

Haiku

Definition of Haiku

A haiku poem has three lines, where the first and last lines have five moras, and the middle line has seven. The pattern in this Japanese [genre](#) is 5-7-5. The mora is another name for a sound unit, which is like a syllable, though there is a difference. As the moras cannot be translated into English, they are modified, and syllables are used instead. The lines of such poems rarely [rhyme](#) with each other.

Haiku became popular as *tanka* poems in Japan during the 9th and 12th centuries. Initially, it was called “hokku” and Basho, Buson, and Issa were the first three masters of the haiku genre. Haiku poetry is also full of metaphors and personifications. However, this has often been argued against, since haikus are supposed to be written on objective experiences, rather than [subjective](#) ones. In English, several experiments were made in this genre as given below.

“Autumn moonlight—
a worm digs silently
into the chestnut.”

(*Autumn Moonlight*, by Basho)

Features of Haiku

It contains three lines.

It has five moras (syllables) in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the last line.

It contains 17 syllables in total.

A Haiku poem does not rhyme.

Haiku poems frequently have a kigo, or seasonal reference.

Haiku poems are usually about nature or natural phenomena.

The poem has two juxtaposed subjects that are divided into two contrasting parts.

In English, this division between two parts can be shown by a colon or a dash.

Examples of Haiku in Literature

Example #1: *Old Pond* (By Basho)

Old pond
a frog jumps
the sound of water

In this example, we can clearly see two contrasting parts of the poem; one is about a frog that is jumping, and second is about the sound of water. The syllable pattern is also following a 5-7-5 format.

Example #2: *Book of Haikus* (By Jack Kerouac)

Snow in my shoe—
Abandoned
Sparrow's nest

This haiku is presenting an image in the first part of “snow in my shoe.” In addition, there are two contrasting ideas that mingle with one another as the second part is about nature. The pattern of syllables is 5-7-5. The poet has tried to present a little story in this haiku.

Example #3: *Dust of Summers* (By Multiple Poets)

Calling home—
the color of mother's [voice](#)
before her words

Twilight...
his voice
deep purple

(By Ludmila Balabanova)

In these haikus, figurative device such as metaphors have been used to present an insight of the world. Through this technique, multiple senses are used to gather sensory information.

Example #4: *Thirds* (By Jeffrey Winke)

Song birds
at the train yard's edge
two cars coupling

[Personification](#) is also a definite trait of haiku poetry. This is to assign a human quality or qualities to nonhuman things, though this is less prevalent in haiku as compared to metaphors. In this poem, personification is very well done, hence allowing the poem to speak for itself.

Example #5: *To a Leg of Heron* (By Basho)

To a leg of a heron
Adding a long shank
Of a pheasant.

The [theme](#) of this poem is to laugh at ones self. This is a perfect example of haiku poetry, as it is perfectly following the pattern of syllable counts. It is also giving an amusing and ironic touch, since reality is the major aspect of this form of poetry.

Example #6: *Selected Haiku* (By Nick Virgilio)

Lily:

out of itself

Bass

Picking bugs
off the moon

Nick Virgilio is an American poet who is a great supporter of Japanese haiku. He has written 5-7-5 syllable-[style](#) poems when translated in Japanese. These examples of haiku poems are natural, mystical, and refined.

Function of Haiku

Haikus are short poems written on topics and things that the readers can identify with easily. For example, seasons and animals are readily recognizable topics to readers. Generally, haiku is written for realistic and objective reasons; however, haikus are also written for children. Sometimes it presents two juxtaposed ideas to express meanings through internal [comparison](#).