

## **Basho's Poetic Journey**

Japanese Lesson Plan  
NCTA East Asian Seminar  
Winter 2008 Akron  
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### **Purpose:**

The poetic device known as the *haiku* has developed and expanded into world languages and cultures, changing slightly from its Japanese origin. Through a study of Matsuo Munefusa (commonly known as Basho) and his poetic journey, students will gain an appreciation, respect, and interest in a well defined, beautiful, and simple art form.

### **Target Class:**

This project is intended for a high school 12<sup>th</sup> grade English class and a 12<sup>th</sup> grade French class (either French IV or French V), taught from an interdisciplinary approach (two teachers) in short segments over a period of several weeks during the last semester or grading report. It emphasizes culture, comparison, connections, and communication: the foreign language content standards.

### **Essential Questions #1:**

1. What is a haiku and from where does it derive its long lasting global evolution?
2. What are the underlying principles that guide the writing style of a haiku?
3. Who was Matsuo Munefusa (Basho)? What was his personal journey?
4. What specific elements does Basho's poetry explore and what are his influences? (beauty of nature/Zen Buddhism/meditative solitude)
5. What is the personal appeal to modern students of this simple poem?
6. What transition can an American student make in writing reflective personal thoughts in the poetic style of haiku? What value does it have?

### **Rationale:**

Students will be exposed to a style of poetry known as haiku and gain cultural appreciation by reading poems of Matsuo Basho. They will reflect on the changing seasons as pivotal points and start their own reflective journey, especially during their senior year of high school, by writing their own personal haikus after contemplation of their changing lives and end of formative years. "Each day is a journey, and the journey itself home"(Basho).

### **Materials:**

[www.terebess.hu/english/haiku/matsuo](http://www.terebess.hu/english/haiku/matsuo) (specifically poems by Yves Bonnefoy/ Paul Claudel, Paul-Louis Couchoud)

Books: Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) & Yosa Buson (1716-1784)

Narrow Road to the Interior Matsuo Basho (translated by Sam Hamill)

National Geographic: February 2008 "Japan's Haiku Master"p. 136 article "On the Trail of a Ghost"ngm.org

The Path of Flowering Thorn: the Life and Poetry of Yosa Buson by Makoto Ueda

[www.toyomasu.com/haiku](http://www.toyomasu.com/haiku)

77 Dances: Japanese Calligraphy by Poets, Monks, and Scholars, 1568-1868 (exhibition at Cornell University's Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art (March 2008))

Map of Japan, detailing Basho's journey

Edsitement.neh.gov (glossary of Japanese poetic terms)

[www.modernhaiku.org/essays/frenchhaiku](http://www.modernhaiku.org/essays/frenchhaiku) (the development of the French Haiku in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Historical Perspectives

[www.worldhaikureview.org](http://www.worldhaikureview.org) (style and spirit in French haiku)

[www.lishanu.com](http://www.lishanu.com) (haiku in French by Gilles Fabre)

[www.poetrylives.com/simplyhaiku](http://www.poetrylives.com/simplyhaiku)

[www.fenwick.org](http://www.fenwick.org) (school project for French poetry writing)

### **Activities:**

This lesson is designed for a 12<sup>th</sup> grade English class whose students also take a foreign language, French. The on-going short lessons will be taught over several weeks, during the last grading report or semester, as seniors ponder their graduation and moving forward in their lives. Contemplation, inward thinking, creativity, and reflection are encouraged to fill in time slots between the frenetic period of OGTs, AP exams, recommendations, and applications.

Students will read the Narrow Road to the Interior by Matsuo Basho (translated by Sam Hamill) and start noting their attitudes about school, life, family, friends, the changing seasons, and moving onward.

Students will read background material on Basho's life, taken from resources on the Internet, and notes given by the teacher, including the following terms:

“Sho Fu” Basho's individual style

“Danrin” popular style by colloquial content and light humour, from the Nisiyama Soin

“Haikai” the original form of haiku elevated to a sophisticated literary art form

“Sabi ” elegant simplicity

“Shiori” a deep sympathetic feeling for both nature and humanity

“Hosomi” understatement

“Karomi” a light tone

“Uygen” spiritual profundity expressing the inner beauty of art and nature

“Kanjaku” a serene desolation

“Kigo” a seasonal word and the observation of a connection between two juxtaposed images

“Kireji” an intuitive leap which connects the first image to the second

A map of Japan (from National Geographic) will be displayed that outlines the journey Basho followed, writing his simple yet elegant poetry, which reflected his meditations.

