

# Japanese Tanka

Cathy Hart, Perry Middle School

## **Purpose:**

Big Concept:

There are forms of Japanese poetry other than Haiku.

Essential Questions:

1. What is tanka poetry?
2. How does tanka compare to the well-known Haiku form?

## **Rationale:**

Exposure of students to the tanka form of poetry

## **Materials:**

1. Posters of Poetry forms (see below)
2. Tanka PowerPoint available on this site
3. Tanka and Haiku comparison handout (see below)
4. Poetry books from the school and public libraries
5. Paper and pen
6. A choice of art supplies for illustration

## **Activities:**

1. Ask students some introductory questions about their knowledge of poetry and various poetic forms. Use the poetry posters to help review those they know.
2. Show the Tanka PowerPoint, pausing for discussion. The PowerPoint includes Tanka poems, both Japanese and American; an explanation of the Tanka form and its history; and pictures from the Shiojiri Tanka-kan Museum in Shiojiri, Nagano.
3. Hand out the Tanka versus Haiku comparison chart.
4. Guide students in efforts to create their own Tanka poems.
5. Encourage students to illustrate their poems.

## **Assessment:**

1. Students' poems will be graded for comprehension of the tanka form, completion and effort.
2. Students will be assessed on their understanding of various types of poetry, including tanka, at the end of the poetry portfolio unit (see below).

## **Grade Adaptation:**

The target grade of this lesson is the 7th grade.

## **Scaling Up:**

1. Students could research the tanka revival in the last several years due to the Machi Tawara who wrote a collection of poems called Salad Anniversary in 1987. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tawara\\_Machi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tawara_Machi) as a starting place.
2. Have students try a renga. "In the Heian period, there was a new tanka-based game: One poet recited or created half of a tanka, and the other finished it off. This sequential, collaborative tanka was called renga ("linked poem")." "A Renga starts with a 5-7-5 Hokku by Kyaku. It will be followed by a 7-7 Waki and then by 5-7-5 Daisan. Next will be 7-7, and this pattern is repeated

until desired length is achieved. The Ageku is the final verse. Shikimoku should be notified in the advance to avoid confusion or even a breakdown of a Renga. It is recommended to use Hizaokuri for a small Ichiza so that everyone gets an equal share. In a large Ichiza, Dashigachi rule is recommended so a better verse would be selected.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renga>)

#### Scaling Down:

1. Instead of creating individual Tanka poems, a class poem could be written.

#### **State Standards:**

##### English Language Arts

##### 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading Applications: Literary Text

5. Identify recurring themes, patterns and symbols found in literature from different eras and cultures.
6. Explain the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres, including poetry, drama, myths, biographies, autobiographies, science fictions, fiction and non-fiction.
7. Interpret how mood or meaning is conveyed through word choice, figurative language and syntax.

##### English Language Arts

##### 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Writing Process

9. Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, colorful modifiers and style as appropriate to audience and purpose.
17. Prepare for publication (e.g., for display or for sharing with others) writing that follows a format appropriate to the purpose, using such techniques as electronic resources, principles of design (e.g., margins, tabs, spacing and columns) and graphics (e.g., drawings, charts and graphs) to enhance the final product.

##### English Language Arts

##### 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Writing Applications

6. Produce informal writings (e.g., journals, notes and poems) for various purposes.

#### **Resources:**

##### **Websites**

1. <http://www.ahapoetry.com/tanka.htm>
2. <http://www.americantanka.com/>
3. <http://home1.pacific.net.sg/~loudon/rick.htm>
4. <http://web-jpn.org/index.html> - click on culture and then literature
5. <http://www.toyomasu.com/haiku/> - good haiku site for comparison
6. <http://members.tripod.com/neca/Tanka%20and%20Sijo.htm#Tanka> - comparison of translations and some contemporary tanka

## **Books**

1. Atwood, Ann. Haiku-vision in Poetry and Photography. New York: Scribner, c1977.
2. Haiku by the Children. Japan: JAL Foundation, 1995.
3. Kobayashi, Issa, 1763-1827. A Few Flies and I: Haiku. [New York]: Pantheon Books, [1969].
4. Livingston, Myra Cohn. Cricket Never Does: A Collection of Haiku and Tanka. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1997.
5. The Seasons of Time: Tanka Poetry of Ancient Japan. New York: Dial Press, [1968].
6. Tawara, Machi. Salad Anniversary translated by Juliet Winters Carpenter. New York: Kodansha International, c1989.

