

Responding to Your Community Through Haiku

**I'm from a country
My country is like water
We are sensitive**

*-Nurrina, ArtsCorps Student
Aki Kurose Middle School*

Responding to Your Community through Haiku is a collaboration between Arts Corps and Sound Transit to help the communities of South Seattle explore their identities and neighborhoods through this uniquely reflective art form. The curriculum that follows was developed by Arts Corps with the aim of engaging community members in responding to their surroundings through poetry. The curriculum draws inspiration from renowned local artist Roger Shimomura's sculpture "Rainier Valley Haiku", a work of public art commissioned by Sound Transit for Othello Station on the new Central Link light rail line. Shimomura has modeled his sculpture on the form of a haiku to portray the culture and historical memory of Rainier Valley communities.

This curriculum represents one facet of Arts Corps' partnership with Sound Transit. During the 2007-2008 school year, Sound Transit also sponsored two Arts Corps classes at Aki Kurose Middle School to allow students to capture the images and emotions that define their homes and lives: "The Poetry of Cultural Identity", taught by Matt Gano, and "Community Backdrop: Digital Storytelling", taught by Tina LaPadula and Vesna Pavlovic. As Sound Transit prepares to open Central Link in 2009, *Responding to Your Community through Haiku* presents residents of Seattle an expressive artistic medium to appreciate and reflect on their neighborhoods and culture in the midst of change.

Why Haiku?

Writing a haiku provides a way for us to share experiences. It is a way for people to take everyday moments and feelings and turn them into an image made out of words. A good haiku allows us to recognize the fleeting beauty of life –*to actually feel beauty* – simply through the words of the poem itself.

The act of reading a good haiku might trigger a feeling of recognition, an insight, an epiphany. Noted poetry teacher William J. Higginson sums up the reason for writing haiku wonderfully in the following quote:

*It is hard to tell you how I am feeling. Perhaps, if I share with you the event that made me aware of these feelings, you will have similar feelings of your own.*¹

¹ William J. Higginson, *The Haiku Handbook*. (Kodansha International, Tokyo 1985) pg.5

A haiku is a distillation of the briefest of happenings, a snapshot of the universe. The best examples of the form are perfectly incomplete renderings of the world and of what it is like to be human.

**Immortalized here
My name echoed across the room
Memories are pictured**

What is a Haiku?

Haiku is often the first method of writing poetry introduced to children. Poems written in this form are bite sized, beautiful and easy to teach. Americans generally think of a haiku as a short, visually expressive, non-rhyming poem with three lines, containing a total of seventeen syllables. In this standardized format, the first line of the poem contains five syllables, the second seven and the third again five.

However, a haiku does not necessarily need to have 17 syllables, and the format taught in American schools is often quite different from the traditional Japanese style. In fact, haiku are usually much shorter, ranging from 12 to 14 syllables or even less. Some haiku contain only one line, some have four or five.

Moreover, traditional haiku often take place in natural settings, containing imagery that reflects the human perception of the physical environment around us. Traditional haiku always indicate what season it is and incorporates a shift from a starting image to an idea or statement that generates reflection or understanding.

What really distinguishes a haiku, however, is that it should be compact and elegant. It should reflect the concrete world around the poet as experienced through the senses (sight, sound, touch, hearing, smell). It can capture your neighborhood, your garden, your street.

**Gun fights after 8:00
middle school two blocks away
102 ave.**

*Khalil. Arts Corps Student
Aki Kurose Middle School*

Examples of Masterful Haiku

Summer night:
in my eyes starlight
hundreds of years old

George Swedeⁱ

autumn salmon
the flipping leaping
one I catch

Kaneko Totaⁱⁱ

well! Let's go
snow viewing till
we tumble!

Matsuo Bashoⁱⁱⁱ

coffee
in a paper cup –
a long way from home

Gary Hotham^{iv}

A Hallowe'en mask
floating face up in the ditch,
slowly shakes it head.

Clement Hoyt^v

fog...
just the tree and I
at the bus stop

Jerry Kilbride^{vi}

dead cat...
opened mouth
to the pouring rain.

Micheal McClintock^{vii}

in the moonlight
a worm
silently drills through a chesnut.

