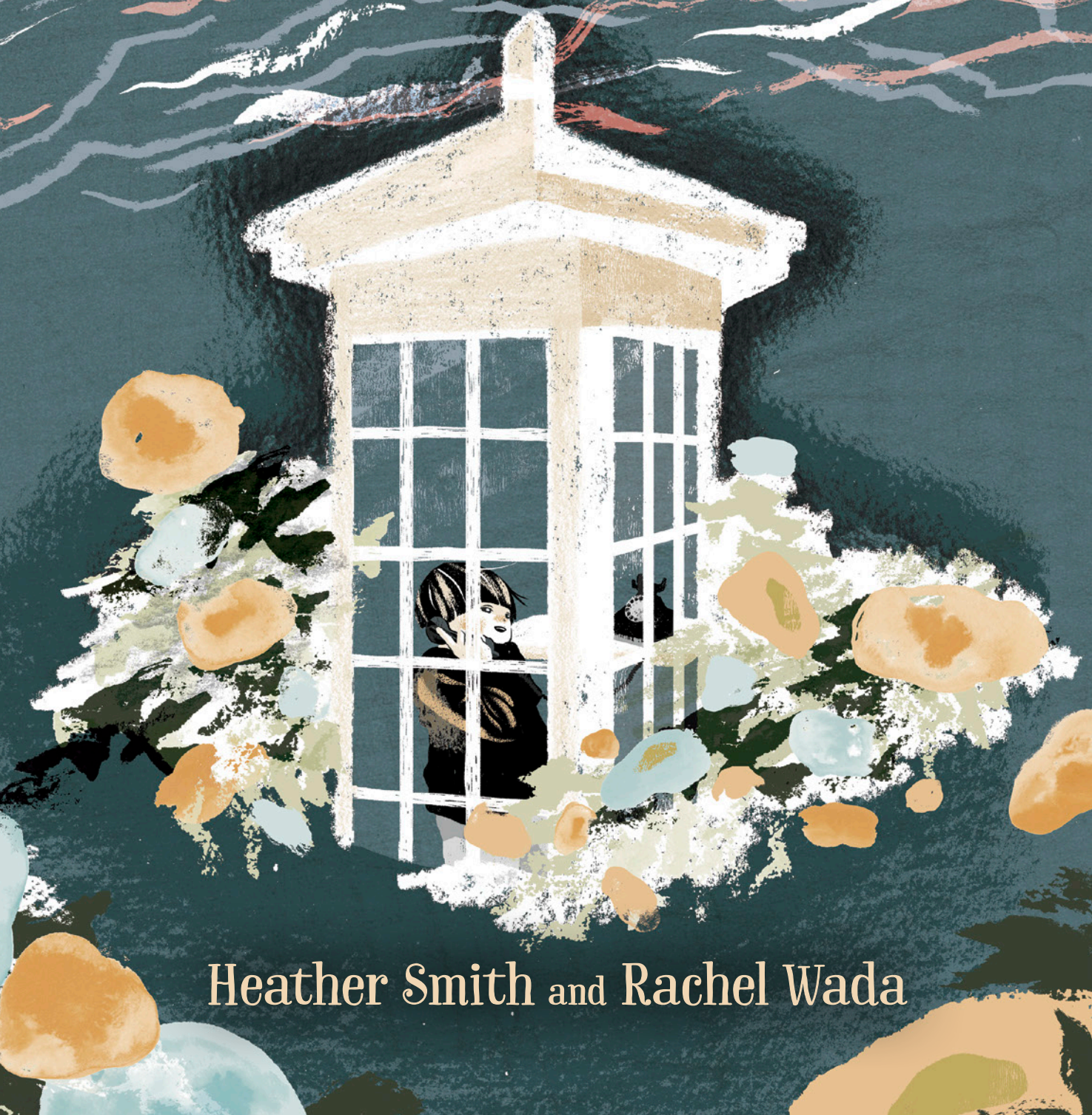


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The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden



Heather Smith and Rachel Wada

Everyone lost someone the day the big wave came.

