

An Introduction to Haiku for Eighth Grade Students

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Introduction

The purpose of this unit plan is to give junior high school students something I never had: a feel for the genuine essence of haiku. My own public school teachers, unfortunately, often approached the obligatory haiku unit as something of a nuisance. Consciously or not, they usually gave my classmates and me the impression that haiku was a quaint, frivolous little form that simply *had* to be composed in the "5-7-5" syllable pattern. Moreover, they often failed to give me a sense of the historical context in which haiku had evolved. As a result, it was not until I had entered college that I even knew who Basho was. My goal in preparing this unit for the students in Introduction to Literature, a hypothetical class comprising about 20 eighth-graders, is to attempt to fill in the gaps left by my own education. My hope is that my students will come to recognize haiku as a rich literary tradition in its own right and to appreciate haiku's capacity to express humankind's relationship to nature as no other form can.

General Objectives

- ~Students will learn about the origins of haiku and about the Four Masters. They will also get a sense of what makes these poets so remarkable and significant.
- ~Students will learn the most basic tenets of Zen Buddhism and discover what role that religion plays in both "classical" and modern haiku.
- ~Students will learn about the role of artistic collaboration in haiku by working with classmates to create a short renga.
- ~Students will read selected contemporary haiku poets.
- ~Students will begin to grasp the Japanese aesthetic by listening to a few selections of traditional music and by viewing examples of Japanese pictorial art.
- ~Each student will demonstrate his/her grasp of the nature and purpose of haiku by completing two small projects, both of which will be presented to the class.

Teacher's Resources in Preparing the Unit

- Boger, H. Batterson. The Traditional Arts of Japan. New York: Doubleday, 1964.
- Bowers, Faubion. The Classic Tradition of Haiku: An Anthology. New York: Dover, 1996.
- Cohen, William Howard. To Walk in Seasons: An Introduction to Haiku. Tokyo: Tuttle, 1972.
- Emrich, Jeanne. The Haiku Habit Workshop. Minneapolis: Lone Egret, 1998.
- Hayashiya, Tatsusaburo, Masao Nakamura, and Seizo Hayashiya. Japanese Arts and the Tea Ceremony. New York: Weatherhill, 1974.
- Higginson, William J. and Penny Harter. The Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share, and Teach Haiku. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1985.
- Miner, Earl. An Introduction to Japanese Court Poetry. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1968.
- Swede, George, and Randy Brooks, eds. Global Haiku: Twenty-five Poets World-wide. Oakville: Mosaic, 2000.
- Various Artists. Excursions in World Music. Silverdisc, 7 49668 2, 1996.

Assessment

Because I do not want my students to regard the writing of haiku as a purely academic exercise, no tests or quizzes will be administered during the unit. Instead, students will earn credit by participating enthusiastically in class and by submitting thoughtful, well-organized projects. Each project will be worth 75 points of the student's grade for the quarter. Participation will make up the remaining 50 points of the haiku unit. Students who complete all of the small in-class and out-of-class assignments and who contribute regularly to class discussion will receive full participation credit.

Day 1: Introduction to Haiku

Objectives:

1. Students will indicate their general opinions about haiku by filling out a short "haiku survey."
2. Students will take notes on a few characteristics of haiku and will discuss some haiku terminology.
3. Each student will receive her copy of The Classic Tradition of Haiku: An Anthology, edited by Faubion Bowers.

Methodology:

