



# Haiku

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Unit: Henry as Author

Topic: Writing, poetry

## Thoreau Quotation

“Good poetry seems so simple and natural a thing.”

—*Journal*, 29 November, 1841

## Background

Henry famously wrote “Simplify! Simplify!” There are few forms of writing simpler than the Japanese poetic style known as Haiku. With lines comprising 5, 7, and 5 syllables, these simple poems can be very challenging, while a good haiku can be wonderfully expressive and evocative.

## Objectives

1. Write a haiku poem based on outdoor observations.
2. Learn to edit and revise written work.

## Method

Students will learn about the art of writing haiku poetry and craft, edit, and re-write a haiku based on their observations outdoors.

## Time Required

30-45 minutes

## Materials

- Field notebooks to write observations and haikus
- Pencil
- Outdoor space

## Procedure

1. Instruct students in the art of haiku, using examples (see the end of the lesson plan). Haikus should be written in three lines, the first with five syllables, second with seven syllables, and third with five syllables.
2. Students should observe their environment on a school yard field trip, or be instructed to make observations at home. Have them observe their surroundings quietly for 10-20 minutes and take field notes about the things they saw, heard, felt (wind, sun, the surface of rock, etc.), smelled, and any emotions they might have experienced (calm, restless, bored, happy).
3. Ask students to write 2 to 5 haikus on one topic or object. After their first draft, ask them to edit and to re-write their first attempts. Henry would often take journal entries and field notes from different days and combine them, build on them, and then revise them to create new speeches or essays. Similarly, encourage the students to combine their favorite elements of different haikus into one that they feel best captures what they observed.
4. Ask students to share their favorite or final poem with the class.

## Reflect and Explain

- Is it easier, or harder, to write a very short poem than a long poem or paragraph? Why?
- Were your field notes helpful in writing the haiku? If not, how might you change your strategy for taking notes next time so you can use your observations for later learning and writing? Did you draw upon more than just your field notes to write your haiku?
- Did anyone make something up to make the poem work rather than just using your direct experience?
- What did you like best about your favorite haikus?

## Extensions

1. Create an illustration to accompany your haiku.
2. Research other forms of poetry and have the students write a poem in the form they chose based upon their field notes from their observations. Have them compare and contrast the haikus to their second poetry form. Questions for reflection: Was it easier or harder to write this form of poetry? Were your field notes helpful in writing in a new form? If not, how might you change your strategy for taking notes next time so you can use your observations for later learning and writing?
3. You could also do some “collective haiku” writing. Give each student three strips of paper. On two of those pieces, they are to write a five-syllable observation of something in nature. On the third piece of paper, they are to write a seven-syllable observation. Have them fold up their pieces and put the five-syllable lines in one pile and the seven-syllable lines in another pile. Then, have each student randomly draw two five-syllable lines from the pile and one seven-syllable line (alternatively, you could assign different colored paper to the five- and seven-syllable lines and have

students pick based on color). Determining which five-syllable line will be first and which will be last, have students share their “collective haiku” with the class.

## Vocabulary

**haiku** - A traditional Japanese haiku is a three-line poem with 17 syllables, written in a 5/7/5 syllable count. Often focusing on images from nature, haiku emphasizes simplicity, intensity, and directness of expression.

## Common Core Standards

### English Language Anchor Standards (all grades)

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4](#)  
Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5](#)  
Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6](#)  
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2](#)  
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4](#)  
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5](#)  
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.6](#)  
Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3](#)  
Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5](#)  
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.6  
Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

### Additional Resources

Creative Writing Now <http://www.creative-writing-now.com/how-to-write-a-haiku.html>

### Examples of haiku that use nature as inspiration (from yourdictionary.com)

Here are three examples from Basho Matsuo, the first great poet of haiku in the 1600s:

An old silent pond...  
A frog jumps into the pond,  
splash! Silence again.

Autumn moonlight—  
a worm digs silently  
into the chestnut.

Lightning flash—  
what I thought were faces  
are plumes of pampas grass.

Three examples of the haiku of Yosa Buson from the late 1700s are offered here:

A summer river being crossed  
how pleasing  
with sandals in my hands!

Light of the moon  
Moves west, flowers' shadows  
Creep eastward.

In the moonlight,  
The color and scent of the wisteria  
Seems far away.

Here are two haiku from Kobayashi Issa, a haiku master poet from the late 1700s and early 1800s:

O snail  
Climb Mount Fuji,  
But slowly, slowly!

Everything I touch  
with tenderness, alas,  
pricks like a bramble.

Natsume Soseki lived from 1867 - 1916. He was a novelist and master of the haiku. Here are a couple of examples of his poems:

Over the wintry  
forest, winds howl in rage  
with no leaves to blow.

The crow has flown away:  
swaying in the evening sun,  
a leafless tree.