

## Field Guide

### On The Playground

from *A Field Guide to North American Haiku*<sup>1</sup>

by Charles Trumbull

For this chapter of the Field Guide, we have chosen the topic of playgrounds, by which we have in mind any space in which children gather for fun or comradeship. Mostly we envision a space in a public park or schoolyard dedicated to rest and recreation, but we don't want to ignore backyard playgrounds. And, should there be no formal playground available, you can be sure the children will themselves find a place to gather:

子どもらが遊ぶ程ずつやくの哉

*kodomora ga asobu hodo-zutsu yaku no kana*

the children

make it a playground ...

burnt field

Issa; trans. David G. Lanoue<sup>2</sup>

Click of marbles

in the dry arroyo —

barefoot children.

Alexis Rotella<sup>3</sup>

Before we get down to business, perhaps a technical note would be in order. Most of the verses in this chapter would properly be considered *senryu*, as they have more to do with observations of human nature than of Mother Nature and generally do not contain *kigo*, seasonal references, particularly to children, toys or playground equipment, and so forth. Issa's verse above would be categorized as a spring haiku, while Rotella's might conceivably be categorized under "arroyos come alive," a winter season word according to the Yuki Teikei Haiku Society's reckoning.<sup>4</sup>

But seasonality is not the point this time around. Let's head off to  
the playground.

A light mist  
we skip to the playground  
my daughter and I

Garry Gay<sup>5</sup>

Be sure you're dressed warmly.

April playground  
only the teacher  
wears a coat

DeVar Dahl<sup>6</sup>

autumn playground  
brightly colored sweaters  
piling up

Michael Ketchek<sup>7</sup>

The children know what they like, often despite the best intentions  
of civic planners:

back and forth in the swing  
a new child for the old tree

Elisabeth Marshall<sup>8</sup>

modern playground:  
free-flowing forms empty;  
a queue at the swings

L. A. Davidson<sup>9</sup>

A playground is a place where children can exercise their imaginations:

Past the shut gate of words —  
child swinging slowly,  
singing her own song —

Helen Stiles Chenoweth<sup>10</sup>

childhood park —  
the imagination swings  
by itself

Vincenzo Adamo<sup>11</sup>

whole yard's garden  
    children's swing  
        an island

John Martone<sup>12</sup>

child swinging —  
the mountain rises  
and falls

Frederick Gasser<sup>13</sup>

afternoon playground  
a young girl stepping  
on the big kids' shadows

John S. O'Connor<sup>14</sup>

For some reason, haiku poets have a special affinity for swings made from vehicle tires. There are dozens of such haiku about tire swings swaying or rotating in the wind or being repurposed as flowerpots or homes for birds or insects. Perhaps the best-known tire swing haiku are these classics:

Now the swing is still:  
    a suspended tire  
        centers the autumn moon.

Nick Virgilio<sup>15</sup>

Bald tire  
    still getting good mileage ...  
        as a tree swing

Garry Gay<sup>16</sup>

changing the tire  
on the swing —  
spring equinox

Chad Lee Robinson<sup>17</sup>

Other permanent playground equipment such as the slides, monkey bars, merry-go-rounds and seesaws are sure to attract large crowds too.

smallest slide  
the boy at the top  
lets go

Peggy Willis Lyles<sup>18</sup>

dares of the big boys —  
a playground slide radiates  
waves of scorching sun

Christopher Herold<sup>19</sup>

in the playground  
the kid on rollerskates  
climbs the sliding board

Alan Pizzarelli<sup>20</sup>

climbing roses —  
the monkey bars covered  
with kindergartners

Marie Summers<sup>21</sup>

lunch recess  
a merry-go-round spins kids  
till they can't walk straight

Barbara Hay<sup>22</sup>

autumn dusk ...  
one child left spinning  
on the merry-go-round

Rebecca Drouilhet<sup>23</sup>

up and down  
on a teeter-totter  
clinging not clinging

Victor Ortiz<sup>24</sup>

Kids may come to playgrounds not to use the fixed equipment  
but to meet their friends and engage in games, bringing their  
own equipment.