1. Distribute copies of The Classic Tradition of Haiku: An Anthology.
2. Administer "Haiku Survey" (included), and allow the students ten minutes or so to finish.
3. Ask students to share a few of their answers to the survey. Allow them to share their "gut reactions" to haiku as a poetic form.
4. Focus class discussion around the "5-7-5 question." Students have most likely been taught to compose haiku according to this formula. Explain the distinction between English syllables and Japanese *onji*. Students should understand that *onji* are shorter than syllables and take roughly as long to say as the syllables of *po-ta-to* (Higginson 172). So, a haiku consisting of seventeen English syllables is actually longer than a seventeen-*onji* haiku in that the former requires more time to say. As a result, students do not need to count out seventeen syllables when composing haiku; instead, they should focus on keeping their poems within the range of ten to a dozen words.
5. Explain the concept of the *kigo*. Students should be aware that the *kigo*, or "season word," is common in English haiku and requisite in more traditional Japanese haiku circles. The *kigo* is not limited to the names of the seasons: it may take the form of such phrases as "first snow" or "new lilacs" or "sparrow's song."
6. Ask students to read the selections of Basho in their books and to write an informal response paragraph to one poem that stands out in their minds. The responses will be collected at the beginning of the next class period.

Day 2: Japanese Court Poetry

Objectives:

1. Students will get some idea of the origins of haiku.
2. Students will learn to distinguish between the "court aesthetic" and Basho's aesthetic (his mature voice).

Methodology:

1. Write the following two poems on the board :

The bridge of dreams
Floating on the brief spring night
Soon breaks off;
And from the mountaintop a cloud
Takes leave into the open sky.

~Teika (1162-1241)

On a bare branch
A crow is perched—
Autumn evening

~Basho (1644-94)

2. Ask students to jot down the similarities and differences between the two poems. What is the tone of each poem? Which is more objective? Is one more melodramatic than the other? Which is more enjoyable to read? Which conveys a more powerful image?
3. Explain that the first poem is an example of *tanka*. The *tanka* is roughly equivalent to the sonnet of Western literature and was associated for centuries with the Japanese court aristocracy. The highly cultivated members of the aristocracy used the *tanka* as a vehicle for refined sentiments and ornate images. The *tanka*, which dominated court literature from c. 700 to 1200 A.D. and beyond, was loaded with literary allusions and centuries-old themes (Miner 29).
4. Ask students to describe the aesthetic Basho displays in his piece (objective, "quiet," austere, subtle, and so on). One of Basho's claims to fame is that he eventually rejected the artificiality and sentimentalism of poetry of his day and gave new life to the haiku.
5. Mention that haiku also grew out of the *renga* tradition. (*Renga* will be discussed in more detail later on in the unit.)
6. Ask students to share their favorite haiku from the Basho selections.
7. Tell students that they are to have attempted one haiku by the next class period.

Assessment:

Students will receive participation points for their written responses to Basho.

Day 3: The Four Great Masters of Haiku

Objectives:

1. Students will get a feel for the Masters' distinctive voices and learn about their contributions to the art of haiku.
2. Each student will share an original haiku with a partner.

Methodology:

1. Distribute the worksheet outlining the contributions and characteristics of each Master (included).
2. Allow students to choose a partner and complete the worksheet.
3. Ask students to justify their answers; then reveal the correct answers.
4. Have students break into groups of two or three and allow them several minutes to share their haiku with one another.
5. Announce that students are to have read the Buson, Issa, and Shiki selections from the anthology before the next class period.
6. Distribute instructions sheet for the photography project (included).
7. Distribute copies of Global Haiku: Twenty-Five Poets World-wide and ask students to thumb through and start looking for poems that "hit them over the head." Mention that the two projects assigned will incorporate their understanding of contemporary global haiku.

Assessment:

Students will receive participation credit for turning in their haiku attempts.

Day 4: Zen Buddhism and Haiku

Objectives:

1. The learner will understand the impact of the concepts of Zen Buddhism on the haiku aesthetic.
2. Students will identify haiku that are Zen in mood and subject matter.

