How Shifting Plates Caused the Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan

The sudden movement of the Pacific tectonic plate under the North American plate caused a massive earthquake and a tsunami.

The earthquake occurred where the Pacific plate thrusts under the North American plate. Northern Japan sits on the west lip of the North American plate.

Source: U.S. Geological Survey

An 8.9-magnitude earthquake struck the coast of Japan on Friday at a depth of about 17 miles below the earth's surface. Dozens of aftershocks, some of magnitude 6.0 or greater, were felt after the quake.

Source: U.S. Geological Survey
Satellite Photos of Japan, Before and After the Quake and Tsunami

Compare satellite images of areas of Japan before and after the disaster.

A Closer Look at the Damage From the Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan

Zoom in on images and examine scenes of the destruction in Japan.

Aftermath of the Earthquake in Japan

Tokyo bureau chief Martin Fackler reports on the huge earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan.

Powerful Quake and Tsunami Devastate Northern Japan

Updates on the Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan