

Workshop: How-to-Haiku

By Tom Painting

Step 1: Facilitator distributes 3X5 cards to workshop participants. On one side of the card each participant should write a definition of haiku. On the flip side, each participant writes a question that they would like answered about haiku by the end of the workshop. Participants may choose to either place their name on the card or remain anonymous. Facilitator collects cards, which will be shared with the group at the end of the workshop.

Step 2: Facilitator distributes a current haiku journal; (frogpond, modern haiku, acorn, etc.) or anthology (Red Moon Anthology) one per participant and directs attention to the section devoted to haiku/senryu. It is important at this phase to not make a distinction between the two.

Step 3: Facilitator instructs participants to read through the journal or anthology, stopping to write any haiku that “strikes” them in their notebook. (Include the name of the poem’s author) Allow sufficient time for participants to read a good number of haiku and encourage everyone to commit at least one poem to their notebook.

Step 4: Follow this activity with a reading (without commentary) of the selected haiku along with the author’s name. Continue until all of the selected poems have been heard. Note; It is important that the facilitator or participants not comment on the haiku at this stage. Much of what defines English language haiku can be discerned through the act of visual observation and listening.

Step 5: Facilitator opens up the discussion with the following prompt: What did you observe and/or hear when reading and/or listening to the haiku selected by workshop participants?

The discussion will often center on both the structure of English Language haiku; the breaking from a strict 5-7-5 syllable structure and the two-part nature of the poem as well the ability of haiku to solicit an emotional response, commonly referred to as the haiku moment. The discussion can be broadened to include observations about punctuation, capital letters and the sometimes shady distinction between haiku and senryu. A fun activity is to have participants count the number of syllables in the haiku they have selected and report to the group.

At this stage the facilitator may choose to reveal the haiku definitions as written by participants at the beginning of the workshop, with discussion to follow. The questions are saved for the workshop conclusion will follow a brief history of haiku in English, haiku terminology, writing practices and an open reading.