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ABSTRACT

In this lesson plan, students explore the traditions and conventions of haiku, comparing this classic form of Japanese poetry to a related genre of Japanese visual art. Students also compose haiku of their own. The lesson's learning objectives are: (1) to learn about the history and poetic conventions of Japanese haiku; (2) to read and interpret classic examples of haiku; (3) to compare the world of haiku with the world portrayed in Japanese woodblock prints; and (4) to practice writing haiku in English. Nine specific activities are described in detail, and ideas to extend the lesson conclude the lesson plan. (SR)

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The World of Haiku

Introduction

In this lesson, students explore the traditions and conventions of haiku, comparing this classic form of Japanese poetry to a related genre of Japanese visual art and composing haiku of their own.

Learning Objectives

(1) To learn about the history and poetic conventions of Japanese haiku. (2) To read and interpret classic examples of haiku. (3) To compare the world of haiku with the world portrayed in Japanese woodblock prints. (4) To practice writing haiku in English.

Lesson Plan

Guiding Question: What can we learn about Japanese culture by studying haiku?

1 Begin by having students read some classic examples of Japanese haiku in English translation. Divide the class into small groups and have students read several haiku aloud to one another. To help sharpen their critical responsiveness, have each group reach a consensus about the poem they like best and agree on three reasons why it is superior. Two collections of traditional haiku are accessible through EDSITEment at the AskAsia website:

- Haiku by Basho
  (http://www.columbia.edu/itc/eacp/asiasite/topics/index.html?topic=Haiku+subtopic=Intro)
  An interactive introduction to this seventeenth century master who pioneered the haiku tradition. Click the "Class Materials" button for a collection of student readings that includes six haiku by Basho.

- Haiku for People!
  (http://www.toyomasu.com/haiku/)
  A website celebrating the history of haiku and its development into a form of poetry practiced around the world. Scroll down for a broad selection of haiku by many classic

Japanese poets, including Basho, Buson, and Issa.

2 Have a spokesperson read each group's preferred haiku aloud to the class and explain the group's reasons for its choice. List these reasons on the chalkboard, noting where groups have identified similar characteristics or registered a similar impression. Keep this list on view for later reference.

3 To enrich students' appreciation for the art of the haiku, provide them with a brief outline of its history and development, drawing on the background available at Haiku by Basho and Haiku for People!:

- Explain that the haiku tradition dates back to the late seventeenth century, the Tokugawa Period, when Japanese society was emerging from the aristocratic culture of the samurai and developing a middle-class culture based on trade, commerce, and mass education. Traditional haiku reflect this shift in their subject matter, focusing on everyday occurrences and ordinary people instead of legendary figures and royal intrigues. It is poetry intended for a popular audience and remains the most popular form of poetry in Japan today.

- Use the Class Materials available at Haiku by Basho to show students how haiku developed from haikai, a longer poetic form made up of linked verses that were contributed by different writers. The first verse in this chain, called a hokku (literally "starting verse"), became the model for haiku, setting the pattern for its metrical structure, its focus on a specific time and place, and its thought-provoking, open-ended quality.

- Point out that haiku became an independent verse form in the 1890s when the poet Masaoka Shiki formalized this centuries-old tradition by setting down rules for writing haiku.

4 Provide students with a list of the three main rules for writing haiku, as explained on the Haiku by Basho and Haiku for People! websites:

- A haiku is a three-line poem in which the first line has five syllables, the second line seven syllables, and the final line five syllables. These syllable counts are strictly observed in Japanese but can be loosely observed when haiku are written in other languages. The Haiku by Basho website provides examples of haiku in transliterated Japanese and in English which illustrate this point. For example:

  kirishigure
  Fuji wo minu hi zo
  omoshiroki

  in the misty rain
  Mount Fuji is veiled all day--
  how intriguing!

  (From Makoto Ueda, *Basho and His Interpreters: Selected Hokku with Commentary* [Stanford University Press, 1991] p. 102.)

- A haiku should contain a kigo, a word that gives the reader a clue to the season. The kigo anchors the haiku at a specific moment in time, setting the experience it describes in a poetic here and now. The kigo can be the name of the season (autumn, winter) or a subtler clue, such as a reference to the harvest or new fallen snow. Through the years, certain signs of the seasons have become conventional in Japanese haiku: cherry blossoms are a kigo for spring, mosquitoes a kigo for summer. Sometimes, too, the kigo may refer to a specific moment -- the dawn or moonrise -- without reference to a specific season.

- Finally, a haiku has two parts. The poem divides after the first or second line, so that it seems to make two separate statements that are related in some unexpected or implicit way. As Professor Haruo Shirane explains on the Haiku by Basho website, this structure "leaves the poem open for the reader to complete," creating "an open space which the reader...is supposed to enter into." The two-part structure can also make reading a haiku feel like discovering something hidden that suddenly becomes very clear. In Japanese, the dividing point between the two parts of a haiku is marked by what haiku poets call a

"cutting word" (*kireji*). In English, the division is often marked with a colon, a dash, or an elipsis.

5 Return to the list of reasons students gave for choosing their favorite haiku and explore similarities between what they had to say about this form of poetry and what the literary tradition tells us about it. For example: Were they attracted by the everyday subject matter that distinguishes haiku from "high class" styles of poetry? Were they impressed by the immediacy of haiku, its sharp focus on a specific time and place as signaled by the kigo? Were they drawn in by the haiku's two-part structure -- surprised by a sudden turn of thought or shift of perspective? Were they inspired by their favorite haiku, prompted to respond with a thought of their own, like a hakai poet of the seventeenth century? Work with the class in this way to extend and sharpen their list of critical insights into haiku, eliciting student comments on characteristic haiku moods and themes (e.g., travel, transitional moments, juxtapositions of the sublime and mundane).