Matsuo Basho

Ways to Write a Haiku

Many different rules and guidelines for writing haiku have been offered, attempting to capture the unique poetic effect of the form. Some haiku writers believe that you should only write a haiku out of what you, yourself, can observe out in the world. Some believe that if you write haiku you must use a word that describes a season. Some believe that a haiku must be stripped of much of the standard rules of grammar. More than any concrete rules, however, a haiku depends on the accuracy of the images and emotions it expresses.

The best way to begin writing haiku is to realize that haiku is made up of at least one concrete image. Images can come from your imagination or they can come from real life, or a mix of the two. Writing in the 5-7-5 format is the easiest way to begin. But don't be chained down to it! Many of the haiku masters whose work is displayed above don't use that structure at all!

The following are some tips from haiku poet William J. Higginson^{viii}:

1. Is it brief?
2. Does it contain one or two clear images with no metaphors or similes?
3. Does the image, or do the images coming together create an emotion in the reader without telling the reader what emotion to feel?

Here are some prompts to get you started on your haiku...

1. write a haiku on the sidewalk in chalk
2. write a haiku on something and hang it in a tree
3. write a haiku on a napkin leave it for a waiter or waitress
4. write a haiku and place it in a book in a library
5. attach a haiku (each line separate) to a fan
6. write a lost pet haiku and put it on a telephone pole
7. make a haiku into a sticker
8. write a haiku postcard
9. start a haiku chain e-mail
10. tie a haiku to a balloon and let it go
11. write a haiku about your mom
12. write a recipe haiku
13. write a haiku in sand on a beach
14. write a haiku on a paper bag
15. write a haiku about Mt. Rainier
16. write a haiku about clouds
17. write a haiku about someone on the bus
18. write a haiku about the traffic you are passing
19. write a haiku using the words the signs on the route
20. write a haiku in the time it takes between your stop and the next stop
21. write a haiku about your favorite tree on your route
22. write a haiku about one of your grandparents

23. write a haiku about something that used to be on the light rail route and is not anymore
24. write a haiku in another language
25. write a haiku with using rebuses
26. write a haiku and send it to your congressman
27. write a haiku about how your ancestors got here
28. write a haiku about your shoes
29. write a haiku about your favorite food
30. write a haiku about your first kiss
31. write a haiku about a broken heart
32. create a photo haiku with your cell phone
33. send a haiku as a text message to someone you love
34. put a haiku in a bottle and drop it in the ocean
35. write a haiku using the titles from your three favorite songs
36. "find" a haiku in a sentence from a magazine
37. write a haiku on the steamed up window in the bus on a rainy day
38. write a haiku about a pet that died
39. write a haiku about something you failed at
40. write a haiku about a misunderstanding
41. write a haiku about a smell on the train
42. write a haiku about the light as it passes through bus windows
43. write a haiku about the trash on the street
44. write a haiku about the dream you had last night
45. write a haiku about how you feel about the rain
46. write a haiku about Seattle in the summertime

47. write a haiku about being a superhero
48. write a haiku about being lost
49. write a haiku about your hands
50. write a haiku about blackberries
51. write a haiku about traffic
52. write a haiku about the neighborhood you are coming from
53. write a haiku about the neighborhood you are going to
54. write a haiku about what you see in a passing car or passing train
55. write a haiku and give it to your favorite train driver
56. write a haiku about revolution
57. write a haiku about the money you have in your pocket right now
58. write a haiku about Martin Luther King
59. write a haiku about the end of the line
60. write a haiku about being the last person on the train

Submit your haiku, or a photograph of where you place your haiku, to the Sound Transit website! start@soundtransit.org

“Rainier Valley Haiku”

Roger Shimomura’s sculpture, “Rainier Valley Haiku”, presents a brilliant and complex visual exploration of Japanese-American heritage as it moves through history. His sculpture presents a humorous and complex critique of what it means for a person of Japanese descent to study, work and live an American life; a simultaneous story of resistance and assimilation. His medium is metal and paint, but the sculpture mimics the form of a haiku.



