

# Haiku:

## Creative Writing and Weatherlore



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# Activity, Time and Materials

## ACTIVITY:

This writing activity will encourage participants to use nature-based memories, observations, and their imaginations to write a patterned, three-line, syllabic form of poetry adapted from the Japanese literary tradition. Weatherlore serves as the source of inspiration for the poetry. The instruction should include interaction between a leader and participants, and the sharing of results could be conducted amongst the participants. Participants also could group or link the writings together by related topics or common experiences. Writers, poets, English teachers, activities coordinators, or volunteers can direct the lesson plan.

## TIME:

One to two hours and thirty minutes over one to three sessions. This activity would take about half an hour to introduce some samples and allow participants to attempt one or two haiku, but could easily take an hour for revising and editing in the first session. If reproduction or sharing is included, it could take several sessions. The overall plan is designed so that each session can be independent of the others. Thus, both the person directing the activity plan and the participants can decide if they want to move on to the next session. The activity plans increase with complexity, with one building upon the other, but participation in the first session does not preclude participation in the later sessions. Each session helps build confidence and familiarity with the art form to encourage participants to advance, while also providing a group-supported challenge.

## MATERIALS:

- Pencils
- Paper
- Large sheets of self-stick, easel-pad paper (25" x 30" is standard)
- Computer, scanner, and printer (If the person directing this activity plan wishes to make the drafting and reproduction of haiku more elaborate and technical.)
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*.

(Recommended optional publication: *It Seems Like Only Yesterday: Memories from the Residents of Hill Top Home of Comfort* by Dr. David Solheim, Vicki Pennington, and Stacy Lemke. Dickinson, ND: Hill Top Heritage Foundation, 2007. This publication features the creative writing of residents at an elder care facility.)

## **“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):**

The analysis of syllables (or word counts) will provide intellectual stimulation and developing topics will include memory and imagination, so this activity will primarily combat boredom. For those with memory and motor skills issues, imagination can be emphasized to address the sense of helplessness. A group setting for shared activities like the editing, reproduction of, and collection of samples of writing will help to combat loneliness. Successful reproduction of the writing may also improve related skills to reduce feelings of helplessness. The sharing of poems with family and friends is directed at reducing the sense of loneliness. Working in any kind of poetic form like haiku is also an intellectual exercise, and as such will have the mental benefits similar to working crosswords and other word (and number) games.

## **ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDIES:**

The decline in word-finding skills as we age is best addressed through specific activities that stimulate both cognitive components and the natural use of language. By addressing word-finding skills at various levels within a naturalistic environment and with one’s peers, such activities help to directly stimulate the communicative competence of individuals.

*--Brookshire, R.H. Introduction to Neurogenic Communication Disorders, 7th edition. St. Louis, MO: Mosby, 2007.*

*Cover photo: Sundogs overlooking the frozen waters of Devils Lake and the Spirit Lake Indian Reservation of northcentral North Dakota in January 2014. (Image courtesy of Troyd Geist, North Dakota Council on the Arts.)*

“The personhood movement in dementia research has established the theoretical foundation for implementing cultural arts interventions in care practices. The underlying assumption is that professionals from the visual and the performance arts are well equipped to see the person behind the condition and to focus on possibilities for meaningful relationships in the here and now. This article focuses on poetry interventions as one example of cultural arts interventions. The use of poetry might seem counterintuitive, given that people with dementia lose their language abilities and that poetry is regarded to be the most complex literary form. I will argue that expanding on existing research on poetry interventions from a health and science perspective with a humanities approach will help illuminate how poetry works to enhance the exchange with people with dementia. Drawing on participant observations of poetry interventions by Gary Glazner (Alzheimer’s Poetry Project, USA) at the New York Memory Center, I will frame poetry interventions as a specific form of oral poetry in which people with dementia are positioned as co-creators of embodied texts and directly benefit from the power of the spoken word.” [Abstract]

*--Swinnen, A.M. “Healing Words: A Study of Poetry Interventions in Dementia Care.” Dementia. Published electronically November 27, 2014. doi: 10.1177/1471301214560378.*

# Activity Plan

## SESSION 1 (1 HOUR):

1. The first level of the activity entails an introduction to the general outlines of the haiku as a poetic form. The traditional content of haiku is a natural description set in a particular season, with the poem typically ending with a surprise. (The surprise needn't be shocking, but it should at least be unpredictable.) The subject matter of weatherlore in the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers* will make excellent prompts for participants to remember, imagine, and create their own nature-related content for haiku and haiku sequences. The very mechanical analysis of haiku is that it is a poem written in three lines, with the first line having five syllables, the second line seven syllables, and the third line five syllables, for a total of seventeen syllables in the three lines. (A variation for some groups or participants would be to make "word haikus" using a similar pattern of seventeen words, rather than the syllable count per line.)