Methodology:

1. Write the following haiku on the board:

one man
and one fly
waiting in this huge room
~Issa

Then write these adjectives below the haiku:

meditative	egocentric (self is most important)	complex
humorous	objective	pretentious
flamboyant	observant	

2. Ask students to select the adjectives that accurately describe the poem (meditative, objective, observant, humorous). Explain that these adjectives also describe the Zen aesthetic.
3. As students take notes, explain that Zen was founded in the early 6th century by Bodhidharma and has remained widespread in Japan since the 12th century. The primary idea behind Zen is that enlightenment may be achieved through meditation. Such meditation must center around the contemplation of beauty and simplicity. The idea that the individual must follow the example of animals and realize her oneness with all of creation is also central to Zen (Cohen 30).
4. Ask students to explain how Issa's poem exemplifies Zen principles for living.
5. Allow students a few minutes to look through their anthologies for poems that are Zen in feel and content and ask them to offer their choices for the class's consideration. Encourage the class to agree or disagree with each choice.
6. Distribute the "Japanese Terms" sheet (borrowed from Jeanne Emrich). Help students to identify terms that relate most closely to the Zen ideal (*karumi, sabi, shibumi, sono mama, wabi, yugen*).
7. Announce that students are to have composed two haiku that demonstrate a knowledge of Zen ideas (egoless, appreciative of nature, observant).

Day 5: Ginko!!

Objectives:

1. Students will be inspired by the natural scene to write thoughtful, meaningful haiku.
2. Students will participate in a revered haiku tradition.

Methodology:

1. Distribute "Taking a Haiku Walk" (borrowed from Jeanne Emrich).
2. Announce that students are not to leave campus and that they are to have written at least one ginko-inspired haiku by the next class period.
3. Before students leave, distribute the instructions sheet for the "Haiku for Me" project (included).

Assessment:

Students who turn in their "Zen haiku" will receive participation points.

Day 6: Japanese Pictorial Art

Objectives:

1. Students will discover that haiku and Japanese painting are governed by a similar aesthetic.
2. Students will grasp the distinctions between Eastern and Western pictorial art.

Methodology:

1. Pass around Gardner's Art Through the Ages and ask students to look through the chapters covering Renaissance painting and sculpture (19-23). (Copies of a few Renaissance paintings are included.) Students will note that the compositions are generally balanced, harmonious, and naturalistic. The use of perspective and the placement of figures in the center of the works make them very easy to understand.
2. Pass around Boger's Traditional Arts of Japan and allow students to notice what Boger calls the "asymmetrical balance" of several of the works. (Again, copies of Japanese paintings are included in the unit plan.) Bring special attention to The Zen Priest Choka, a work in which the empty space creates a daring, unbalanced design. Point out that the space becomes as important as the title figure.
3. Read to students the following quotation from Makoto Ueda (Matsuo Basho):
If the verse says everything, it leaves no room for the reader's fancy; it does not induce him to undergo the experience himself. In Basho's view, the very merit of the haiku form was that its extreme brevity enhanced poetic suggestiveness.
4. Pose the following questions:
~Is there a connection between the "poetic suggestiveness" that Basho values and the asymmetry of The Zen Priest Choka? Do haiku and Japanese painting/drawing urge us to remain passive, or do they invite us to participate in the moment, to bring our own imaginations and experiences to the work? (The answer, hopefully, will be obvious to the class.)
~What would Basho and Sotatsu (artist who drew Choka) think of Renaissance art? Would they be impressed with The Last Supper? With Veronese's busy compositions?
~Do the Japanese pieces in Boger's book embody Zen ideas? How so?
5. Conclude by offering an extra credit opportunity to the class. Any student who is interested may draw or paint one picture that resembles Western principles of design and another that exemplifies the Japanese aesthetic. The project will be worth an extra 15 points.

Day 7: Photography Project Presentations

Objectives:

1. Students will have the opportunity to display their work to their classmates.
2. When not presenting, students can provide their classmates with listener feedback.

Methodology:

1. Ask each student to limit her presentation to just a couple of minutes. Allow a minute or so for questions after each presentation.
2. Remind students that the "Haiku for Me" project is due the class period after next.

Assessment:

Students who demonstrate that they have put time into their photography projects will receive 75 points.

Day 8: Renga

Objectives:

1. Students will work in small groups to create linked verse.
2. Students will learn how to make the "perceptive leap" that some verses require.

Methodology:

1. Arrange students into three groups of about six or seven.
2. Distribute the "Composing Renga" sheet.
3. Collect a "renga rough draft" from each group at the end of class.