When the tsunami destroyed Makio's village, Makio lost his father. Sadly, he was not alone. Everyone lost someone the day the big wave came. With the villagers silenced by grief, Makio's anger at the ocean grows. Then one day his neighbor, Mr. Hirota, starts a mysterious project that helps the villagers heal. How? Mr. Hirota has built a phone booth on a hill, giving Makio and the villagers the chance to say goodbye to their loved ones. The phone might not be hooked up to any wires, but words are carried through the wind. Inspired by a true story, *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden* is an honest and touching story of grief and recovery.



Originally from Newfoundland, **HEATHER SMITH**, award-winning author of *The Agony of Bun Okeefe*, now lives in Waterloo, Ontario, with her family. *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden* was inspired after Heather heard a podcast on NPR and felt stirred to write about the phone in a way that would reach younger audiences. Smith was struck by how beautiful the story was, despite the devastation and sadness, and how a simple object—a disconnected phone—could help a village heal.



RACHEL WADA is a freelance illustrator whose work is defined by heavy texture, bold color and intricate detail. To pay homage to this book's Japanese roots, Wada combined traditional Japanese art forms and techniques such as sumi-e and calligraphy with her own personal twist, referencing Japanese children's books, traditional woodblock prints and photos from the time of the 2011 disaster to inform her illustrations. Her identity as Japanese-Cantonese, an immigrant and a woman informs her artistic practice, and she has a special love for the ocean, tea and noodles of all kinds. Rachel lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

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The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden

Heather Smith

illustrated by
Rachel Wada

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EVERY MORNING Makio visited his neighbor, Mr. Hirota. Together they sat at the edge of his garden, looking down at the small figures on the harbor. They made a game of spotting Makio's dad as he unloaded the morning catch, and Mr. Hirota's daughter, Fumika, as she cleaned and gutted the fish.


"I see them!" Makio would say.

Mr. Hirota would laugh. "You win again, Makio."

It was one of their favorite games.

They were playing it when the shaking started and the big wave came.

FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES

An illustration of a man and a young boy standing by the ocean. The man, on the right, has a white beard and is wearing a dark blue robe with a white headband. He is looking towards the ocean with a gentle expression. The boy, on the left, has dark hair and is wearing a dark blue robe. He is holding a long, dark, curved object, possibly a fishing rod or a branch, and has his hand near his face as if listening intently. The background shows the ocean with stylized waves in shades of blue and green, and dark, silhouetted branches or seaweed in the foreground.

Makio's father loved the ocean. He'd say, "Listen, Makio,
the ocean is saying good morning."

The lapping waves would whisper:

O-hi-o.

O-hi-o.

