

Excerpts from “Lighting the Global Lantern: A Teacher’s Guide to Writing Haiku and Related Literary Forms” by Terry Ann Carter Wintergreen Studios Press, 2011.
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Part One: haiku examples

dead cat ...
open mouthed
to the pouring rain
(Michael McClintock)

empty shopping mall
faintly
the night sweeper’s broom
(Michael Dudley)

divorce
nobody
wants the dog
(Ruth Holzer)

bean stalks
none of my clothes
fit
(Gen Poehner)

lovers
exchanging
bacteria
(George Swede)

heat mirage
the crow’s light landing
on asphalt
(Carole MacRury)

windowless classroom
we talk about thinking
outside the box
(Yu Chang)

summer afternoon
the first drop of rain
on my bare feet
(Stanford Forrester)

first date
letting her
put snow down my neck
(Michael Dylan Welch)

Two parts of the haiku: haiku consists mostly, (although sometimes this may not be true) of two images put together to create harmony, contrast, emotions, depth. the other image may be described in the other two lines, or vice versa. There should be a pause at the end of either the first or the second line, but not both.

After writing haiku about the self (these poems are often called senryu, but for simplification, they will be called haiku:you, it is important to look around, outside your “own” experience, and notice the community, nature, the cosmos, that is also a part of your larger world. Once you begin to compose more haiku about the nature around you, you will become more aware of seasonal changes and seasonal words (called *kigo* in traditional haiku) This guide book will give examples for techniques to improve the quality of your haiku, and to inspire more creative thinking, and writing.

Part Three: haiku techniques

Haiku is an art form, a poetry. The most popular techniques for writing haiku are:

1. Comparison
2. Contrast
3. Association
4. Mystery (Yugen)
5. Narrowing the focus
6. The sketch
7. Focus on the senses

Haiku technique: Comparison

a sky full of stars
how improbable
my parents would meet

(Robert Mainone)

A haiku needs two parts. In this haiku the “sky full of stars” is compared to “the meeting of parents” and the million-to-one chance of that happening. The poet has achieved an aha moment! with the connection.

Writing exercises:

Using the poet’s first two lines, add a third line of your own.

Compose a haiku that compares two things that you like.

Compose a haiku that compares two things that you don’t like.

After you have completed these “recipes” for writing, read the following haiku. What comes to your mind? Try moving out on your own.

the first chip
in our windshield
Northern star

(Susan Constable)

Haiku technique: Contrast

gelled hair
perfectly in place
his anarchy t-shirt

(Angela Leuck)

The poet is contrasting the images of hair perfectly in place and a t-shirt that is advertising the idea of complete disorder. The humour is found in the juxtaposition of these two opposing “styles”.

Writing exercises:

Using the poet’s first two lines, add a third line of your own.

Compose a haiku that contrasts your personality with a friend’s.

Compose a haiku that contrasts you with your mother/father/sibling.

Read the following haiku. What comes to your mind? Try creating one of your own.

this cold morning
I pull on my pants
hot from the dryer

(Michael McClintock)

Haiku technique: Association

endless scales
on the neighbour's flute –
my mother's ironing

(Dorothy Howard)

The “endless scales” from the flute of the poet's neighbour is reminding the poet of her mother's endless chore of ironing. She associates the drudgery of scales with the drudgery of a household chore.

Using the poet's model, compose a haiku that associates something you own with the lyrics of a favourite song.

Compose a haiku that associates a particular place with the weather.

Compose a haiku that associates a mood with a school subject.

crescent moon
an arc of surf
catches a bikini bottom

(Alan Bridges)

Haiku technique: Mystery (Yugen)

summer afternoon
the first drop of rain
on my bare feet

(Sanford Forrester)

Sometimes, there is a moment that completely takes your breath away. Feeling that first drop of rain, so happy to be alive, outdoors, on a summer's day, so delighted to be part of the mystery of nature, the mystery of life. The poet is refreshed by nature.

Using the poet's first line, compose two new lines to express an "ordinary" event from everyday living that might take place on a summer afternoon.

Writing haiku about the natural world:

Haiku traditionally include a season word (kigo) such as blossoms, tadpoles, April Fool's day for SPRING – mosquitoes, fly swatter, fireworks, heat wave for SUMMER – pumpkins, falling leaves, harvest moon for AUTUMN -- frost, hail, icicles, New Year's Day for WINTER.

The following haiku have been written by students who won awards for their innovation and creativity.

light footsteps
across the snow
his alcohol breath

(Desire Giddens, age 12)

New Year's Day
walking in yesterday's
frozen footprints

(Allen Bartter, age 17)

harvest moon
the homeless man's cup
filled with silver

(Asha Bishi, age 14)

summer cottage
the bullfrog
slips my grasp

(Emily Cornish, age 15)

spring evening
rain soaks through the newspaper
on my head

(Laura Santiago, age 15)

strep throat
she kisses him
anyway

(Heidi Streit, age 17)

after the rain
so visible
the spider's web

(Tony Leisen, age 18)

he gives me
roses
and their thorns

(Keri Haas, age 18)

Haiku technique: Narrowing the focus

in the meadow
the cow's lips
wet with grass

(Penny Harter)

This is a “haiku technique” that the poet Buson used a great deal, for being an artist he wrote with an “artist’s eye”. Basically start with a wide angle lens on the world in the first line, switch to a normal lens for the second line, and zoom in for a close up in the third line.

This technique may be used on a city street, a lake in cottage country, your own backyard. Start wide and gradually focus in on one object. Here is another:

inside the box
sits a doll
shoeless

(Noelle Egan)

Haiku technique: The sketch

at the cast party
Capulets
and Montagues

The haikun “sketch” or “shesei” originated in Shiki’s time, when the poet rebelled against the “rules” of haiku and decided to write simply what caught his eye (often with a bit of humour). The poet is not contrasting images or comparing images or associating images. A kigo (seasonal word) is not present.

Here are a few more examples of the sketch:

on the bus
the teenager pulls out a mirror
and adjusts her pout (George Swede)

science project
Jupiter
on the floor (Mark Wilson)

superstitious
a fortune cookie
seals my fate (Adrian DiMatteo, age 14)

Sometimes the sketch may have a dark side...

in front
of the meth lab
three children hopscotch (C.J. Welch, age 17)

Haiku technique: Focus on the senses

metallic taste
the cold stream spills
from my hand

(Jenny Zhang, age 16)

shifting shadows
deep in the hills
a dog barks

(Allison McCrossen, age 13)

koi
nibbling
my copper wish

(Elizabeth Hetherington, age 16)

up a tree
among the green apples
girl in a red sari

(Angela Leuck)

autumn fog
the squeaking brakes
of a school bus

(Lenard D. Moore)