

Haiku Poetry from Japan

About haiku

Haiku is a form of short poetry that originated in Japan several centuries ago and gained national popularity, thanks to master poets such as Matsuo Basho and Yosa Buson. In the mid-twentieth century after World War II, it became popular in Western culture and all over the world. Traditional haiku poems are often rooted in natural history and the seasons. A traditional haiku poem also typically features an image, or pair of images, meant to depict the essence or mood of a specific moment in time.

Unlike other forms of poetry, a haiku poem focuses on patterns of syllables rather than rhyming, and is usually divided into three lines: the first and third lines each have 5 syllables, and the second line has 7 syllables. This creates a 5/7/5 syllable pattern. For example:

*Birds silently perch
The slender branch of the birch
Cradles their splendor*

As the form has evolved, many of these rules—including the 5/7/5 practice—have been routinely broken. However, the philosophy of haiku has been preserved: the focus on a brief moment in time; a use of provocative, colorful images; an ability to be read in one breath; and a sense of sudden enlightenment and illumination.

Write your own haiku

When crafting haiku, think of a group of words that present an observation in a way that appeal to the senses. Use sight, touch, sound, smell, taste, or other sensations like pain or movement. Be as specific as possible, and write in the present tense. Try to describe your feelings as you write the poem. When writing about an event, present it as an image. Because your haiku poem must be a total of 17 syllables, each word in the poem needs to be selected carefully. Use a thesaurus or dictionary to help!

Haiku #1

Haiku #2

Suggested Activities

For libraries or individual classrooms, how about a haiku party after watching Hikaru's videos? Find a few good haiku examples at your local library or online and read them together with copies on the board or in-hand. Review haiku composition and content options as above and then use the instructions below to write your own haiku. Everyone reads their best haiku over a cup of Japanese tea. Perhaps there are categories for haikus about nature or pets or history. Have random objects on hand for people to write haiku about to make it fun, challenging, and competitive.



No. 26 Japanese woodblock print by Katsushika Hokusai from 36 views of Mount Fuji.

Sources

Poets.org
Poetry Foundation
The Iafor Haiku Award