Assessment:

Students who contribute enthusiastically to their renga groups will boost their participation grades.

Day 9: Presentation of the "Haiku for Me" Projects

Objective:

Again, students will present their work to the class and will also have the opportunity to respond to others' work.

Methodology:

1. Limit each student presentation to a couple of minutes.
2. Announce that the haiku unit will end with a "Haiku Tea Party."

Assessment:

Like the photography project, the "Haiku for Me" project is worth 75 points.

Day 10: Haiku Tea Party

Objectives:

1. Students will learn about the tea ceremony as one of the traditional Japanese arts.
2. Students will listen to a few selections of Japanese music.

Methodology:

1. Bring disposable cups, hot water (microwaved in the faculty lounge, of course), and green tea (along with Darjeeling, Earl Grey, and other varieties) to class. Invite students to enjoy a cup of hot tea.
2. Distribute the "Tea Ceremony Quiz" (included) and allow students a few minutes to work on it.
2. Play the selections of Japanese music from the Excursions in World Music cassette (be sure to include the *Chidori* for koto, the *sankyoko* piece, and the *Gagaku* piece).
3. Point out to students that the *Gagaku* (court music) composition is the musical equivalent of haiku and Japanese pictorial art. The music is not rushed, each solo seems to flow naturally with the accompaniment, and the listener has the sense that all of the instrumental parts are working together to create an organic whole. Moreover, the silence is as integral to the piece as the sound. Clearly, the aesthetic that inspired the drawing of Choku and the best haiku of Basho is present in Japanese court music.
4. Finish by inviting students to share their impressions/opinions of the haiku unit in general.

Name _____

Date _____

Haiku Survey

Please answer the following questions as truthfully as possible. There are no right or wrong answers in this survey. I'm only interested in your impressions of and attitudes toward haiku in general. (Note: This activity is based on an idea suggested in Chapter 12 of Higginson's and Harter's Haiku Handbook.)

1. Briefly describe your previous experiences with haiku. Have you ever written one? Were you happy with the result?

2. To the best of your knowledge, what are the characteristics of haiku?

3. In your view, what is the purpose of haiku?

4. Describe the emotion(s) you feel after reading the following haiku:

the blind musician
extending an old tin cup
collects a snowflake
~Nicholas Virgilio

5. What is your honest opinion of haiku (are they wonderful? mysterious? pointless? something else altogether?)

Name _____
Date _____

The Four Haiku Masters

Below are brief descriptions of the Four Haiku Masters (Basho, Buson, Issa, and Shiki). Read over this information and then see whether you can match up the poet with his haiku. (Note: The source of much of the following information is Higginson's and Harter's Haiku Handbook.)

Matsuo Basho (1644-94)

- ~reacted against the superficiality of the poetry of his day
- ~in later years, composed lighthearted haiku
- ~believed that the feeling in a poem should come from the object being written about
- ~spent a number of years traveling

Yosa Buson (1716-84)

- ~poems have an objective and sensual feel, revealing his painterly love of the visual
- ~lamented that the teachings of Basho had been lost
- ~revered the literature and art of the past

Kobayashi Issa (1762-1826)

- ~viewed human nature in a pessimistic light
- ~preferred the company of little creatures (insects, birds, and so on) and included them often in his haiku
- ~is mistakenly perceived as a sentimental poet, though his style is far from "sappy"

Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902)

- ~was ill with spinal tuberculosis for most of his adult life
- ~felt that poems based on actual life were better than those grounded in imagination
- ~called for purely objective language in haiku

Fingertips yellow
from peeling tangerines--
a winter shut-in

~ _____

Patient woodpecker--
evening, and you are still knocking
at the same spot

~ _____

Under the blossoming pear
a moonlit woman
reading a faded letter

~ _____

Mountain road--
sun rising warm
into the plum scent

~ _____

JAPANESE TERMS

The Japanese have many words for the evocative power of images. Knowing them will increase your awareness of and sensitivity to the images you encounter every day, any one of which may be potential subject matter for your poems.

