

## Workshop: Kigo and seasonality in haiku

By Tom Painting

Step 1: In general a distinction can be made between haiku and senryu. This point, which should not be belabored is usually established in Workshop 1. Since haiku is most often defined by its association with a particular season (there are five: spring, summer, autumn, winter and the New Year) this is a good time to introduce the word kigo and the importance of seasonality.

The workshop facilitator will want to focus on the particular season in which the workshop takes place and lead the group in a discussion of the sights, smell, sounds, tastes associated with that particular season. It is often worth while to mine the wealth of memories that one associates with a particular season of the year.

Below is an example of a discussion lead-in:

Winter: December – February are the months of winter in the northern hemisphere. The weather has turned cold, days grow shorter until the winter solstice and even after the light begins to return, the earth loses radiant heat, making January and February our coldest months. For some winter signals the opportunity for outdoor recreation like skiing, skating and snowmobiling. Others revel in the parade of holidays that mark the winter season: Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and New Year Celebrations.

The haiku poet with a discerning eye can juxtapose images in such a way as to offer insight into the human condition and earn the reader's delight in writing about the most common of things.

There are sights, smells sounds, tastes and the textures synonymous with winter.

Prompt: A smell I remember from childhood is \_\_\_\_\_.

Share responses to the prompt and then continue by giving participants time to jot down other winter images in their notebooks. Pay particular attention to the here-and-now.

### Writing practice #1

Kigo is a haiku literary term.

Kigo is word or phrase associated with a particular season.

Kigo are particularly valuable in providing economy of expression.

When referencing the seasons, it is important to use elements from nature to create images that represent emotion and ideas. The following are some typical ways of using kigo in haiku.

- **Winter:** Winter imagery is often centers on grief, distance, loss and serenity. It can include "snow," "ice" and "bare tree." But winter may also provide the comfort that comes from family gatherings. Holidays are also written about and include an array of engaging vocabulary.

The most popular reference for kigo is a book called Saijiki, which is divided into the four seasons. Under each season, one will find various categories such as the Earth, the Sky, Animals, Plants or Humanity. Each category contains lists of kigo related to that subject. Saijiki is a type of dictionary that allows writers to find descriptions of kigo along with lists of related words that can be used. The book also contains examples of haiku that include kigo. A fine resource book for the haiku enthusiast is: The Haiku Seasons, Poetry of the Natural World by William J. Higginson.

I recommend that teachers and workshop facilitators have a copy of Higginson's book on hand.

Writing practice #1 continued...

Ask participants to consider one or more of the winter kigo written below. Spend about 10 – 15 minutes composing haiku on the spot. Attempts can be written in the notebook. When the facilitator feels that enough time has been spent composing, ask if there is anyone willing to share. It is useful to simply listen at this stage of the workshop and hold commentary. ( I will say more about commentary/critique in the revision workshop)

\* winter solstice

\* One of the following words in any context: winter, snow, ice, bare trees

\* Any of the winter observances including the New Year

- note, Valentine's Day is technically a spring kigo.

Examples: Prior to the workshop the facilitator should assemble 5 – 10 examples of haiku that address the season of focus. These may be presented before participants are asked to write, as a way to encourage and inspire.

winter night

cracks in the floorboards

widen

Mary Rice age 16

quiet night

the gazebo

dressed with snow

Meredith Jeffers age 16

winter

the old man's beard

frozen in place

Riley Siwiec age 12

new snow

my footprints

follow me

Martine Thomas age 12

Christmas Eve

a row of cut trees

no one took home

Pamela Miller Ness

Note: In English haiku are generally written in three lines and a total of seventeen or fewer syllables. Notice in the above examples that there is not a strict adherence to the traditional 5-7-5 format.