

The Boy Who Saved Holland

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Shikha and Aafje are pen friends. Recently Shikha had written to Aafje about her country, Nepal, which is located in the high Himalayas. Here is Aafje's reply:

Dear Shikha,

Just as you are surprised to hear about my country, I too am surprised to hear that people can live on such high mountains in your country. My country is called the Nether (low) + lands because a large portion of our land is located below sea level. We are often called Holland as well.

It should be difficult to live in a country where over 20% of land is below sea level, but our ancestors worked hard for many centuries to hold back the North Sea. They slowly pushed back the water by building dams and embankments called *dikes*. We also use canals, windmills and pumps to drain the land and keep it dry. In fact I live in Flevoland, a province which was once a part of the North Sea. But today we have beautiful farms, towns and cities here. And there are tulips everywhere!

Thank you for the invitation. I will definitely visit Nepal in March to enjoy Holi and see the mountains. Do plan a visit to my country too.

Love,
Aafje

Aafje has sent some pictures to Shikha. Read her email carefully and name what the pictures show by using words from the mail.



Every nation has its own myths and legends. You are going to read one famous legend about a little Dutch boy.

Hendrik would be ten years old in ten months. All his life he had heard about the dykes¹. He knew that a big part of Holland, his homeland, lay below the level of the sea, and the only things that protected it from being flooded were the dunes² and dykes. The dykes, which were made by humans, were the most important. From very long ago, Hollanders had put up great mounds³ of earth and sod⁴ to save their land from the tides⁵. It was a cruel war between the rising of the sea and the strength of the dykes, and for many years the sea threatened to win. But the Hollanders loved their country and would not allow the sea to drive them out from there. They fought back the waters that roared in from the North Sea; they protected the soil with longer and larger dykes, using barriers of clay and stone as well as bricks.

Hendrik's grandfather had been a dyke builder; his father looked after dyke repairs; his uncle was in charge of a polder⁶, an area of reclaimed⁷ land, surrounded by dykes. Hendrik admired the way the dyke was constructed—its tall grassy flanks⁸ and the great stone blocks on the sea's side, put there to break the violence of the onrushing waves.

He would imagine himself standing on the wall, as if it were a rampart, and would give a victory call to the sea. He would make expeditions⁹ into the countryside, exploring the turns and twists of the walls, examining the ways in which they were built, trying to guess their age.



¹dykes natural or artificial slopes or walls to regulate water levels, usually made of earth and often parallel to the river or the coast + ²dunes banks built to prevent water from a river or sea from coming into a town or a village + ³mounds heaps of earth + ⁴sod earth covered with grass + ⁵tides (here) huge rushes of water + ⁶polder an area of low land, especially in the Netherlands, originally from a water body, but protected by dykes + ⁷reclaimed taken back + ⁸flanks sides + ⁹expeditions organized trips with a purpose

One day he roamed further than he had ever gone, much further than he had intended. The sky was darkening when he turned towards home; there was no time to watch anything except the shady, unfamiliar road. It was a still, chill, stormy evening; the birds had gone to their nests; there was no sound in the air except ... Hendrik listened intently. He did not want to believe what he heard, but he knew only too well what it was. It was the sound of water. Nothing much—only a trickle—but Hendrik knew what it would mean. He knew that the trickle would soon become a **gurgle**¹⁰; then there would be a gush, followed by a rush and then a roar, and the North Sea would sweep in.