“... *red light*,  
          *green light* ...”  
          spring equinox

Christopher Patchel<sup>25</sup>

“Hide and seek!” they cry,  
then leave him there to wait —  
spring rain on his cheeks ...

Jerry Ball<sup>26</sup>

hide-and-seek counting to ten fireflies

Francine Banwarth<sup>27</sup>

hide-and-seek  
the weeping willow  
giggles

Sabine Miller<sup>28</sup>

red rover  
we lock arms with friends  
for the capture

Pris Campbell<sup>29</sup>

moonlit children  
scatter among the headstones  
playing frozen tag

Winona Baker<sup>30</sup>

jumping rope  
the little girl and her shadow  
touch touch touch touch touch

Jerry Kilbride<sup>31</sup>

her dreadlocks  
dancing in rhythm with  
the jump rope

Patricia A. Laster<sup>32</sup>

desert wind  
the sound of jump ropes  
double Dutch

Frank Higgins<sup>33</sup>

the 'hood cools off  
the slap of jump rope  
reaches hot peppers

Frank Higgins<sup>34</sup>

soft April breeze —  
the jump rope song  
ends in rhyme

Stanford M. Forrester<sup>35</sup>

double rainbow  
girls in the playground  
spin hula hoops

Vuong Pham<sup>36</sup>

縄跳や入る子出る子見知らぬ子  
*nawatobi ya hairu ko deru ko mishiranu ko*

jumping rope —  
a child who enters, a child who exits  
a child who is a stranger

Nakatsuka Kenta; trans. Fay Aoyagi<sup>37</sup>

NIÑO Y TROMPO

*Cada vez que lo lanza  
cae, justo,  
en el centro del mundo.*

BOY AND TOP

Each time he flings it  
it falls, just,  
in the center of the world.

Octavio Paz; trans. William J. Higginson<sup>38</sup>

a spinning top  
moves along the sidewalk  
towards the girls' jacks

Cor van den Heuvel<sup>39</sup>

all afternoon  
bounce the ball pick up the jacks ...  
learning to count

C. Robin Janning<sup>40</sup>

first day of spring  
children risk marbles  
on the playground

Glenn G. Coats<sup>41</sup>

spring equinox  
the clack  
of marbles

John Soules<sup>42</sup>

the soft click of marbles an eye for an eye

Elmedin Kadric<sup>43</sup>

winning at marbles  
the challenger even takes  
the ex-champ's swagger

Frank Higgins<sup>44</sup>

the toy sailboat  
sails across the puddle  
with a cargo of two marbles

Cor van den Heuvel<sup>45</sup>

It's not only children in the playground that are interesting to  
watch. The adults are also worth paying attention to:

April Fool's Day  
an urchin in the playground  
calls me father

Jacek Margolak<sup>46</sup>

in the playground  
the father counts the children  
over and over

Hans Jongman<sup>47</sup>

playground the babysitter's tattoo

Greg Schwartz<sup>48</sup>

on the sidewalk  
beside the school playground  
the mothers'  
cigarette butts

Penny Harter<sup>49</sup>

pocket park:  
nanny outbrags nanny  
while wards fidget

Emily Romano<sup>50</sup>

both of us  
by the playground swings  
exchange of custody

Marcus Larsson<sup>51</sup>



Sometimes scenes among the children on a playground mimic the actions of adults ... or vice-versa.

election day  
kids in the schoolyard  
playing tag

Bill Kenney<sup>52</sup>

Outside the polls —  
a child abandons one swing  
to ride another

Donna Claire Gallagher<sup>53</sup>

in the playground a businessman  
tries out the swings

Penny Harter<sup>54</sup>

border town  
neighborhood children play  
red light, green light

William Scott Galasso<sup>55</sup>

A sandbox, whether in the yard or a public park, especially attracts haiku poets. Their poems often project a mood of *sabi* or *wabi* or *déjà-vu*.

