**Using Poetry in the Classroom to Promote Creativity**

Teacher and Poet – Claire Thom



**A wee bit of theory –**

Source – “Exploring poems to promote language learners’ creative writing.” By Yasemin Kirkgöz

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042814061990>

**Mind The Gap Haiku**

Show students the model “Monarch” (see worksheet 1 – What is a haiku?) to introduce them to the haiku form. Explain the structure and syllable count in the three lines. Then show students the same haiku but with gaps. Give students time in pairs or groups to brainstorm possible words that could go in the spaces. This allows students to play with different vocabulary and shows them how changing words can alter the mood and tone of the haiku.

**Five Senses**

Tell students that haikus capture a moment in a few carefully selected words and that they sometimes express the different senses. Show students one of the most famous examples by one of the haiku masters, Matsuo Basho. (Worksheet 2 – Five Senses) Use columns to brainstorm new vocabulary for the five senses and provide students with any new vocabulary they might need. What would you see, hear, taste, touch and smell if you were by a pond?

Brainstorming gets the creative juices flowing and is a great starting point for any type of writing. Then, individually, in pairs or small groups, students can try writing their own version of Basho´s haiku.

By becoming more aware of their surroundings and senses and then putting this into words, students need to use their creativity to express how they view the world around them. At the same time they are improving their language skills and learning new vocabulary.

**Jigsaw Haiku**

In this activity, students are given a set of individual words (Worksheet 3 - Jigsaw Haiku) and they need to order them to make a complete haiku, just like a jigsaw puzzle. This is a great activity for focusing on syllables and it could also be a lead in to a pronunciation lesson on word stress. Students can then practise writing their own haikus and can cut up the individual words, exchange them with another pair or group and try to put the haikus back together. Having students make their own material for games really keeps them involved in the activity and gives them a sense of ownership, which boosts motivation.

**Prompt**

Using a specific word or short phrase or even an image is a good way to provide inspiration for haiku writing in the classroom. Students can first create a word, short phrase or image bank. Again, this fully involves the students in the process as they are providing the prompts. This can be a great warmer or cooler with a 10 or 15 minute writing slot at the start or end of a lesson or even set for homework. The prompts could also be based on different topics that students have been studying in class. (Worksheet 4 – Season Word Prompt and Worksheet 5 - Image Prompt) “Summer” is quite a general season word but in the brainstorming activity, students will have time to think of specific vocabulary related to summer and can use these words in their own poems.

**Chain Writing**

Chain writing haikus leads on nicely from the prompt activity and is best done in pairs. Using the haikus written in the prompt activity, students exchange their poems with their partner and write a follow on from their partner´s poem then they swap back again and write another follow on etc. They can continue this several times, 3 or 4 exchanges is a manageable number. This activity promotes creativity as students have to respond to what their partner has written in an imaginative way, continuing the theme using their own words and developing a longer piece of writing. Haiku lends itself perfectly to chain writing as it is small chunks of language.

**Haiku Corner and Haiku of the Week**

Once students are familiar with haiku and have had the opportunity to practise writing their own poems, a lovely weekly class activity is “Haiku Corner”. Students can each write a haiku on a particular theme or about whatever they choose and submit them to the teacher. To add a competitive element, each week one haiku can be chosen as “Haiku of the Week”. The haiku can be displayed in the classroom or on a class blog, for example. Displaying students´ work is another great way to boost motivation and it gives students a sense of achievement and pride in the piece of writing they have produced.

**Guessing Game**

This guessing game is an old TEFL favourite. My book, “Ever Forward”, contains haikus and watercolours. Each haiku describes an animal and the reader is invited to first read the haiku and try to guess the animal before turning the page to reveal the watercolour. This is a great game to play in the classroom and “Ever Forward” is a useful resource for using haiku in your lessons. Students can write their own haiku about different animals or objects, then read them out to their partner or small group or even whole class and try to guess what is being described.

This is a useful skill students need, particularly in speaking exams when they don´t know a specific word so they need to use other words to describe what it is they want to say.

**Haiku Poetry Slam**

Poetry is meant to be read aloud so why not organise a haiku poetry slam in class? This is a great opportunity for students to practice natural pronunciation, getting away from robotic monologues which students often reel off in speaking exams. Poetry readings are a great way for students to share their haikus with each other and help build their confidence.

**Make a poetry book**

At the end of the course or academic year, students can put together a class book of the haiku they have written throughout the course. They could also illustrate the book and include a short biography of each student, giving them further writing practice. Students could make a single book with a collection of all their work or they could make their own individual books and create a class library.

------

My book “**Ever Forward**”, a collection of haikus by me and watercolours by my dad, Colin, is available to buy on Amazon. My book can be a great classroom resource for haiku writing in your lessons.

All profit made from sales is donated directly to the Guide Dogs charity in the UK.

Follow me on Instagram **@poetrycadiz**

or email [cthom31@hotmail.com](mailto:cthom31@hotmail.com) ☺

Thank you!

Worksheet 1 - What is a haiku?

**“Monarch”**

candy floss blossom

tickles regal wings under

a bright azure sky

Haiku is an ancient form of Japanese poetry often containing (in English) a total of 17 syllables shared between three lines that are arranged in a pattern of 5-7-5.

The first line consists of 5 syllables, the second line 7, and the last line contains another 5 syllables.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_blossom

tickles \_\_\_\_\_\_\_wings under

a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_sky

What different adjectives could go in the gaps?

Here are some examples –

cotton wool blossom

tickles gentle wings under

a bold sapphire sky

crepe paper blossom

tickles fragile wings under

a grey cloudy sky

Now, you try writing your own haiku.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_blossom

tickles \_\_\_\_\_\_\_wings under

a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_sky

Worksheet 2 – Five Senses

old pond!

a frog plunges into

watersound

This is one of the most famous haiku by Japanese master, Matsuo Basho. This is one of several different translations. Haiku poems capture a moment in a few, carefully selected words. They often express the different senses.

It is important to note that the original Japanese haiku was measured in sounds, or "breaths," *not* English syllables. The 5-7-5 approach was a rough approximation. Many traditional Japanese and English-language haiku are much shorter than the 5-7-5 format of the West. That said, poetry is art and 5-7-5 is still very popular today. Some Japanese poets still embrace that framework.

Now, imagine you are standing or sitting by a pond or a body of water. Brainstorm vocabulary for what you can **see, hear, touch, taste and smell.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **See** | **Hear** | **Touch** | **Taste** | **Smell** |

Now, use some of this vocabulary to write your own version of Basho´s famous haiku.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Worksheet 3 – Jigsaw Haiku

Put these words in order to make a haiku. Remember there are 3 lines with 5 syllables in the first line, 7 in the second line and 5 in the third line.

eyes feathers sprinkled

cocoa bean coffee

soft cappuccino with

brown

What do you think is being described? Can you guess?

Draw what you think it could be.

Worksheet 4 - Season Word Prompt

Brainstorm vocabulary for the season word “**summer**”.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **See** | **Hear** | **Touch** | **Taste** | **Smell** |

Here is an example haiku about summer –

summer smells of dust

thirsty paths lead to the beach –

the cool ocean waves

Now, you try writing your own haiku about summer. Use some of the vocabulary from the brainstorming activity.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Worksheet 5 – Image Prompt

Try writing a haiku inspired by this image.



\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_