



GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

HAIKU

★ From the Japanese we have inherited the sensitive yet powerful haiku (high-coo). The haiku is a three-line, seventeen syllable, unrhymed (usually) poem which uses nature as its primary focus. There are numerous collections of haiku translated from the Japanese as well as those created by English writers. Some are exquisitely illustrated. It would be very simple to arrange an entire unit of study around Japanese culture and art (especially the pen and ink drawings). Haiku books are readily available at any public library. You may have some in the school's resource center or library, also.

The haiku, it has been said, captures a moment in nature or in life and freezes it with disciplined language. Each reader, then, thaws the message, the picture painted by words, and brings the scene to life.

We have found that upper elementary grade students are the most capable of working with the haiku. Younger students tend to stay too literal, too concrete. The clever thing about the haiku is its ability to convey a mood or a feeling through the picture painted in words. Explicit language denoting feeling is not generally used. Consider these samples:

An old silent pond (5)
A frog jumps into the pond (7)
Splash, silence again. (5)
Basho

In the darkest woods (5)
A weeping willow tree cries (7)
Who made such sadness? (5)
G. Lipson

Without telling us so, each poem not only captures a moment in nature, but clearly conveys a mood, a tone.

Though we have simplified a good deal, you will find that your students can generate some sensitive haiku, if you,

- 1) keep the focus on nature
- 2) help the students generate colorful phrases
- 3) assist with the syllabication of each phrase
- 4) practice writing haiku sufficiently with the entire class before expecting individual effort.

An approach that we have used repeatedly and which has not failed us is as follows:

1. Engage the class in a discussion of the season. Allow them to reflect on scenes that come to their minds and share with the class.
2. Now, ask each student to "zero-in" on *one* spot in his scene. Can he give you a picturesque phrase to capture that spot? When you are given a rather ordinary phrase, ask the student to "stretch" it so that others can sense the picture more clearly. You want to move, for example, from "a lake" to "a lazy, placid lake," etc.
3. Brainstorm for phrases and fill your chalkboard with as many as you can. (Do not deal with syllabication at this point.) Leave one section of the chalkboard free for the creation of the haiku, later.

4. Now, review each phrase for syllabication. Placing check marks above the syllables helps. When there are too many or too few syllables, make adjustments immediately so that the phrase is either a 5-syllable or a 7-syllable phrase. For example,

a lazy, placid lake (6 syllables)
can be changed to
lazy, placid lake (5 syllables)

or to

lazy, placid, moon-filled lake (7 syllables).

5. When all phrases have been marked for syllable content, ask one student to select a 5-syllable phrase that would make a good starter for painting a word picture.
6. Read the phrase to the class. Ask them to reflect on it and then to select a 7-syllable phrase that preserves meaning and tone. Write it as the second line of the haiku.
7. Complete the poem with the selection of a 5-syllable phrase for the third line.



STUDENT WORK SHEET

HAIKU

Haiku is a three-line poem of Japanese origin which usually focuses on nature. It is not ordinarily a rhyming poem, but it does pay careful attention to syllables.

1. Look through a magazine and find a nature scene that is special. Cut it out and mount it on construction paper.
2. Sit quietly and look deeply into your picture. Think about all the interesting ways to describe the scene.
3. Write at least 10 - 12 colorful phrases which capture the mood and the picture.



4. Check the syllables to be sure that each phrase is either 5 syllables or 7 syllables long.

5. Select a 5-syllable phrase which makes the best starter. Write it as line one, below.

6. Now pick a 7-syllable phrase that keeps the meaning and mood you started in the first line. Write it as line two, below.

7. For your third line, pick a 5-syllable phrase which ends your haiku in a satisfactory way.

8. Proofread and edit your haiku, rewrite it below and paste it below your picture.