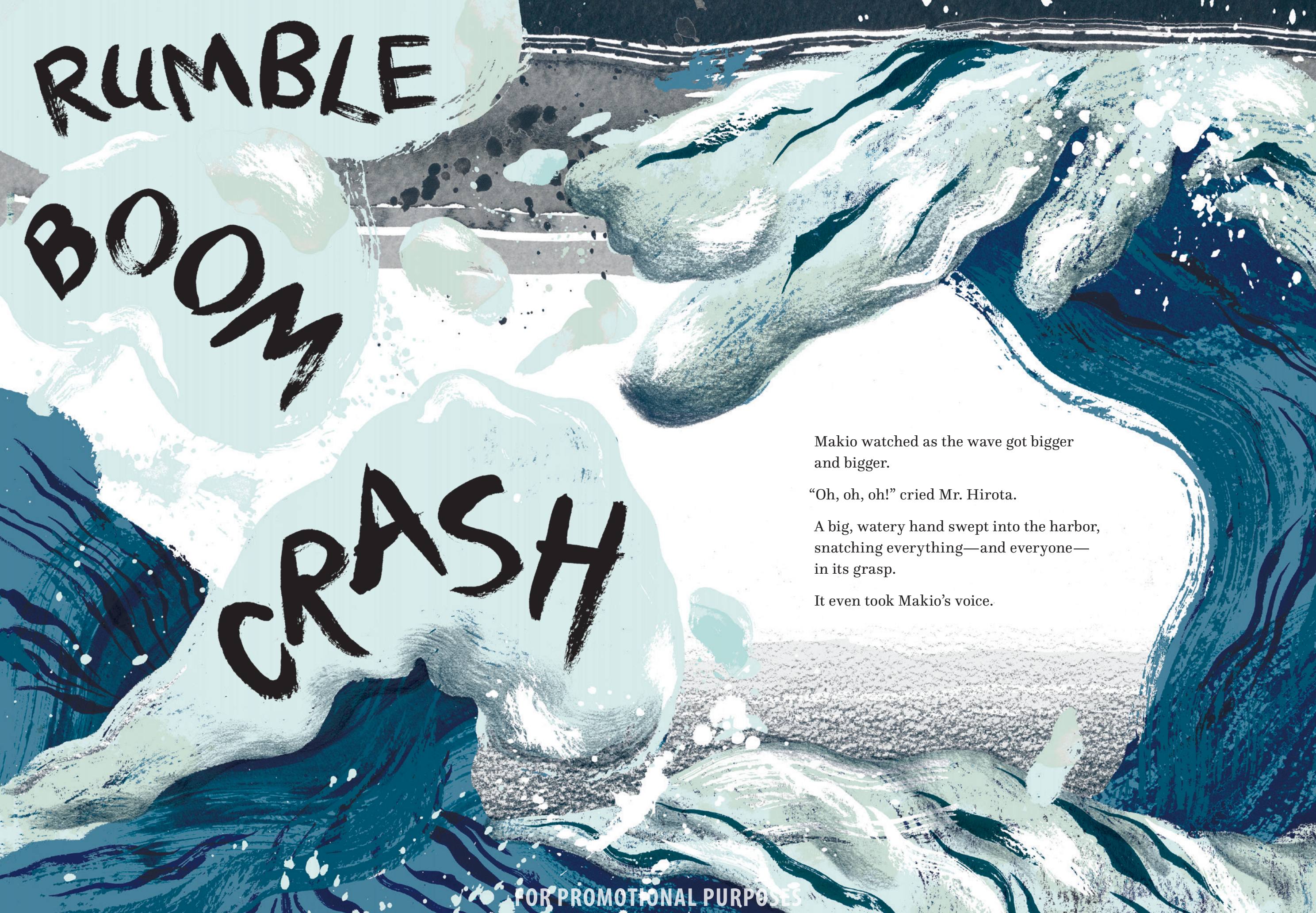
O-hi-o.

Makio always returned the greeting.

Ohayo gozaimasu, ocean.

But on the day the big wave came, the ocean didn't whisper.

It roared.



RUMBLE

BOOM

CRASH

Makio watched as the wave got bigger and bigger.

“Oh, oh, oh!” cried Mr. Hirota.