Once a writer aims at haiku and has most of the words down, it is a matter of changing forms and adding or deleting syllables to get the most efficient and effective material for the pattern. It is common for writers in English to leave out articles (a, an, the) in order to make the content of the poems as lively and informative as possible.

2. To set the stage for the nature-themed content of the haiku-writing activity, show the participants the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. From that book, read the introduction to the weatherlore chapter on

pages 88 and 89. Then peruse that chapter, pages 90-107, looking for the titles of the numbered weatherlore entries that meet the haiku criteria of having five syllables for the first line of the poem. For example, the following weatherlore entries meet the required criteria: "9. Muskrats in the Slough" on page 90, "47. The Oak and the Ash" on page 99, "71. Red Sky at Morning" on page 103, and "The Land of Three Suns" on page 106. This search can be conducted by the participants individually, as part of a group, or the titles can simply be chosen by the person directing the activity plan. The advantage to the participants finding the weatherlore entry titles that meet the haiku criteria is that the search will engage and familiarize them with the material and with the counting of syllables.

3. There are eighteen such titled entries in the weatherlore chapter of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers* that meet the five syllable criteria for the first line of the haiku. After selecting the appropriate first line of the haiku, the chosen weatherlore entry should be read in its entirety, either individually, or, if developed as part of a group, aloud to the participants. (Reading the entire entry may inspire participants in the creation of the second and third lines of the haiku.) Individually, or as part of a group, now develop the second and third lines of the poem.

See the examples of the weatherlore items "Red Sky at Morning," "The Land of Three Suns," and "The Oak and the Ash"

from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, which are used to create the first line of the haiku (the first line of each haiku is from the book, while the second and third lines are by poet Dave Solheim).

**Red sky at morning** (title from page 103)  
Omens thundering rains and  
Exploding lightning.

**The land of three suns** (title from page 106)  
Glowing exaggerating all  
Powers of nature.

**The oak and the ash** (title from page 99)  
Race seasons. Flowering first:  
Oak dust, ashen rain.

(When developing a haiku as a group, write it in big, bold letters on large sheets of self-stick, easel-pad paper that is hung on the wall to make it easier for the participants to see.)

4. If writing their haikus individually, each participant should work on revising and editing his or her poems at this meeting. Ask participants to bring their completed haiku to the next session, so that they can be shared with the rest of the group. Encourage participants to create additional haiku outside of this session.

## SESSION 2 (1 HOUR):

1. Ask participants to share their revised and finalized haiku from Session 1 by reading them aloud.

Note: Some people may not want to read in front of others and may opt out of this part of the activity. That is fine.

2. Explain that haiku will be created again following the same structure of three lines; the first line with five syllables, the second line with seven syllables, and the third line with five syllables, for a total of seventeen syllables in three lines. Require that the entire poem be one complete sentence, or another alternative could be three loosely related phrases. Explain that it has become a fairly common poetic practice to write a series or group of haiku on a related topic, situation, or common experience.

As a team, decide on a topic, situation, or common experience upon which to focus the writing of haiku based upon a weatherlore selection. The first three lines of the compilation haiku will be created through group effort, while the following three-line segments will consist of haiku developed individually by the participants.

Just as in Session 1, peruse the weatherlore chapter of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, pages 90-107, and look for the numbered weatherlore entry titles that meet the haiku criteria of having five syllables for the first line of the poem. This search could be done by the participants individually, as part of a group, or the entry could be chosen by the person directing the activity plan.

3. Select one entry title to be used as the first line of the haiku, for example, “The Land of Three Suns” from page 106. Read aloud to the group the entire weatherlore entry. Based on this weatherlore entry, related topics and common experiences generated may include watching the sunset, the colors or the lights seen, the sun, the cold, the snow, the ice, the feelings emoted, or whatever related imagery comes to mind or feelings to heart, after reading the specific entry and/or seeing the related image. Again, the poem is to be created with one complete sentence or three loosely related phrases.

Individually, or as a group, develop the first three lines of the haiku using the title of the selected weatherlore entry as the first line. See the example below written by Dave Solheim:

<b>The land of three suns</b>	(title from page 106)
Glows exaggerating all	(line created by the group)
Powers of nature.	(line created by the group)

(When developing a haiku as a group, write it in big, bold letters on large sheets of self-stick, easel-pad paper that is hung on the wall to make it easier for the participants to see.)

4. After the first three lines of the group haiku are complete, ask each participant to now write their own individual haiku based on the criteria discussed and related to the weatherlore entry selected. Do not, however, reuse the title of the weatherlore entry in the individual haiku.

5. After writing their individual haiku, participants should work on revising and editing their three-line poem during this session. If another meeting is needed to finalize their individual haiku, make the appropriate arrangements. Working on individual haiku but within a group setting provides an opportunity for mutual support, encouragement, and new ideas. In such a situation, the haiku is much more likely to achieve completion.

