

FIVE EXTENSION HAIKU LESSONS FOR STUDENTS IN GRADES 3-4

These lessons are designed for students in grades 3 and 4. They are intended to extend the wonderful lessons on “Haiku Awareness,” “Haiku Reading,” and “Haiku Writing” for students in grades 3-4 found on The Haiku Foundation’s “Education Resources” page. They are inspired by Patricia Donegan’s book *Haiku: Asian Arts & Crafts for Creative Kids* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 2003). In this very useful introduction to haiku for children, Donegan outlines “Seven Keys to Writing Haiku,” which are form, image, kigo, here and now, feeling, surprise, and compassion. The following short lessons introduce four of these concepts and one additional idea, and are intended to enhance students’ haiku understanding and writing ability. Most of them start with Donegan’s descriptions—she does a great job so why re-invent the wheel—and should each last approximately twenty minutes so that the kids have time to try out these elements of haiku in their own writing. Each lesson is accompanied by a sample of haiku that illustrate the particular element and can lead to wonderful conversations. In fact, I have found that teaching with examples or “mentor texts” is the most valuable way to teach poetry. So these lessons rely heavily on the sample poems and the ensuing discussions. I have taught all of these lessons in various settings, classroom poetry lessons, one-shot workshops for kids, and an eight-week class called “The Way of Haiku” at a local community arts center.

I hope they are helpful. Perhaps other teachers of young children will be moved to add more lessons on other elements of haiku, such as feeling, compassion, small creatures, Issa, and haiga!

1. IMAGES

On pages 10-12, Donegan describes the importance of images in haiku. She believes that strong, sharp, descriptive images make better haiku. She also introduces the technique of showing the images rather than telling what they mean. Her additional hints include the avoidance of *like* or *as*, repetition, and words that explain rather than show. You may also want to introduce the idea of **juxtaposition** and lead a discussion about how two images relate in haiku.

Sample Haiku: What Two Things? (Pass the sample sheets out and ask the students to read each one silently and circle the two images. Then ask students to read each one aloud and have kids share the two images that are being compared. You can also ask them if they think each comparison is effective—does it work?)

Sample Haiku: Contrasting Images (Talk about different ways we compare things. Introduce the word **contrast** and talk about what it means. Then use the same process outlined in the previous sample haiku exercise.)

2. KIGO

Pages 12-14, Donegan introduces *kigo*, or season words as a way of grounding each haiku in nature and its cycles. After you introduce the concept, try this small exercise:

Season Words

Create a list of season words ahead of time and keep it to yourself. Provide writing implements for the kids. Tell them that you will be reading each word one by one. You will give them time to write down each word and which season they think of when they hear the word. After going through the whole list, re-read each word aloud and ask kids to share which season they wrote down for each word. This often leads to really interesting discussions about seasonal activities and memories. (Sometimes I share the traditionally-designated season associated with each *kigo* from William J. Higginson's *Haiku World: An International Poetry Almanac*, but I don't get too heavy handed about seasonal matches.) This list (and the kids' memories that accompany the *kigo*) provide wonderful starting points for writing haiku.

Here's a sample list below. I start with some "easier" ones and then move toward more ambiguous ones.

1. pumpkin
2. lilac buds
3. frost
4. harvest
5. blueberries
6. icicle
7. valentine
8. robin
9. poison ivy
10. the longest day
11. sleet
12. thunder storm
13. pine branch
14. swimming
15. river fog

Sample Haiku: Which Season? (You can pass out sheets of these haiku and ask the students to read them silently and circle the *kigo*. Then read each one aloud and discuss.)

3. HERE AND NOW—THE HAIKU MOMENT

Donegan introduces the idea of the importance of the haiku poet's real experience in the moment on pages 14-15. You can also connect this lesson with the common

student writing exercise of asking the five questions (who, what, when, where, and why) that help writers focus on specific details while they write.

Sample Haiku: What, When, Where? (As a way to help kids think about the haiku moment and writing in the present tense, read each one aloud and ask what action is occurring and when and where is it happening.)

4. SURPRISE

Donegan discusses surprise on pages 15-16 by starting with Basho's famous haiku about the old pond and the frog. She introduces humor as one way to add surprise. I also mention that haiku sometimes have a little **twist** in the last line. Donegan mentions senryu here, so you may want to bring some in and introduce them to your kids.

Sample Haiku: Surprise! (Ask students to read each one aloud and discuss what surprises them.)

5. USING YOUR SENSES

This is not one of Donegan's elements, but it is very important to help children hone their observation skills by directing their attention to their senses and giving them opportunities to utilize them. You can start by asking the students what are their five senses and write them down on chart paper or a whiteboard.

Sample Haiku: Which Senses? (Ask students to read each of the sample poems one by one and discuss which senses are represented by the images in the poems.)

Using Your Senses Writing Exercise

The perfect follow up to this small lesson would be to go outside and ask children to focus on their senses and write a haiku for each sense (except taste, perhaps). You could begin with a guided meditation to help kids become more attuned to their senses. You could also do this one inside if the weather or surroundings don't cooperate.