- aware* (touchingness) Moving, stirring; the kind of thing that evokes an emotional response; often in the phrase *mono no aware*, "the touchingness of things".
- karumi* (lightness) In *haikai* and *haiku*, the beauty of ordinary things.
- sabi* (patina/loneliness) Beauty with a sense of loneliness in time, akin to but deeper than, nostalgia.
- shibumi* (astringency) The beauty of subdued, rather than vibrant, images; Classical, rather than Romantic, in taste.
- shiori* (bending, withering) In *haikai* and *haiku*, sympathy mixed with ambiguity; used of verses with delicate, almost pathetic images.
- sono mama* (as it is) In *haikai* and *haiku*, presenting a thing or event just as it is, without flourishes or emotionalism.
- wabi* (loneliness, poverty) Beauty with a sense of asceticism; austere beauty.
- yugen* (mystery) Elegance, mystery, depth. (Several whole volumes in Japanese are devoted to this word, particularly in relation to the no drama.)

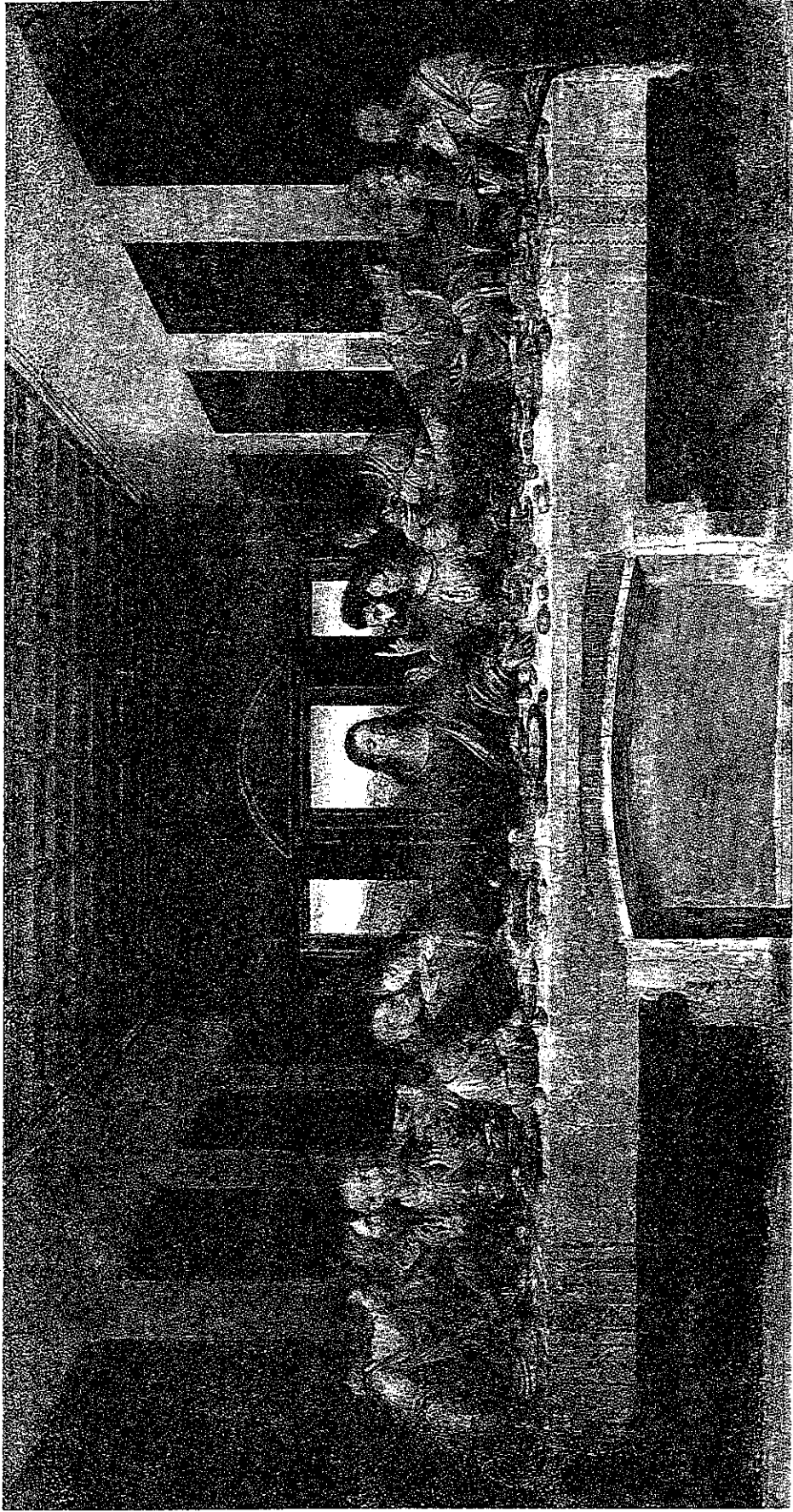
TAKING A HAIKU WALK

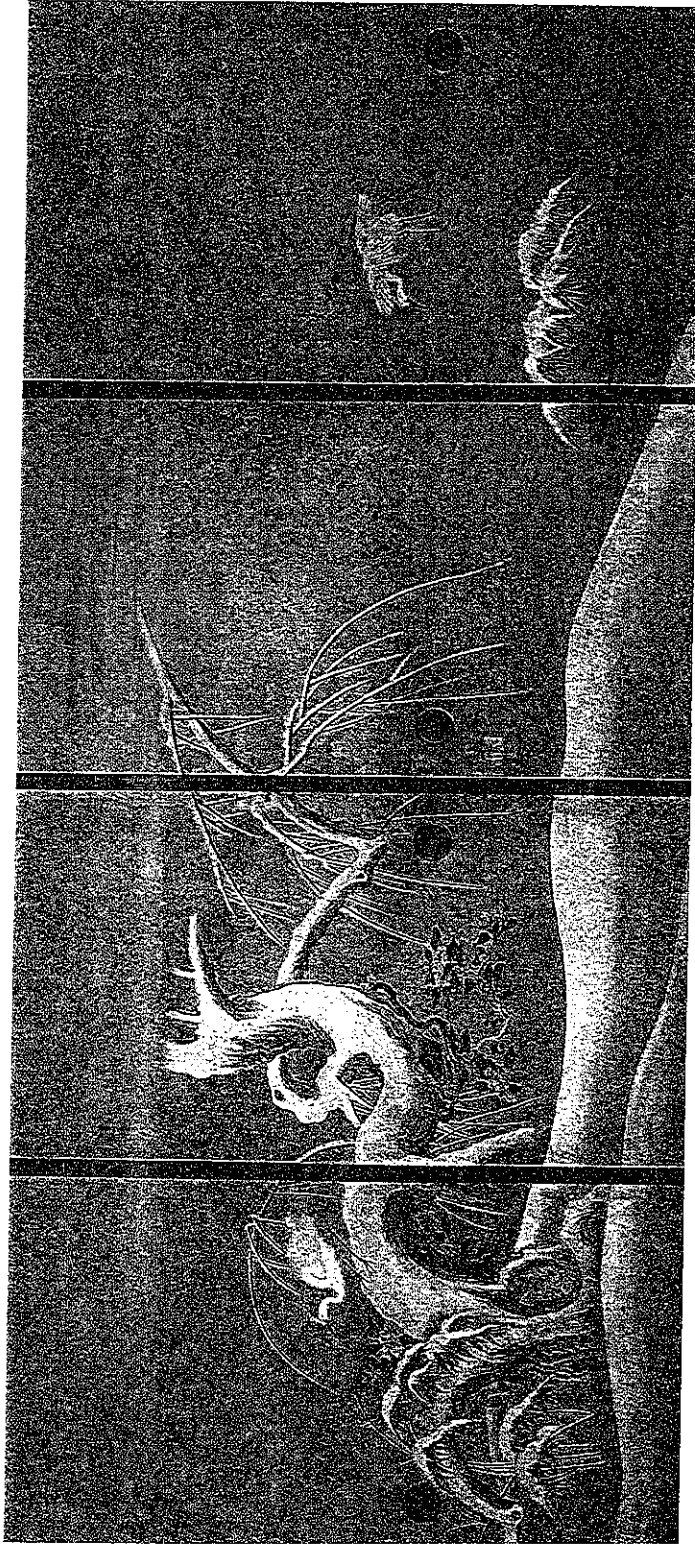
The great delight of haiku is that it can get you outdoors—on a haiku walk or *ginko*. You can go alone or with friends. Always, though, the objective is to be receptive to the haiku moment and the poetry it generates. You might find haiku moments while doing something else—jogging or bicycling, for example—but be warned that vigorous exercise or lively conversations with friends about other subjects are highly distracting.