Students will choose their own haiku found and one volunteer will read his/her choice aloud to the class.

The teacher will choose one haiku, written on laminated cardstock, to discuss each Friday (last ten minutes of class).

Students will write journal entries in English/French as a reflective summary on their own personal journey. Some examples follow:

1)“Should I hold it in my hand  
It would melt in my burning tears”  
Autumnal frost.”

2)“This autumn  
Why am I aging so?  
Flying towards the clouds, a bird.”

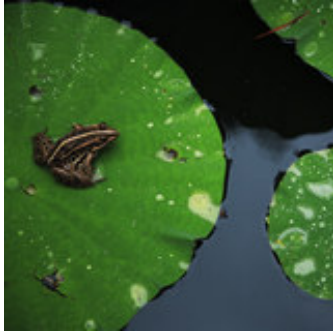
3)“Another year is gone  
A travel hat on my head,  
Straw sandals on my feet.”



4)“Myriads of things past  
Are brought to my mind’  
These cherry blossoms!”

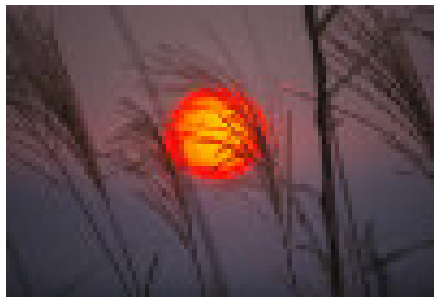
5)“Spring rain  
conveyed under the trees  
in drops.”

6)“A green willow,  
dripping down into the mud,  
at low tide.”



7) “Spring passes  
and the birds cry out—  
tears in the eyes of fishes.”

8) “Year’s end, all  
corners of this  
floating world, swept.”



9) “Stopped awhile  
inside a waterfall--  
the summer begins.”

10) “Stillness! It penetrates  
the very rocks—  
the shrill chirping of cicadas.”

Follow-Up Discussion and Extended Lesson:

Students will find Japanese art or photographs that help visualize the poems. The exhibition at Cornell University, “77 Dances: Japanese Calligraphy by Poets, Monks, and Scholars, 1568-1868 is a good resource. A comparison of the ukiyo-e art could also be incorporated. If possible, check the availability and resources of Japanese art of this period at nearby universities (Kent State, University of Akron, or Case Western Reserve University, or the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Students in French class will read French haikus and make comparisons to English and Japanese writing styles.

**Essential Questions #2:**

1. What is the spiritual and poetic discipline of Basho's journey? What is your own personal journey this year? What do you contemplate as joy or anxiety?
2. How is grief expressed? A sense of loss? Unaccomplished dreams?
3. What are the poetic images evoked?
4. How do you experience the passing of time, of aging, of leaving high school?
5. What visual impression do you have or which most clearly relates to your haiku or journey?
6. How do your thoughts change from one season to the next? How does landscape evoke meaning?
7. When does the fleeting of time feel most poignant? At what age in one's life?
8. What are you most conscious of while reading, hearing, discussing, or writing haikus?
9. What do we learn about another culture by reading poetry?
10. What comparison can we make in learning another language through a literary form?

**Assessment:**

Students will discuss the haikus chosen and write their personal journal entries in a small spiral notebook (pocket size) for a credit/no credit grade.

Their original haikus will follow the original standard of 5-7-5 syllables, in English or in French, and have a follow-up paragraph explaining emotional context (what lead up to the writing). A basic rubric will evaluate poetic form and a grade of 4/3/2/1 will be assessed.

**Standards:**

*Foreign Language Content: Culture, Comparison, Connections, and Communication:*

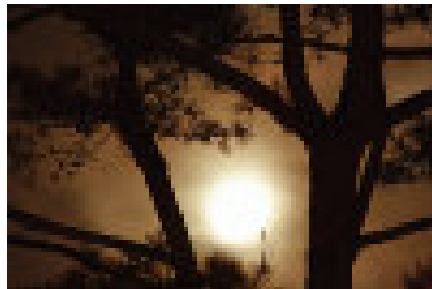
Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences.

Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss text.

Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns across cultures,

geographic regions, and social roles.

Students use visual, spoken, and written language to appreciate and learn poetic style (reading from a different time period in a different genre to build an understanding of the many dimensions (philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic) of human experience.



*“Each day is a journey and the journey itself home”*