Roger Shimomura was commissioned by Sound Transit to create a Haiku assemblage sculpture for the Othello Station in the Rainier Valley Light Rail corridor, installed in June 2008. Photo © Roger Shimomura 2008. All rights reserved.

Shimomura's art explores the issue of an individual's cultural identity in relationship to the dominant American culture, and the effects of racism from his personal perspective. Shimomura, a Japanese American artist, was born in Seattle during World War II. His earliest memories come from his experience living with his family in a Japanese internment camp in Idaho. Later, he received degrees in fine arts from the University of Washington and Syracuse University in New York. Shimomura's work explores and reflects back to the viewer his experiences with racism and encounters with the ideology of cultural superiority as a Japanese-American in post-war society. He makes use of a graphic style influenced by pop art, comics and his collection of American memorabilia found in thrift stores. Shimomura describes his work as,

... an aesthetic and political comparison between contemporary America and traditional Japan. Using images from both cultures, Shimomura creates a complicated layering of pictorial information and social observation. As his paintings and prints are interpreted and decoded by the viewer, Shimomura's tangled intentions are revealed in a subtly political way.

Taken from Roger Shimomura statement "Thrift Store Haikus"
www.gregkucera.com/shimomura_sculpture.htm

Visual Haiku: Haiga

Haiga is the term used to describe visual haiku. It comes from the combination of the Japanese words "hai", meaning poem, and "ga", meaning painting. Traditional haiku masters used brush and ink to write their poems, it was a very natural transition for the masters such as Basho (1644-1694) to illustrate their words. They followed the precepts of written haiku by representing nature and daily life with simplicity, spontaneity and often with humor. Haiga can incorporate three images, mimicking the standard three-line form of haiku.

"The form [of haiga] originated in seventeenth-century Japan and was used to decorate scrolls, albums, screens, and fans. You always find three elements in haiga: an ink-brush or watercolor painting, a poem or poems, and calligraphy. The form is characterized by a fresh and spontaneous rendering of ordinary, everyday life--very much in the haiku spirit--as well as by simple subjects, loose and fluid brushstrokes, and plenty of white space. It is usually very sketch-like with spare images expressed with just a few lines, little detail, and one or two colors for added visual interest."

Taken from Reeds: Contemporary Haiga-What is Haiga?
<http://www.reedscontemporaryhaiga.com/WhatIsHaiga.htm>



Peter DeLory “Tight Steel Collection #2” August 2007

Contemporary haiga often makes use of drawing, painting, collage or photography, incorporating the haiku text within the image much as traditional masters created images using ink, pen and brush techniques. Many poets work in collaboration with visual artists to create the haiga. Sometimes such collaborations begin with image which is then shared with the poet to inspire her to write the haiku, or with the haiku to inspire the visual artist to turn the poem into a visual image or sculpture.

Here are some ways to create your haiga...

You can work by yourself, Or work with a partner and take turns. One person writes the Haiku and the partner creates the haiga. Then switch, starting with the haiga, and have your partner interpret it with a Haiku.

Think about where you would like to place the text of your Haiku, will you put it in with the images or next to it?

Use a Digital camera or camera phone

- Represent your haiku with natural objects
- Represent your haiku with manmade objects
- Take three pictures with a digital or camera phone and present each picture as the lines of your haiku.
- Check out Peter DeLory’s, Sound Transit photo collection of “Tight Steel”, #2 and write a haiku that describes the way you see it.
- Email your images to Sound Transit to share in the Haiku Gallery at start@soundtransit.org

Use pen brush and ink

This is what you need:

- Watercolor brushes #2, #4, #6 or traditional Japanese Sumi calligraphy brush
- Calligraphy pen and student drawing nib
- Non-toxic Sumi Ink
- 9" X 12" Watercolor paper or a roll of Sumi paper

How to...

Lay newspaper down on a flat surface, lay your Sumi paper or watercolor paper down, decide which to do first, write your Haiku or create your haiga drawing.

Next...

You can work "dry" by applying the ink to the paper, or you can play with wetting the papers surface using a brush and water, then dipping the brush or pen into the ink to create a "wash" effect. Experiment to see which technique works best, remembering to play with the relationship between the image and the text of the Haiku. Be spontaneous and playful!

Then...