For your first haiku walk, keep the following in mind:

1. Walk alone, if possible, or with one other friend.
2. Bring a pocket notebook and a pen or pencil, but don't feel you have to take notes on everything you see.
3. Walk with heightened awareness of your environment. This means keeping alert to what your five senses are picking up.
4. Walk slowly in a relaxed manner. (Henry David Thoreau talked of the value of sauntering.) Stop frequently to investigate a noise, a smell, a rustle in a bush. Become *intimate* with nature. What is inside that rotten log? Under that rock? Why is that squirrel fussing so loudly in the high branches?
5. Name the things that stand out, and resolve to learn the names of things you do not know. (Start a small library of reference books at home, if possible—birds, flowers, fossils, mushrooms, and so on.) Often the best way to write about the significant detail, the particular, is to name it.
6. Linger where there is action—by a pond, a busy park, the beach. Let the details sink in.
7. Write haiku on the spot, if one comes to you, and consider it a gift. But know that likely you will be writing a word or two or a phrase here and there during the *ginko*. Later, at home, your poems will take shape.

Leonardo da Vinci, The Last Supper, c. 1495 (Italy)





3 Set of four *susunagi*; gold-leaf ground on paper. Snow-covered willow tree depicting the beginning of spring, according to the old calendar, with camellias which bloom while snow still covers the ground. Black lacquer frames and circular bronze *hikite*, or inset finger pulls, with cherry blossom motif. Kano school, Edo period, second half of the seventeenth century. Author's collection.

Photography Project

As you've already noticed, one of the characteristics of excellent haiku is that they send a powerful visual image to your imagination. With this project, I want you to create a link between image and haiku by taking a few photographs and composing your own haiku.

Start by asking to borrow your parents' camera if you don't have one of your own. It doesn't matter whether you're a gifted photographer or whether you have "professional equipment." I'm less concerned with your skills as a photographer than I am with your ability to make a "perceptive leap" between a visual image and the written word.

Your photographs *should* require the viewer to make the aforesaid perceptive leap. That means that if your haiku includes an image of a maple tree, don't simply take a picture of a maple tree. Think about all that you instinctively associate with maple trees. Then take a picture that incorporates one or more of those associations. For example, if your haiku mentions a lonely widow and you find that the solitary bird in the tree outside your window reminds you of that widow or of loneliness in general, capture a solitary bird on film. Your associations and mental processes are your own. No one can decide for you what image goes with what.

You may write the haiku first, or you may take the photographs first. In any case, I would like you to turn in two haiku-photograph pairs. They should be neatly mounted on a poster board or in a notebook. The exact arrangement of photo and poem is up to you.

On the day this project is due, you will present your haiku and photographs to the class. You may talk about the perceptive leap you made in creating your haiku and photos during your presentation. The most important thing is that you exercise your creative powers!

Composing Renga

In its beginning phases, the haiku was the starting verse (*hokku*) of the renga, or linked poem. In Basho's day and well before then, poets got together at parties and took turns contributing verses to the renga. From the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, renga were typically fifty to a hundred verses long. (Obviously, your group's renga will not be considerably shorter than that.) In a word, renga was the thing of the moment when Basho was at his most prolific. He was, in fact, best known for his *haikai-no-renga*, a humorous version of renga.

