

# Haiga and Haiku

Target Grades: 3-5

State Standards of Learning

English 3.17, 3.26

Visual Art 3.10, 3.13, 3.17, 3.26

## Overview

Children combine poetry and art to produce traditional *haiga*—haiku-inspired paintings.

## Essential Questions

How is the special appreciation Japanese people have for the natural world revealed in their writing and art?

## Objectives

- Students will write seasonal verse using the syllabic pattern of Japanese haiku.
- They will paint pictures inspired by their writing.
- They will discover the Japanese aesthetic for finding beauty in the natural world in yet another art form.

## Management:

- 45 minutes or more
- Hold class outdoors or near a window that overlooks a natural setting

## Materials

- Collection of haiku (see the Sample Haiku resource page)
- Paper and pencils
- Watercolor paints and brushes
- Paper for painting
- Black paint or black markers

## Preparation

Find examples of *haiga* (haiku paintings) online. Save for projection.

Read the Sample Haiku resource page, which describes how this deceptively simple form of verse works.

## Activity

1. Introduce students to the form of the haiku, a three-line poem of the syllabic pattern 5-7-5.
2. Read aloud several haiku written by the Japanese masters. It's fun to start with Basho: *The old pond/A frog jumped in/Kerplunk!*
3. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine the moment that inspired this poem—a perfectly still moment interrupted by a frog leaping into the water. Introduce the Japanese sentiment expressed as *mono no aware*—an awareness of things, especially of things that do not last, like the stillness of the pond.
4. Have children notice that like so many other Japanese arts, haiku reflect on nature. They often provide a verbal twist or contrast, first offering a larger view, then focusing in on a small detail.
5. Talk about the current season. Together, come up with a list of seasonal words that can be used in a haiku. Japanese poets actually use almanacs that contain seasonal word inventories.
6. Project several *haiga* examples to show children how haiku can inspire art. The *hai* in *haiga*, like the *hai* in *haiku* means "lighthearted." *Ku* means "verse." *Ga* means "painting." Haiga are poem paintings.
7. Challenge the children to write a haiku and to paint a haiga inspired by it. (You can ask them to incorporate a seasonal word from their list.) The haiku should be handwritten on the haiga at the end.
8. Have the children read their haiku, then display their haiga.

## Variations

Hold a Haiku Death Match! This goofy contest is popular at colleges and universities and among haiku writing groups. Have students write several haiku in advance of the "death match." The haiku are copied onto strips of paper with the poet's name on the back. Collect the poems and place them in a box.

Choose three judges to sit at a table in the front of the classroom. Give each judge two pieces of cloth, one white and one red (samurai headbands). Invite the first three contestants to come to the front of the room. Give each contestant three or four haiku.

Begin the first round. Each contestant takes a turn reading one haiku twice, reciting it with great, even exaggerated expression. After all three have read, the judges are asked to judge the best haiku for that round. As you point to the first contestant, the judges hold up either the white cloth (thumbs up) or the red cloth (thumbs down). The haiku that received the most white cloth votes wins, and the poet, whose name is on back, is identified. Repeat with the remaining haikus, then declare the winning reader for that round. That reader remains for a new round, as you invite up two more contestants. Continue in this way until you have run out of haiku.

In this contest, reading performance is weighed as heavily as the merits of the haiku, so winning and losing is ambiguous, taking the pressure off your young readers and writers.