childless  
we move to a house  
with a sandbox

John Sheirer<sup>56</sup>

sandbox —  
candy wrapper stuck  
in wet sand

Penny Harter<sup>57</sup>

October morning —  
a child in the sandbox  
no one will play with

Rick Tarquinio<sup>58</sup>

a bed of cosmos  
surrounding last year's sandbox  
— rusting Tonka truck

Patricia A. Laster<sup>59</sup>

MIA for 20 years ...  
a toy soldier  
in the sandbox

Stanford M. Forrester<sup>60</sup>

人気のない公園  
ドングリいつぱいのカップ  
砂場に残されたまま

empty park —  
a cup full of acorns  
left in the sandbox

*Ninkinonai kōen*  
*donguri itsu pai no kappu*  
*sunaba ni nokosa reta mama*

Ikuyo Yoshimura<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, the playground is not always a scene of fun and laughter.  
It can be a tough or sad place. Disturbed and abused children,  
bullies and the bullied, frequent parks and playgrounds too.

no space  
to be different  
rowdy playground

Mike Gallagher<sup>62</sup>

vandalized playground  
a swear word on the stone  
we called safe

Ian Wiley<sup>63</sup>

A child reaches up  
behind a black-barred fence  
to swing an empty swing

Sister Benedicta<sup>64</sup>

battered child  
... kicking the swing  
higher

Margaret A. Peacock<sup>65</sup>

on the playground  
a small child shouts.  
*Nuke 'em!*

Adele Kenny<sup>66</sup>

And beyond the issues that trouble individual children are larger social and political ills. Haiku poets are always ready to call attention to instances of inequality and violence, whether at home or overseas:

daybreak  
    hypodermics  
    strewn about the playground

Michael Dudley<sup>67</sup>

a tire swing  
hangs empty from the oak  
cocaine overdose

Katherine Simmons<sup>68</sup>

lockdown  
the swings sway  
without children

Mona Bedi<sup>69</sup>

gunfire the length of the playground

John McManus<sup>70</sup>

Bethlehem children  
play at marbles  
watched through crosshairs

John McDonald<sup>71</sup>

moonscape  
the pocked playground  
of Aleppo's children

William Scott Galasso<sup>72</sup>

hopscotch  
square to square  
the refugee girl

Aparna Pathak<sup>73</sup>

refugee camp —  
kids playing tag  
in the food line

Ruth Powell<sup>74</sup>

A playground that has been abandoned or closed, whether because the day has come to an end, or because the weather has worsened and the season has changed, is a sad, and seemingly unnatural situation.

the bell rings  
again the playground fills  
with pigeons

Charles Trumbull<sup>75</sup>

the creak of the swing  
after the last child  
leaves the park

Michael Cecilione<sup>76</sup>

deserted playground  
one swing  
still swinging

kjmunro<sup>77</sup>

empty playground  
i retrieve the boy  
i was

Dietmar Tauchner<sup>78</sup>

Twilight settling  
on the empty playground  
two blue marbles.

Margaret L. Schell<sup>79</sup>

first the children  
then the hopscotch grid  
gone with the rain

Natalia L. Rudychev<sup>80</sup>

summer rain  
castle ruins  
in the sandbox

Chad Lee Robinson<sup>81</sup>

alone  
on  
the  
playground  
a girl with orange hair  
summer's  
end

Lee Gurga<sup>82</sup>

the teetertotter  
levels again:  
fall equinox

Nasira Alma<sup>83</sup>

Hopscotch  
all the squares  
fill with leaves

Garry Gay<sup>84</sup>

no cicadas  
no double dutch ...  
park bench peeling

Tyrone McDonald<sup>85</sup>

derelict playground  
ghost laughter echoes  
of the school bully

Marion Clarke<sup>86</sup>

schoolyard deserted —  
faint breeze on the  
merry-go-round

Sheldon Young<sup>87</sup>

empty sandlot  
a shadow slides  
across home plate

Elliot Nicely<sup>88</sup>

a gray winter day;  
    music from the carousel  
        drifts through the playground

Tom Tico<sup>89</sup>

Snow covered playground,  
children's footprints surrounding  
the merry go round

Jeff Swan<sup>90</sup>

playground slide

Fe

brrrrrr

air

eee

Randy Brooks<sup>91</sup>

playground closed

icicles hang

from the monkey bars

Carol Rainsfeld<sup>92</sup>

abandoned school the playground buckling in the heat

Frances Angela<sup>93</sup>

to and fro

the ghost child

on a playground swing

Paulette Y. Johnston<sup>94</sup>

playground

still

swings

McMurtagh<sup>95</sup>

ブランコの揺れも消え果て遊園地

*buranko no yure mo kiehate yūenchi*

The swing of the swings all gone in the children's park

Furuyama Shitsue, trans. Hiroaki and Nancy Sato<sup>96</sup>

Furuyama's haiku becomes especially poignant when the reader realizes that it was written following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.

