

Spring Inspiration (In 17 syllables!)

Do these numbers mean anything to you?

17: 5 – 7 – 5

Hint: think poetry...

If you guessed Haiku, you are right! Our April lesson of the month will feature this ancient Japanese form of poetry. Haiku gets its distinctive style from both its form and its thematic material. It consists of just seventeen syllables, five in the first line, seven in the second line, and five in the third. These non-rhyming poems usually focus on some small, beautiful aspect of nature – a raindrop on a leaf, a firefly hovering over a field – some fleeting slice of life. And what better time than spring to hone our observation skills and appreciate the world coming into bloom again! Here's what you do:

1.) Ask the class to close their eyes and imagine – then read some examples of Haiku:

Napping cat content

Beneath thick lilac blossoms

Warmed by springtime sun.

Brown against wet grass

Red feathered chest puffed and proud

Robin stretches worm.

Yellow daffodils

Bowing graceful bell-like petals

Under April rain.

2.) Ask students to think about how each poem conjures up a single little scene, a fleeting moment in time. Explain that this is called "Haiku", an ancient kind of Japanese poem. Ask

them to listen again and to tell how many syllables they hear. (17) Then, read each line by line and have them identify how many syllables in each line. (5-7-5)

3.) Brainstorm and chart a variety of springtime images. Here are some examples:

- staying light later • rain in a puddle • touching a pussywillow • sun on shoulders • smell of fresh-cut grass • specific kinds of flowers • bees gathering pollen
- trees budding • birds making nests • polliwogs • tree-frogs
- moths • butterflies

4.) For younger students, make a template with a blank for each syllable, arranged in three lines – 5 – 7 – 5, respectively. This will help them plan their Haiku. Ask them to select a theme for their poem and brainstorm lists of nouns, verbs, and adjectives that relate to their theme. (It is helpful to try, as much as possible, to avoid too many articles such as ‘a’, ‘an’, ‘the’, etc.)

Give them some helpful hints – a line might describe their subject (what does it look/sound/feel like?) It might show some action – (What does it do?) It might reflect a feeling – (How did the subject seem to feel?) If they’re short a syllable or two they can try adding an adjective or an adverb.

5.) Work through one together, trial and error, to model the thought process. Stress vivid verbs, powerful adjectives.

6.) Have the students try their hand at it, circulate, offering suggestions. Then allow them to take their Haiku-in-progress home to “tinker” with it some more. Establish a “due date”.

7.) Option – have students create water-color wash paintings to illustrate their Haiku and display on a bulletin board!