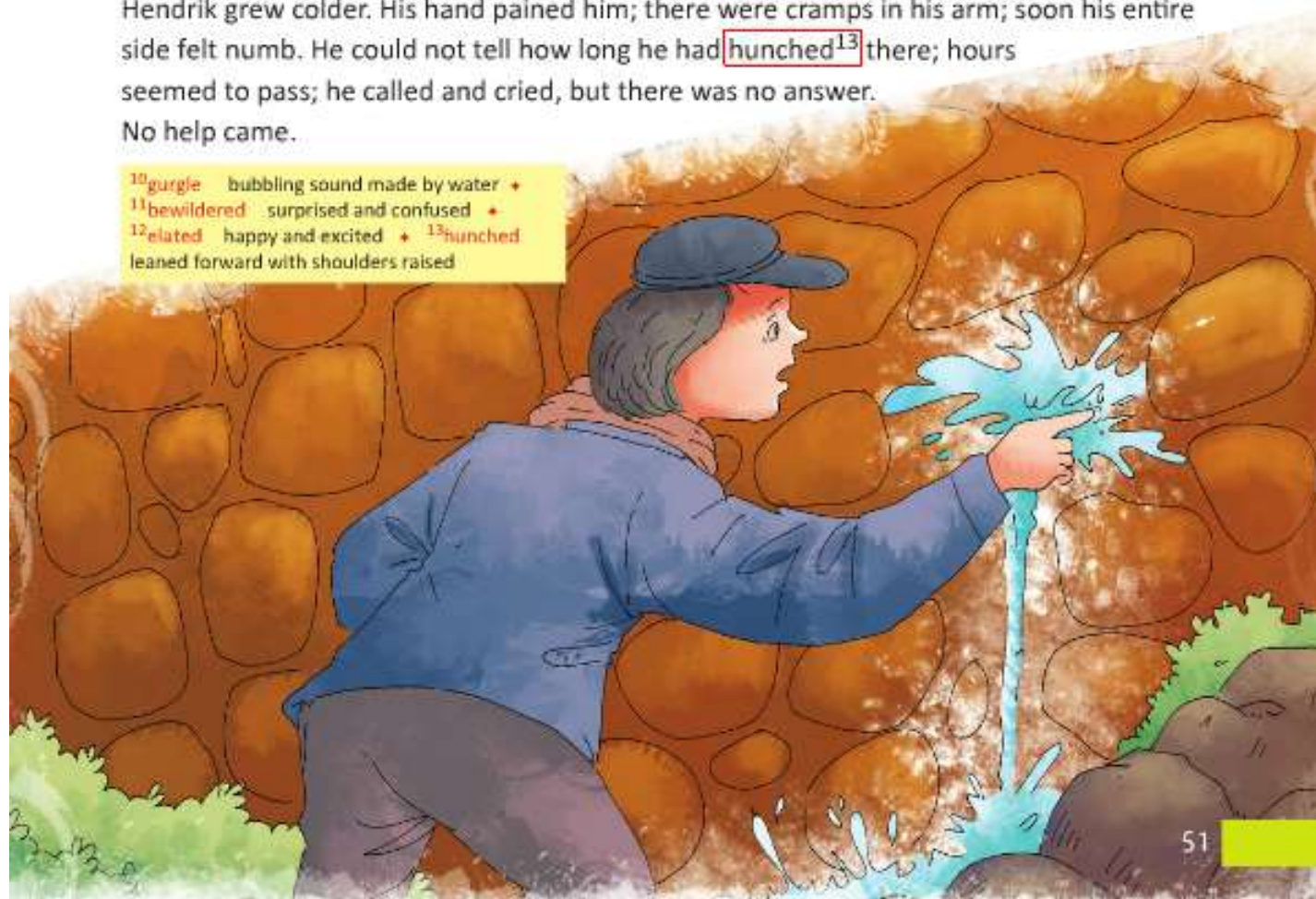
For a moment he stood **bewildered**¹¹. It was growing dark, hard to see, harder to locate a small leak in the dyke. Finally he found it—a few feet from the ground—he could reach it. It was, as he suspected, a small leak, small enough to be stopped with one finger.

At first he was not worried. He even felt a little heroic, **elated**¹² to see that the finger of one small boy could hold the mighty waters in check. Besides, he thought, it would not be long; someone was sure to pass by, see what was happening and get people to repair the damage. But the stillness continued—stillness and loneliness. As the night came on, Hendrik grew colder. His hand pained him; there were cramps in his arm; soon his entire side felt numb. He could not tell how long he had **hunched**¹³ there; hours seemed to pass; he called and cried, but there was no answer. No help came.

¹⁰**gurgle** bubbling sound made by water +

¹¹**bewildered** surprised and confused +

¹²**elated** happy and excited + ¹³**hunched** leaned forward with shoulders raised



The pain frightened him, but he could not take his finger from the dyke. The air was freezing; he was afraid he would drop from fatigue. He stamped his feet to stamp out the cold. He rubbed his still arm with the fingers of his other hand to keep the blood flowing. He was dizzy; pain stabbed every part of his body. But he would not remove his finger from the dyke.

It was almost dawn when he saw the man with a lantern in his hand. Hendrik almost fainted. It was a labourer returning after working all night. Hendrik's parents had been searching for him all night. But it was this labourer who found the boy. He immediately called for help. The leak was plugged soon. The dyke was strengthened in weeks. A great part of Holland was saved!

Years passed, and many things were forgotten. But the country is still grateful to the boy who kept his finger in the dyke.

Reading 1

1. Say whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

- a. If not for the dykes, Holland would be flooded. ☐
- b. Hendrik was proud of the dykes built by his ancestors. ☐
- c. Because Hendrik was a small boy, he could not understand that the trickle was dangerous. ☐
- d. Hendrik noticed a leak in the dyke because he loved dykes and understood what the leak meant. A foreigner probably would not have noticed it. ☐
- e. When Hendrik located the leak he ran to call for help. ☐