There is something about seeing a playground that awakens a strong feeling of nostalgia: a lost childhood perhaps, or simply memories of simpler times.

on the playground  
what a grandson imagines  
about my past

Gary Hotham<sup>97</sup>

playground slide:  
I call my grandson  
by my son's name

Edward J. Rielly<sup>98</sup>

spring breeze —  
I teach my granddaughter  
hopscotch

Billie Wilson<sup>99</sup>

My aging mother  
tells of her happiest moment:  
swinging as a child

Tom Tico<sup>100</sup>

35 & childless  
the merry-go-round  
shudders to a halt

Tanya McDonald<sup>101</sup>

a gust of spring  
the playground swing sways  
into my childhood

Chen-ou Liu<sup>102</sup>



*De paardjesmolen  
draait in tegenwijzerszin  
naar mijn kindertijd.*

The merry-go-round  
turns counter-clockwise  
back to my boyhood.

Willy Cuvelier<sup>103</sup>

all the dreams  
I shared with you  
childhood swing

Christina Sng<sup>104</sup>

that kid  
    who stole my marbles,  
    buried today

Michael McClintock<sup>105</sup>

duck-duck-goose  
the girl i passed up  
now a swan

John Hawk<sup>106</sup>

I hopscotch  
when no one's watching  
— spring again

Johan Bergstad<sup>107</sup>

Even the willow  
that holds my childhood swing  
    seems smaller now

Sandra Fuhringer<sup>108</sup>

my old school ...  
stillness of the  
merry-go-round

Charlotte Digregorio<sup>109</sup>

in a dream the wind  
 pushes the old tire swing  
 without me

Mary Fran Meer<sup>110</sup>

**Notes:**

1. A Field Guide to North American Haiku is a long-term project along the lines of a haiku encyclopedia-cum-*saijiki*, a selection of the best haiku in English arranged by topic and illustrating what it is about a given topic that attracts poets to write. When complete, the Field Guide project will comprise multiple thick volumes keyed to the several topics in traditional Japanese *saijiki* (haiku almanacs) and Western counterparts, notably William J. Higginson's *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (1996). These topics are Season, Sky & Elements, Landscape, Plants, Animals, Human Affairs, and Observances. The haiku in this essay are taken from my Haiku Database, currently containing more than 557,000 entries and selected from several thousand haiku about things that go on in playgrounds. Critique and suggestions of this article or the Field Guide project are warmly invited; please comment by email to [cptrumbull@comcast.net](mailto:cptrumbull@comcast.net).
2. David G. Lanoue, *Haiku of Kobayashi Issa* website.
3. Alexis Rotella, in *Frogpond* 13:3 (August 1990).
4. Anne Homan, Patrick Gallagher, and Patricia J. Machmiller, eds., *San Francisco Bay Area Nature Guide and Saijiki* (2010).
5. Garry Gay, in *Woodnotes* 25 (Summer 1995).
6. DeVar Dahl, in *The Heron's Nest* 12:4 (December 2010).
7. Michael Ketchek, in *Modern Haiku* 35:2 (Summer 2004).
8. Elisabeth Marshall, in William J. Higginson, *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (1996).
9. L. A. Davidson, *The Shape of the Tree* (1982).
10. Helen Stiles Chenoweth, in *American Haiku* 4:2 (1966).
11. Vincenzo Adamo, in *Stardust Haiku* 35 (November 2019).
12. John Martone, *Spirea* (2005).
13. Frederick Gasser, in *Inkstone* 1:2 (1982).
14. John S. O'Connor, in *Cicada* 24 (1998).
15. Nick Virgilio in *Haiku West* 4:2 (1971).
16. Garry Gay, in *Woodnotes* 2 (Summer 1989).
17. Chad Lee Robinson, in *Bottle Rockets* 8:1 (2006).
18. Peggy Willis Lyles, in *South by Southeast* 5:3 (October 1998).