Today, as you contribute verses at your "renga party," keep in mind that the links between verses do not need to be obvious or even make logical sense. The verses that Basho and his fellow poets created were linked "impressionistically." In other words, the reader had to figure out intuitively the relationship between one verse and another.

Directions:

1. Elect someone to start the renga (or someone may volunteer). If you want your renga to be more on the traditional side, make certain that the hokku contains a *kigo* or "season word."
2. Move around the circle and allow everyone to contribute a verse. (If this method doesn't seem to be working, allow people to jump in as they please.)
3. Feel free to question someone else's contribution. Don't simply add it to the renga without thinking.
4. Try not to allow each verse just to echo the previous one. Remember, each verse can change the setting, the season, the mood, and so on.
5. If the finished renga seems to be lacking something, feel free to revise it.
6. At the end of class, turn in your renga to me. I don't expect them to be polished and ready for publication: it's your first attempt, after all.

"Haiku for Me" Project

Zen Buddhism teaches us that the best haiku are "ego-less." For this project, however, I want you to focus on yourself, on *your* responses to various haiku.

Begin by thumbing through Global Haiku: Twenty-five Poets World-wide to identify a few poets whose style you truly appreciate. Then, carefully choose five to ten haiku that seem to be speaking directly to you. These haiku may remind you of a wonderful memory or they may simply provide your imagination with an unforgettable image. Once you've found haiku that make you feel more closely connected to the world, you can claim them for your own by putting them together into a "Haiku for Me" display. With this display, you will arrange your favorite haiku in a visually appealing manner for all to read and enjoy.

You may be as creative as you'd like with your display. You could write them in calligraphy (your art teacher may be willing to help you with this) on a poster board and surround them with hand-drawn illustrations. (If you choose this approach, you'll be contributing to the *haiga* [haiku painting] tradition.) You may want to create a Power Point slide show in which your haiku are featured against colorful backgrounds. I'm eager to see what you come up with.

Along with your display, you will turn in a short (2 pp.) essay in which you share with me why your "Haiku for Me" selections are so wonderful. This essay may take the form of one short response paragraph for each selected haiku.

Finally, you will present your "Haiku for Me" project to the rest of the class. Don't worry: the presentation will only last a couple of minutes. I just want you to tell the class about the process you went through in designing your display. You may also wish to tell the class why your haiku selections struck a chord with you.

Name _____

Date _____

Tea Ceremony Pop Quiz

Find out what you know--or don't know--about the Japanese tea ceremony. Answer the following questions, and try not to look at the answer key until you've finished. (Hiding the answers with your hand always helps.) Note: These quiz questions are derived from information found in Japanese Arts and the Tea Ceremony (see "Teacher's Resources").

1. How long does a formal tea ceremony typically last?
 - a. one hour
 - b. two hours
 - c. four hours
 - d. all day

2. How many guests are invited to a proper ceremony?
 - a. five
 - b. ten
 - c. twenty
 - d. three

3. How do the host and the guests greet each other?
 - a. They bow to one another.
 - b. They embrace.
 - c. They shake hands.
 - d. They touch foreheads.

4. What must the guests do before entering the tearoom?
 - a. They must wash their hands.
 - b. They must rinse their mouths.
 - c. They must take off their sandals.
 - d. all of the above

5. How many sips must the head guest take before passing the tea bowl to the next guest?
 - a. one
 - b. three
 - c. seven
 - d. two

6. How many courses or "sessions" of the ceremony are there?
 - a. five
 - b. one
 - c. seven
 - d. three

7. What do the guests do the day after the ceremony?
 - a. write or visit the host to thank him/her
 - b. spend the entire day in meditation
 - c. buy an expensive gift for the host
 - d. fast until sundown

Answers: 1) c 2) a 3) a 4) d 5) b 6) d 7) a