects, relying more upon a person's imagination to "fill in" the idea. The value in 'white space' representing some form of mass combined with 'line', as suggested by the 'blue outline' indicates WATER..



## Line and Writing

Line drawn objects have similar shapes to the writing in their language. If you look at the wave-tops of the water they follow the same curves dimensions as their handwriting. Similar love for that shape is in the clouds.

## Sense of Time

Western view of image is that it's a snapshot of "time" Asian image can represent multiple time periods on one canvas.

Asia visual history shows a visual description of different time periods. The art history term is 'conflation'. Objects repeated such as the main character appearing more than once on the same canvas. The Western perception would divide the events by time and place and put each event on a separate page or frame.



*Conflation - king appears in two scenes on one canvas.*



Water shows the wave arriving, while the beach shows the wave after it departed

## Composition vs. Reality

In all the Thai drawings there is a sense of contrast in action, somewhat confusing to western eyes. Objects and people underwater are shown by overlapping lines, or near each other both shapes visible as opposed to "disappearing" the background object in a western perspective.

The Tsunami scenes contrast with gentle clouds and birds, and the ever-present RED sun is a reminder that legend is informed on reality. Just as those who escaped the Tsunami wave recalled the stories told to them by grandparents and elders, when you see fish thrown on the sand - Run to the hills.



Chaius Klatala  
Age 8

One of the uncanny drawings representing Thai Style of drawing and visual memory recording. Open space allows the mind's imagination to "fill in" the scene.

Visual Memory shows Time suspended in three intervals:

- 1) A boat is toppled by the wave, it rides on the underside of the curl;
- 2) A rescue helicopter extends a ladder denoted in blue to tell you it represents "sky". This ladder reaches those thrown from the boat;
- 3) the descent of the wave onto the beach, throwing sea life that was captured from the bottom of the ocean floor.

The sea life occupies the child's attention, and so it is "large" to show significance. The Red of the wave does not necessarily mean 'anger or danger' as in the Western interpretation. For the most part, it is an extension of the use of a single color in the drawing - and Red is a favorite color in Asia.





## Mission Statement

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### **Who We Are:**

Children Speak: Tsunami is a non-profit organization founded under a concept of "ninja philanthropy"; meaning it does not aim to provide ongoing operations or charitable services. It has no religious affiliation or corporate or economic organization to promote. It has no staff, no leased offices, no advertising, and no full time fund raising organization. The primary volunteers are Arlene R. Atherton and her friends. We are a 100% volunteer organization.

### **Our Purpose:**

We want to bring the awareness that children experience trauma, and can articulate it well to others. They speak the truth. Our purpose is to support the continuance of education of children in elementary school to high school level education.

All copyrights for the videos have been given up by the artists and organizations to promote the USA NGOs who provided aid in the S.E. Asia Disaster. Atherton created a special tribute to President Bill Clinton, special envoy to the S.E. Asia Tsunami Relief, and President George W. H. Bush who formed a bipartisan effort to bring aid to the survivors affected by the Tsunami. The videos will be used for education of the Tsunami, and memorial services.

### **The Book:**

The economies of these areas are so affected; although their lives have been spared the impact will remain in history. We wish to honor the children who drew the drawings.