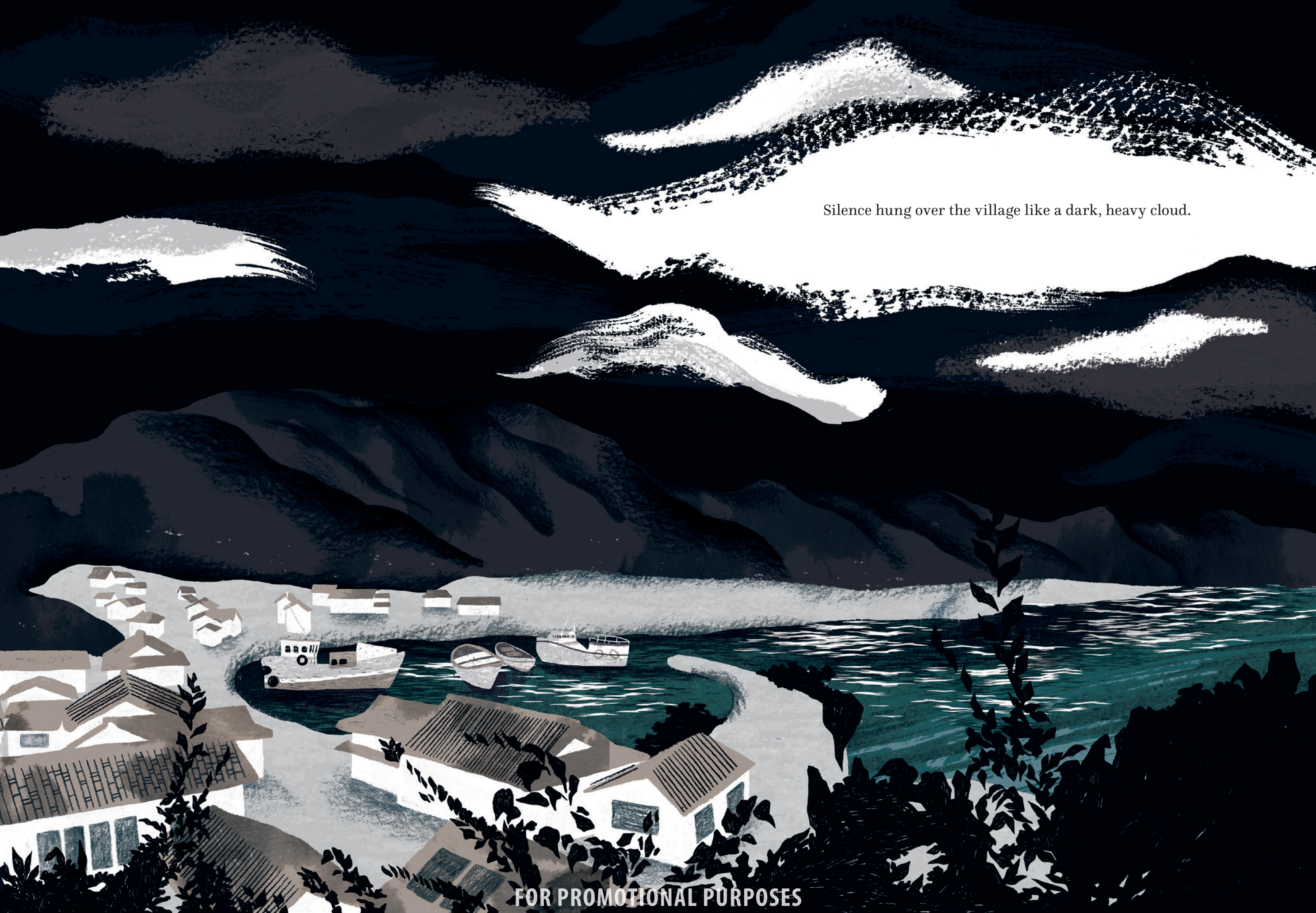
A big, watery hand swept into the harbor, snatching everything—and everyone—in its grasp.

It even took Makio’s voice.



Everyone lost someone the day the big wave came.

FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES



Silence hung over the village like a dark, heavy cloud.

FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES



Then one day:

Rat-tat-tat.


Rrr-rrr-rr.

Thump, thump, thump.

Makio watched from his window.

Mr. Hirota was building something.

But what?



It was a phone booth, painted white and with many panes of glass.

Mr. Hirota went inside.

His voice floated out.

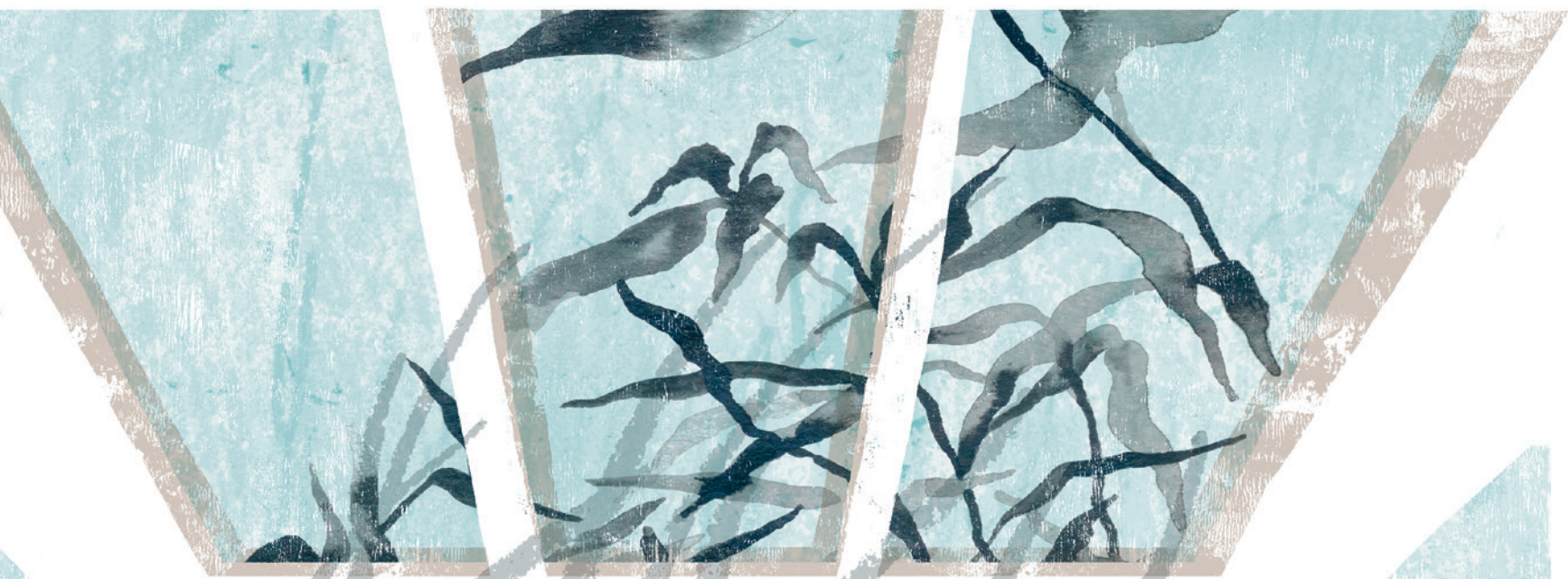
Fumika? It's your father. I miss you.

