

Lesson Name : 42

Lesson Title : Haiku Poems

Course Name : English 2 Part 2 [Honors]

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Essential Instruction

Please read or reread the Haiku poetry selections by [Matsuo Basho](#) and [Kobayashi Issa](#).

These poems were written in Japanese. You will read translations.

It is a good idea to use your digital notebook to keep notes on new vocabulary and definitions that you may need to reference later.



### Understanding Haiku

A **haiku** is generally a three-line poem with a strict syllable count. Usually, the first line has five syllables, the second line has seven, and the last has five. However, you may have noticed that the haiku you read for this lesson did not always fit that pattern. That is because the translator chose to translate the words literally. Since a word doesn't have the same syllable count across languages, the translation doesn't always have the usual 5-7-5 form. Of course, some of the beauty of **haiku** is untranslatable because Japanese writing itself is beautiful to see.

Because each haiku is so short, each poem focuses on a single image or idea.

Haiku by Issa is known for vivid images of everyday things and a lighthearted tone. These poems show these characteristics of Issa's work:

Don't kill that fly!  
Look –it's wringing its hands,  
wringing its feet.

Don't worry, spiders,  
I keep house  
casually.

Notice that the message is a little bit funny. It's not roll-on-the-floor funny, because **haiku** generally have a calm feel about them. But it is indeed amusing to think about the fly you're about to swat looking up at you worriedly, wringing its little hands (or are they feet?)

Notice that the poems contain a single image, which you can picture in your mind. The use of imagery is common to nearly all poetry from all times and traditions.



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### Vocabulary

Knowing the literary terms that follow will help you think about and talk about poetry.

1. **protagonist** – noun – the main character in a narrative
2. **irony** – noun – the difference between what was intended and what actually happens
3. **voice** – noun – the worldview or vision of an author as shown through his or her work
4. **diction** – noun – the distinct language pattern of a specific character or work
5. **tone** – noun – the author's attitude as it is expressed in a work (e.g. ironic tone or melancholy tone)