# Poetry Posters

(From Highsmith, Inc.)

## 1. Couplet

"A billy goat kicked a can of paint and it went all over his head.  
He couldn't read, but all the same, he was still considered well "red""

"A couplet seems simple, only two lines that rhyme.  
If you think it sounds easy, just try it sometime!"

## 2. Limerick

"An owl with a question was "shook,  
'Cause he didn't know where to look.  
Or where he should go,  
With his great need to know."  
"It's simple – fly straight to a book!"

"All limericks must start with line one,  
Which rhymes with line two just for fun.  
Line three rhymes with four,  
But wait – there is more.  
Lone five rhymes with two, then you're done."

## 3. Acrostic

**B**ecause  
**O**nly dolls, cars and  
**O**ther toys were  
**K**ept upon the shelf, I  
**W**ent to the library and checked  
**O**ut a book to  
**R**ead all by  
**M**yself!"

"**A**crostic poems  
**C**an be fun to  
**R**ead 'cause they've got something  
**O**ther poems lack. A  
**S**ecret word  
**T**hat runs down one side and  
**I**t's cool  
"**C**ause it stands in a stack."

## 4. Haiku

"Flowers spring open  
and the bees need to gather  
the sweet nourishment."

"Haiku poems have three  
lines containing five, seven  
then five syllables."

## How do TANKA and HAIKU compare?

The Japanese poetry forms of haiku and tanka are alike in these ways:

- simplicity
- brief and clear
- contemplates nature
- traditionally no violence

They are dissimilar in the following ways:

- tanka is 13 centuries old, haiku is only 3 centuries old
- tanka's length is 31 onji/syllables and haiku's is 17 onji/syllables
- tanka has five parts/five images while haiku has at the most three images
- tanka's aim is beauty, whereas haiku's aim is "is-ness"
- tanka uses imagination and is written about given themes; however, haiku uses real images and is based on an experience
- tanka is meant to delight in beauty, encourage reflection, and stir up emotions; on the other hand, haiku is meant to open the heart, be quick and direct, and be emotionless.
- tanka is courtly and literary while haiku is of the merchants and lower class
- tanka traditionally uses elegant images, yet haiku speaks of common things with common language to reveal uncommon ideas
- tanka is written to be a chanted song, but haiku is to be spoken crisply

# Poetry Portfolio

(Cindy Moore, Perry Middle School)

We will be working on poetry during the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter. "Poetry Fridays" begin today and will last every Friday throughout the quarter. Each Friday we will spend time on our Poetry Portfolios. You will be exposed to a variety of poetry forms.

- Things I Learned (modeling after William Stafford)
- Acrostic
- Diamante
- Haiku
- Tanka

## Details

- You will be required to include one final draft of each form of poetry and one final draft of your choice – **6 total poems**
- Each poem should include an illustration. Illustrations can be directly on the poem or on a separate sheet. – **6 total illustrations**
- You will need a cover sheet including the title – **Poetry Portfolio, your name, date and English.**
- Each poem needs to be labeled with the **form of poetry** and a **title**.

Final Due Date – Friday, March 24, 2006

\*\*You will have some class time to prepare. But you will need to spend some time out of class to produce a quality portfolio. Last class workday will be Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup>. Be prepared to share one poem in class on Friday, the 24<sup>th</sup>.

**N.B. Tanka was added to Miss Moore's unit plan because of this lesson.**