The person directing the activity plan should explain that the participants’ individual haiku will be collected and arranged to form one, two, or three longer composite haiku. The number of longer composite haiku will depend upon the number of individual haiku written. The first three lines of the haiku developed by the group will serve as the beginning first three lines of each of the longer composite haiku. The haiku developed by each individual will then follow the three-line group haiku. See the examples below written by Dave Solheim:

<b>The land of three suns</b>	(title from page 106)
Glows exaggerating all	(line created by the group)
Powers of nature.	(line created by the group)

As Sol is setting	(entire haiku developed
His heeling pets, teeth bared, growl	solely by Participant A
At encircling dark.	added to composite)

Solar fire and twin	(entire haiku developed
Shimmering images reflected	solely by Participant B
In celestial ice.	added to composite)

6. Inform the participants that the composite haiku will be read aloud at the next session. Also, announce to the participants and to all other residents of the facility that the poems written during these sessions will be printed and distributed and selected poems read at the next meeting.

### SESSION 3 (30 MINUTES):

1. Distribute copies of haiku created during these sessions and have a reading for participants, other residents, and, if possible, the family and friends of residents. Share poems by reading them aloud. (The person directing the activity plan can read the poems or the writers could be asked to share one or more of their own.)

2. Read the composite haiku from Session 2. Ask participants to give it a poetic title.

3. Refreshments and a reception for the reading are suggested.

### RECOMMENDED OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES:

1. Compile all the poems written into a booklet to be given to those who participated. Also offer the booklets to residents who did not participate. Each poem should be identified by title, author, and the date it was created. Encourage residents to share the book of poems with their friends and family. Feature the program and the poems in the elder care facility's family newsletter.

2. Some elder care facilities in the North Dakota Council on the Arts'

*Art for Life Program* have had success featuring the creative writing of their residents in the local newspaper. Exploring this possibility is very strongly suggested.

3. Loneliness and isolation from family, friends, and the community outside of the elder care facility negatively impact the residents. Giving them something to look forward to, as well as increasing their interaction with family, friends, and others in the larger community, is vitally important. So, consider utilizing an interactive letter-writing activity focused on haiku.

Begin by developing a short text that describes haiku. With that text, include a haiku whose first line was written by the resident, with or without the help of a volunteer or activity coordinator, now inviting the recipient of the letter to join in the creation of the poem by writing the second line. Instruct the recipient to return the letter, whereupon the facility resident will write the third line of the poem and send the completed poem back to his or her creative partner.

### AUTHOR • DAVE SOLHEIM:

Dave is a Professor of English at Dickinson State University, Dickinson, North Dakota. He holds English degrees from Gustavus Adolphus College, Stanford University, and the University of Denver. He is a veteran of the North Dakota Council on the Arts' *Artist in Residence Program*, participating frequently since 1974. During the 1990s, he regularly conducted creative writing activities at the Hill Top Home of Comfort, an elder care facility in Killdeer, North Dakota. Dr. Solheim has taught creative writing to students as young as the primary grades, to secondary and college students, up through graduate students and octogenarians. In 1989, he was chosen to be the North Dakota Statehood Centennial Poet, and is a North Dakota Associate Poet Laureate. Solheim is the author of five books of poetry: *On the Ward* (1974), *Inheritance* (1987), *West River: 100 Poems* (1989), *The Landscape Listens* (1999), and *Green Jade and Road Men: Translations, Commentary, and Poems of China* (2011). Samples of participants' work from writing workshops have been published in three anthologies: *Voices North in Dakota* (1976), *Plainsongs* (1978), and *It Seems Like Only Yesterday: Memories from the Residents of Hill Top Home of Comfort* (2007).

### AUTHOR • TROYD GEIST:

Troyd is the state folklorist with the North Dakota Council on the Arts who is charged with encouraging the preservation and continuation of folk and traditional arts, heritage, and culture. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Sociology/Anthropology from North Dakota State University, and has participated in and conducted projects involving the impact of folk art and folk traditions on personal health and well-being. Those efforts include traditional storytellers working with fetal alcohol research and prevention programs, Bell's palsy as viewed and treated in traditional cultures, familial Alzheimer's disease tracking using anthropological methods, and the use of culturally infused narrative and traditional music for guided imagery. He directed the original *Art for Life* pilot project in 2001-2003, which measured the effects of long-term folk arts and artist interaction on combating the negative impact of the "Three Plagues" (loneliness, boredom, and helplessness) that many residents in elder care facilities experience. Subsequently, he developed the *Art for Life Program*. With Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz, Troyd co-edited, co-compiled, and co-authored the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*.

*(All haiku examples written by David Solheim.)*