Makio was confused.

Fumika had been snatched by the ocean.

Just like Makio's dad.

FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES



When Mr. Hirota left the booth, Makio crept inside.

An old-fashioned phone sat on a table.

It had no plugs or wires.

It was a phone connected to nowhere.

FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES





Mr. Hirota visited his phone booth every day.

Soon the other villagers did too.

Their voices floated on the wind.

Hello, cousin. Today I fixed the boat. I will fish again soon.

Hello, Mom. I planted a tree for you today. A maple. Your favorite.

Sister, how are you? I rode your bike today. It fits me now.

Hello, my love. I painted our bedroom your favorite shade of blue.

FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES



Makio went down to the harbor.

For the first time since the big wave came, he used his voice.

He screamed at the ocean.

“Bring our people back!”

The waves lapped gently.

O-hi-o.

O-hi-o.

O-hi-o.

Makio sighed and looked up.

Mr. Hirota’s phone booth sat high on the hill like a lighthouse.

FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES



FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES



The climb back up the hill was tiring.
Makio was hot and sweaty.
The phone felt cool in his hand.

FOR PROMOTIONAL PURPOSES



Dad?
It's me.
Can you hear me?
I yelled at the ocean.
It said good morning anyway.

Guess what?
I did really well on my math test.
The cherry blossoms are in full bloom. Everything's pink!
Mom painted your room your favorite shade of blue.





I miss you, Dad.



Every morning Makio looks down at the harbor.

When the ocean says good morning, Makio thinks of his dad. Someday he'll return the greeting. But for now he makes a game of spotting Mr. Hirota from high on the hill.

"I see you!" Makio calls.

Mr. Hirota smiles and waves.

It's one of their favorite games.

Author's Note

After the death of his cousin in 2010, a man named Itaru Sasaki built a phone booth in his garden as a way to deal with his grief. Although the phone was disconnected, Sasaki believed his words rode the wind to his loved one. A year later, when a tsunami

struck his coastal town of Otsuchi, thousands of mourners flocked to the phone booth, longing to connect to their missing loved ones. When I heard the story of Itaru Sasaki's "phone of the wind," I was struck by the beauty of how a simple object—a disconnected phone—could help a grieving community heal. It was this sense of hope and resilience that inspired me to fictionalize the story for a young audience. I hope that, like Makio, readers will see that sometimes in sadness there is beauty. In this case, it is found within the walls of Mr. Hirota's phone booth.



To Itaru Sasaki

—H.S.

*To Dad, resilient and strong like the waves.
And to Mom, whose love runs oceans deep.*

—R.W.

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Summary: This gorgeously illustrated picture book tells the story of a young Japanese boy who loses his dad in a tsunami.

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Inspired by traditional Japanese techniques, the artwork was created using watercolors, black ink and pencils, and assembled digitally.

Photograph of Itaru Sasaki's phone booth by Alessia Cerantola/BBC
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