

TIP - Japanese Poetry  
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**Purpose:**

Big Concept:

Haiku, evolving from the Japanese court poetry called tankas, is the most popular form of Japanese poetry. Though simple in form, it evokes deep spirituality. Though focused on the physical, sensuous world, it's connections to Buddhist ideas (especially anatta and anicca) force readers to contemplate the transitory nature of all that is. Furthermore, the literary tradition of travel writing shares many of the spiritual associations of haiku. A journey is almost always about better understanding of the "self".

Essential Questions:

1. What are the characteristics of haiku?
2. What is the purpose of a journey? How can a physical journey symbolize an inward one?

**Rationale:**

Students will become familiar with traditional Japanese poetry and with travel writing. Students will also become familiar with basic concepts of Buddhism.

**Materials:**

1. Notes on haiku and tanka.
2. Excerpts from Narrow Road to the Interior, a collection of poems by Matsuo Basho translated by Sam Hamill.
3. Poems from Buson and Issa.
4. Excerpts from Peter Matthiessen's The Snow Leopard.

**Activities:**

1. Present students with notes on the development of haiku. The notes also include the requirements / characteristics of haiku.
2. Give students brief introduction to basic tenets of Buddhism.
3. Give students notes on Matsuo Basho.
4. Students read the introduction to The Narrow Road to the Interior.
5. Pass out a map of Basho's Japan and one of modern Japan.
6. Have students read and analyze excerpted poems from Basho and read and analyze excerpted chapters from Matthiessen's The Snow Leopard.

**Assignment:**

1. Students must write a travel narrative of their own. It must contain at least three haiku, appropriate to theme and style.

**State Standards:**

Reading Process:

1. Apply reading comprehension strategies, including making inferences and drawing conclusions.
2. Answer literal, inferential, evaluative and synthesizing questions to demonstrate comprehension.

Reading Applications: Literary Text

1. Compare and contrast motivations of literary characters.
2. Analyze the historical, social and cultural context of setting.
5. Analyze variations of universal themes in literary texts.
7. Compare and contrast varying characteristics of American, British, world and multi-cultural literature.

Writing Processes: 1-17

Research: 1-7