

Japanese Haiku

When it comes to poetry, some people like to have rules. Other people like to write whatever they feel like writing. Do you have a preference? Either way, haiku might be for you.

Haiku is a form of poetry that has some strict rules. Haiku poems can be only 17 syllables long. The syllables are arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables each.

Even though they have strict rules about syllables, haiku poems can be full of emotion and meaning. In this way, they let the author write what they feel like writing. The poems generally do not rhyme. They try to express a lot in just a few words.

Haiku poetry originated in Japan. No one knows exactly when it was created or who created it. The form was first seen in Japanese literature as the beginning part of a longer poem. It was known as hokku. Later, the form was used for stand-alone poems. It was then called haiku.

Traditional haiku are about nature. They describe events that happen in different seasons. These descriptions can create strong emotions in the reader.

One of the first famous haiku writers was the great master Basho. Here is an example of one of his poems about nature:

On a withered branch
A crow has alighted:
Nightfall in autumn.

Ever since Basho, haiku has been the most popular form of poetry in Japan. Other traditional haiku masters include Buson, Issa, and Masaoka Shiki. After World War II, haiku became popular all over the world. Today haiku poems are written in many countries and in many languages. They are also written about many subjects, not only nature.

If you are writing a poem, you might try to write it in the form of a haiku. The rules about syllables can help you get started. After that, anything goes!



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. What is the subject of most traditional haiku?
 - a. Love
 - b. Animals
 - c. Nature
 - d. Japan

2. Who was NOT mentioned as a haiku master?
 - a. Basho
 - b. Kyoshi
 - c. Issa
 - d. Masaoka Shikki

3. What is the difference between hokku and haiku?
 - a. Hokku is the start of a longer poem
 - b. Haiku is about nature
 - c. Hokku has three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables each
 - d. Haiku is from Japan

4. Why do you think haiku poems are popular?
 - a. They are short
 - b. They create strong emotions
 - c. They have a specific format
 - d. All of the above

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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