When your haiga is finished take a photo or scan the image and send your work by e-mail to the Sound Transit web site at start@soundtransit.org

Make a Mono-print

This is what you need:

- 9" X 12" plexi-glass plate
- speedball water-based printing inks
- 1"-3" Brayer roller for ink
- 1"-3" Brayer roller for printing
- palette knife/paint scraper to spread ink
- 9" x12" Japanese paper, printmaking paper, newsprint
- Newspaper
- Spray bottle with water
- Drawing tools chop stick, comb, shell, feather and found objects – be inventive!

How to...

Lay newspaper on a flat surface, then lay the printing plate on top of the paper. Draw a 3" inch line of ink on printing plate, and use the inking brayer to evenly roll the ink out until it has a nice finish and the roller gives off a "tacky" sound and it feels like paint that is not quite dry.

Next...

Draw the first picture for your haiga, using the drawing tools. Add more color and experiment with spraying water on the ink. then lay a sheet of paper over top of the ink. Make a fist with your hand and rub the paper from side to side with even pressure, then pull the sheet away to finish your first print.

Then...

Add more ink and draw on the plate again to create the second image of your haiga. When you are happy with your drawing lay the paper on top, and follow the previous instructions, to pull your second print. Repeat again to create the third image of your haiga.

A helpful hint...

When you finish using rollers or decide to change ink color, wash the roller with warm soapy water and dry well, with paper towel or roll out on clean newspaper.

Use Mixed-Media Collage

Try combining the various techniques described above with text and images cut from old magazines, newspapers and used books. Play with manipulating the placement of your haiku text around the visual haiga that you have created. You can also glue down found objects, feathers, dried plant materials or bits of plastic or metal you might find when walking around your neighborhood. Remember to be playful and experiment; the best creations can come from your mistakes.

Submit your haiga to the Sound Transit website by taking a photo or scanning the image and sending it to start@soundtransit.org.

Useful Links:

Arts Corps

www.artscorps.org

Densho Teachers Guide: In the Shadow of My Country a Japanese American Artist Remembers

<http://www.densho.org/learning/default.asp?path=shadow/Shadow.asp>

Greg Kucera Gallery

www.gregkucera.com

Haiku For You: A collaborative art project blog

www.ourstereo.com/haikuforyou/

In the Moonlight a Worm...

www.haiku.insouthsea.co.uk/index.htm

Michael Eble "Beats of Haiga"

www.michaeleble.com/Beats.html

Modern Haiga

www.modernhaiga.com

National Association of comic Art Educators: Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom

<http://www.teachingcomics.org/studyguide.php>

Ray Rasmussen

<http://raysweb.net/haiga/index.html>

Reeds Contemporary Haiga

www.reedscontemporaryhaiga.com/index.htm

Roger Shimomura

<http://www.rshim.com/>

Shimomura explores racism in all its guises – From the racist's

POV: Regina Hackett, Seattle Post-Intelligencer March 2004

http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/visualart/164137_shimomura.html

The Haiku Society of America

www.hsa-haiku.org/

3 Lights Gallery

www.threelightsgallery.com

YouTube- Haiga Collections

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR5PXvwm9_A

Art Supplies

<http://www.artistcraftsman.com/>

This curriculum was created by Arts Corps teaching artists Roberto Ascalon and Lauren Atkinson.

Arts Corps was founded on the principle that all young people, not just those with resources, should have access to quality arts learning opportunities. Since 2000, our excellent faculty of teaching artists have been modeling and fostering creative habits to K-12th grade students, so that they may reach their full potential. We work with area community organizations and schools to reach as many kids as possible with powerful arts learning experiences. And since Arts Corps believes that *every* child should have the freedom to imagine and the courage to be, we offer classes for free. More information at www.artscorps.org

ⁱ Higginson, pg.215

ⁱⁱ *ibid* pg 41

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.haiku.insouthsea.co.uk/>

^{iv} Cor Van Den Heuvel, *The Haiku Anthology*. (WW Norton and Co, NY 1999)

^v Higginson, pg 169

^{vi} Van Den Huevel, pg 121

^{vii} <http://www.haiku.insouthsea.co.uk/>

^{viii} Higginson, pg.175