19. Christopher Herold, Kiyoshi and Kiyoko Tokutomi Memorial Haiku Contest, 2003, Honorable Mention.
20. Alan Pizzarelli, in *Frogpond* 8:1 (February 1985).
21. Marie Summers, in *Haiku Harvest* 5:2 (2005?).
22. Barbara Hay, in *Bloō Outlier Journal* 1 (Winter 2020).
23. Rebecca Drouilhet, in *haikuNetra* 1:3 (November 16, 2023).
24. Victor Ortiz, *Mainichi Haiku in English*, January 16, 2014.
25. Christopher Patchel, in *Modern Haiku* 44:2 (Summer 2013).
26. Jerry Ball, *Left-Handed Year* (1981).
27. Francine Banwarth, in *The Heron's Nest* 25:1 (March 2023).
28. Sabine Miller, in *The Heron's Nest* 4:7 (July 2002).
29. Pris Campbell, in *Brass Bell*, August 2021.
30. Winona Baker, *Moss-hung Trees* (1992).
31. Jerry Kilbride, in *Woodnotes* 20 (Spring 1994).
32. Patricia A. Laster, *Connecting Our Houses* (1997).
33. Verse 3 of 7 from Frank Higgins's sequence "Manzanar War Relocation Center," *Modern Haiku* 53:2 (Summer 2022).
34. Frank Higgins, *On Earth as It Is: Haiku* (2023).
35. Stanford M. Forrester, *Snapshots* 11 (2006).
36. Vuong Pham, in *A Hundred Gourds* 2:1 (December 2012).
37. Nakatsuka Kenta, in *Shūkan haiku* (Haiku Weekly blog) 283, November 4, 2012; Fay Aoyagi, ed., *Blue Willow Haiku World*, January 8, 2013.
38. Octavio Paz, *Libertad bajo palabra* (Madrid: El país, 2003); William J. Higginson, *The Haiku Handbook* (1985).
39. From Cor van den Heuvel's haibun "A Boy's Seasons," *Modern Haiku* 24:3 (Fall 1993).
40. C. Robin Janning, *Brass Bell*, July 2021.
41. Glenn G. Coats, in *The Heron's Nest* 11:2 (June 2009).
42. John Soules, Kaji Aso Studio's International Haiku Contest, 2011, First Prize.
43. Elmedin Kadric, in *The Heron's Nest* 18:3 (September 2016).
44. Frank Higgins, in *Modern Haiku* 44:2 (Summer 2013).
45. From Cor van den Heuvel's haibun "A Boy's Seasons," *Modern Haiku* 24:3 (Fall 1993).
46. Jacek Margolak, in *Shiki Internet Kukai*, April 2009.
47. Hans Jongman, in *RAW NerVZ Haiku* 2:3 (Fall 1995).
48. Greg Schwartz, Featured Poem, in *Bottle Rockets* 46 (February 2022).
49. Penny Harter, in *Wind Chimes* 9 (1983).
50. Emily Romano, in *Brussels Sprout* 10:2 (May 1993).