6 To broaden students' perspective on Japanese culture, have them compare the types of scenes evoked by haiku with the scenes portrayed in ukiyo-e woodblock prints, which also became popular during the Tokugawa period. Like haiku, this was an art rooted in everyday experience, as indicated by its name, "ukiyo-e," which means "pictures of the floating world." Ukiyo-e captured the ephemeral aspect of life, finding a timeless beauty in the here and now that has made it the best known style of Japanese art today. Background on ukiyo-e is available through EDSITEment at the Teaching (and Learning) About Japan website, which provides links to several online galleries:

- The Ukiyo-e Museum of the Nagoya Broadcast Network
  (http://www.nbn.co.jp/ukiyoe/index.html)
  A collection of characteristic examples of ukiyo-e organized into thematic galleries. For images that bear comparison to the world of haiku, direct students to the galleries called "Rain and Snow," "Sightseeing in the Town of Edo" (Edo is present-day Tokyo), and "A Sense of Journey." In each gallery, click on the small image to view a larger version with an interpretative caption, then click the larger version to view the image at maximum size.

- Ukiyo-e: The Pictures of the Floating World
  (http://www.bahnhof.se/~secutor/ukiyo-e/)
  A collection organized for art collectors, with galleries devoted to individual ukiyo-e artists and characteristic visual themes. Click "Guide to ukiyo-e websites" on this site's homepage and scroll down to the Hiroshige heading for a link to "Quiz: Tokaidou 53 Questions," a website that leads visitors through the most famous series of ukiyo-e prints, Hiroshige's "Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido" (1833), which depicts scenes along the highway connecting Edo, the Tokugawa capital, with Kyoto, Japan's ancient imperial city. The captions in this exhibit provide background on Japanese history and geography, and include a question that must be answered correctly to continue the journey, making this site an effective online learning tool as well as a resource for comparing the world of ukiyo-e with the world of haiku.

- A Visual Literacy Exercise
  (http://www.csuohio.edu/history/japan/japan01c.html)
  A special presentation of the Teaching (and Learning) About Japan website, which can be accessed by clicking the third small picture (an architectural detail) on the site's homepage. This online learning exercise leads visitors through a series of fifteen ukiyo-e images, many from Hiroshige's Toakaido series, allowing one first to look at the images without explanation, then providing background and pointing out focal points for each one.

7 Have students examine a selection of ukiyo-e prints in small groups, listing points of comparison between these images of everyday life and the scenes called to mind by haiku. Students might notice, for example, that ukiyo-e frequently convey a sense of season and seem to capture a specific time and place. Likewise, these pictures typically draw a viewer into the situation and open a fresh perspective by including a "cutting" detail, such as a person whose posture or facial expression at first seems out of place, or a tiny human figure who at first seems lost in the landscape. Encourage students to note other similarities and differences, then share observations in a class discussion. Ask students what conclusions one might draw about the relationship between ukiyo-e and haiku, and how one might substantiate (or refute) those

conclusions through further research.

8 Close this discussion by asking students what these two art forms reveal about Japanese culture and society in the Tokugawa period. Direct students' attention first to physical aspects of the culture portrayed in traditional haiku and ukiyo-e: What does Japan look like to the Japanese? How do they respond to the weather and climate? How do they perceive their country's landscape, vegetation, and wildlife? What is their attitude toward nature, country life, and the urban scene? Probe more deeply by asking what haiku and ukiyo-e might reveal about Japanese social relationships, gender roles, class divisions, and cultural values. Note students' observations on the chalkboard and encourage them to range widely in this discussion, aiming to open their eyes to the wealth of information concentrated in these popular art forms. Be alert at the same time, however, to guard against sweeping generalizations by reminding students that haiku and ukiyo-e are only a tiny part of Japanese culture.


Conclude this lesson by having students write two or three haiku based on their own everyday experiences. Be sure to emphasize that a haiku can be funny, serious, or even just a "snapshot" of a moment or a scene. Allow no more than 15 or 20 minutes for this assignment, then have students share their best poems in their groups or with the class.

☐ Extending the Lesson

- Encourage students to submit their haiku to the Mainichi Daily News, which publishes a monthly selection of Haiku in English from writers around the world. At the paper's English-language website, students can also read a wide selection of present-day haiku, including recent winners of the Mainichi Haiku Contest. Haiku can be submitted by email to mdn@mainichi.co.jp. (To access this resource through EDSITEment, click "Information/News" on the AskAsia website's homepage, then click "New Site Links" and select "Asian Newspapers." Scroll down to the section for Japan and click "Mainichi Shimbun," then look in the extreme lower right-hand corner of this Japanese-language webpage for a link to "Mainichi Daily News." Scroll down to the lower right-hand corner of this English-language webpage and click "Haiku in English" under the Features heading.)

- Haiku can serve as a doorway into Japanese history. For an in-depth overview, have students visit the Teaching (and Learning) About Japan website, which offers a series of illustrated online lectures exploring The Cultural History of Japan. (To find this resource, click the third small picture on the site's homepage, then click the "series of five illustrated lectures" link.) The lecture titled "The Floating World" provides a detailed overview of the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), when haiku and ukiuyo-e developed into Japan's most popular arts.

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