

Scents and Sensitivity: A *Haibun* Workshop by Margaret Chula

BACKGROUND: I first presented this workshop at the Haiku Society of America's Quarterly Meeting in Portland, Oregon in 2009. Ce Rosenow and I organized the weekend of events held at the Hoyt Arboretum. Most participants had an understanding of haiku, but for many this was their first experience writing haibun. Using scent as a creative stimulant proved to be very successful. Several haibun produced during this session ended up being published in haiku journals and online. I've continued to offer modified versions of this workshop at the 2009 Haiku North America in Ottawa, Canada; for the Southern California Haiku Group at the Pacific Asian Museum in Pasadena, California; and most recently at the Northwest Poets Concord in 2011. In each instance, I found that even people with little writing experience produced evocative, personal haibun triggered by the sense of scent.

INTRODUCTION: Smell is a great stimulator of memory. When asked, "What is the single sensual image of Japan," translator Edward Seidensticker replied, "The smell of mildew." Poet Ted Kooser says, "I've often thought it would be wonderful to have a shoebox full of little vials of the kinds of perfume that women were wearing when I was a little boy. White Shoulders and all those lost perfumes and then I could unscrew one and take a little sniff and travel through time. And apparently it's a fact that fragrances go directly to the part of the brain that is inaccessible in other ways."

TEACHER PREPARATION: A couple of days before the workshop, put together samples of scents. Dab the scent onto a piece of cotton and place it into a black film canister. In some cases (herbs, lemon peels, garlic, cinnamon), you can place them whole into the film can, but be sure you do this just before the workshop date or they may mold. Close the lids tightly! Photo stores usually recycle these canisters and are happy to give them to you for a school project.

WORKSHOP: Have the students make a list of the following. Encourage them to jot down the first thing that comes into their heads.

TASTE (Include at least one unpleasant taste)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

SOUND (Include at least one unpleasant sound)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

TOUCH (Textures, such as nubby, smooth, sticky)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

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COLORS (Include a color that you hate)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

THINGS YOU SEE IN SPRING (Summer, fall, winter depending on when the workshop is given)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Have each student select a film can. Warn them to open them carefully as not all the smells are pleasant. Also, some of them may be liquid. If someone isn't happy with the scent they've chosen, let them choose another. Be sure to have plenty of extras on hand.

Then tell them to immediately jot down any associations with the scent they've chosen—just phrases, not whole sentences. For example, memories from childhood. Vanilla: ice cream my father bought me as a child. Vinegar: coloring Easter eggs. Have them work quickly, writing the first thing that comes into their heads. These are just prompts, not poems.

Pair one of these scent memories with any of the words from their lists of taste, sound, touch, color, or season.

Begin the haibun with prose, as in the examples I've given you on a separate sheet. Intersperse the prose with one or more haiku. Remind them to shift when they write their haiku. After they are finished, have them look for a word or phrase in the prose or haiku to use as a title.