

# Sample Haiku

The *haiku* is the “short” form of Japanese poetry: 17 syllables arranged in 3 lines of 5-7-5 syllables (compared to the “long” form, the 33-syllable *waka*, where the pattern is 5-7-5-7-7 syllables.)

*Haiku* generally focus on an image drawn from the natural world and contain a seasonal reference. They are characterized by:

- A light touch, often with a humorous or surprise verbal twist;
- Linguistic dexterity, fostered by the relatively limited number of sounds in the Japanese language, and the consequent frequency of possibilities for punning;
- And a focus on the small details of nature, often common but closely observed, with a deliberate sense of contrast created between small and large, or between the transient and the infinite.

## History

Haiku, which became the most popular verse form in Japan’s Edo period (1600-1868), was originally practiced in a complex collaborative form known as linked verse (*haikai no renga*). Gradually, over the course of the Edo period and under the influence of the great poet Buson, this practice of linking verse evolved into a concentration on the initial 17-syllable verse in the sequent—the *hokku* or *haiku* we know today, which does not depend on a previous verse, but stands alone.

### Haiku by Matsuo Basho:

The old pond  
A frog jumped in,  
Kerplunk!

On a bare branch  
A crow is perched—  
Autumn evening.

I will bind iris  
Blossoms around my feet—  
Cords for my sandals!

### Haiku by Yosa Buson:

Behold, an old man  
Cutting stalks of pampas grass  
Behind him, the wind.

Scattered petals lie  
On the rice-seedling waters:  
Stars in the moonlit sky.

The raftsmen’s straw coat  
Is now in the storm become  
A cloak of blossom