51. Marcus Larsson, *Northern Lights* (2020).
52. Bill Kenney, *Tinywords* 16:2 (November 8, 2016).
53. Donna Claire Gallagher, *Modern Haiku* 29:1 (Winter–Spring 1998).
54. Penny Harter, link from “Lunar New Year,” a kasen renku, in Elizabeth Searle Lamb, *Across the Windharp* (1999).
55. William Scott Galasso, *Rough Cut* (2019).
56. John Sheirer, in Shirer, ed., *Bridge Traffic* (1998).
57. Penny Harter, *The Monkey’s Face* (1987).
58. Rick Tarquinio, in *Modern Haiku* 30:1 (Winter–Spring 1999).
59. Patricia A. Laster, in *Modern Haiku* 26:3 (Fall 1995).
60. Stanford M. Forrester, *Staten Island: 10 Haiku and Senryu* (2020).
61. Ikuyo Yoshimura, *Spring Thunder* (1996).
62. Mike Gallagher, in *Cold Moon Journal*, September 13, 2022.
63. Ian Wiley, in *Bottle Rockets* 35 (2016).
64. Sister Benedicta, in *Modern Haiku* 25:1 (Winter–Spring 1994).
65. Margaret A. Peacock, Gerald M. Brady Senryu Awards 1993, Honorable Mention.
66. Adele Kenny, *Starship Earth* (1990).
67. Michael Dudley, *Pilgrimage* (2015).
68. Katherine Simmons, in *Mayfly* 63 (Summer 2017).
69. Mona Bedi, Japan Fair Haiku Contest 2021 (Bellevue, Washington).
70. John McManus, in *Modern Haiku* 45:1 (Winter–Spring 2014).
71. John McDonald, *A Hundred Gourds* 1:3 (June 2012). Originally written in Scots.
72. William Scott Galasso, *Rough Cut* (2019).
73. Aparna Pathak, in *Frogpond* 40:2 (Spring–Summer 2017).
74. Ruth Powell, in *Shiki Internet Kukai*, February 2010.
75. Charles Trumbull, in *The Heron’s Nest* 1:2 (October 1999).
76. Michael Cecilione, in *Black Bough* 13 (1999).
77. kjmunro, in *Autumn Moon Haiku Journal* 3:2 (Spring/Summer 2020).
78. Dietmar Tauchner, 14th International Kusamakura Haiku Competition, 2009, Nyūsen (Third Prize).
79. Margaret L. Schell, in *Modern Haiku* 2:2 (Spring 1971).
80. Natalia L. Rudychev, in *Modern Haiku* 40:3 (Autumn 2009).
81. Chad Lee Robinson, *Hermitage* 1:1/2 (June 2004).
82. Lee Gurga, in *Modern Haiku* 40:1 (Winter–Spring 2009).
83. Nasira Alma, in *Modern Haiku* 25:2 (Summer 1994).
84. Garry Gay, in William J. Higginson, *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac* (1996).
85. Tyrone McDonald, in *The Heron’s Nest* 10:1 (March 2008).

86. Marion Clarke, in *Bloo* Outlier Journal 4 (Winter 2022).
87. Sheldon Young, in *Old Pond* 2:1 (April 1987).
88. Elliot Nicely, in *Presence* 61 (July 2018).
89. Tom Tico, in *Frogpond* 12:1 (February 1989).
90. Jeff Swan, in *Black Bough* 10 (1997).
91. From Randy Brooks's sequence "Devotional Calendar," *Frogpond* 37:1 (Winter 2014).
92. Carol Rainsfeld, in *Simply Haiku* 1:4 (October 2003).
93. Frances Angela, *Day Out* (2019).
94. Paulette Y. Johnston, in *Lummox 7 Anthology* 2018.
95. McMurtagh, in *Still* 3:3 (Autumn 1999).
96. Furuyama Shitsue (古山シツエ), in Mayuzumi Madoka, ed., *So Happy to See Cherry Blossoms: Haiku from the Year of the Great Earthquake and Tsunami* (2014).
97. Gary Hotham, in *Blithe Spirit* 31:4 (November 2021).
98. Edward J. Rielly, in *A Hundred Gourds* 3:1 (December 2013).
99. Billie Wilson, in *The Heron's Nest* 7:1 (March 2005).
100. Tom Tico, in *American Haiku* 5:2 (1967).
101. Tanya McDonald, not previously published.
102. Chen-ou Liu, in *Wales Haiku Journal* (Summer 2019).
103. Willy Cuvelier, 10th Ito en Oi Ocha Shinhaiku Contest, Honorable Mention.
104. Christina Sng, in *Wales Haiku Journal* (Winter 2018–19).
105. Michael McClintock, in *Modern Haiku* 31:3 (Fall 2000).
106. John Hawk, in *Prune Juice* 7 (Winter 2012).
107. Johan Bergstad, *Snödroppar/Snowdrops* (2009).
108. Sandra Fuhringer, in *Brussels Sprout* 2:3 (1982).
109. Charlotte Digregorio, in *Modern Haiku* 40:2 (Summer 2009).
110. Mary Fran Meer, in *Brussels Sprout* 8:2 (May 1991).