

Exploration 19

Poetry: Building with Words

Architecture and poetry are aesthetics with an underlying structure that holds them together. Poetry can be seen as “an art of conventional signs marching along in time”⁷ and architecture as an art of signs spatially arranged. Each art form can help us understand the other. In these exercises, students will use poetry to gain insight into architecture.

Materials:

- Something to write on
- Something to write with

Objective:

After visiting Fallingwater, or another building, students will write a poem that communicates their experience of the place to others.

Standards:

- Arts: NA-VA : 2, 5; NA-D 7; NA 8
- English: NL-ENG: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12
- Mathematics: NM-PROB.CONN 3
- Science: NS: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- Social Studies: NSS-G: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6

Procedures:

HAIKU

- Have students write a haiku that expresses the building. Students must include a season, reference to a season, or to a moment in the natural cycle of the day. The haiku should follow these conventions:

Three lines, 17 syllables in all, divided 5 – 7 – 5

Background on Haiku:

⁷ Hefferman, James A. W. **Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashberry.** University of Chicago Press, 1993: xi.

Information on haiku from the National Endowment for the Humanities, at:

www.edsiteement.neh.gov

Can You Haiku?

A giant firefly:

*that way, this way, that way, this –
and it passes by.*

--Issa (1762-1826)

Haiku show us the world in a water drop, providing a tiny lens through which to glimpse the miracle and mystery of life. Combining close observation with a moment of reflection, this simple yet highly sophisticated form of poetry can help sharpen students' response to language and enhance their powers of self-expression. In this lesson, students learn the rules and conventions of haiku, study examples by Japanese masters, and create haiku of their own.

Form: Traditional Japanese haiku have seventeen syllables divided into three lines of five syllables, seven syllables, and five syllables respectively. These syllable counts are often ignored when haiku are written in other languages, but the basic form of three short lines, with the middle line slightly longer than the other two, is usually observed.

Structure: Haiku divide into two parts, with a break coming after the first or second line, so that the poem seems to make two separate statements that are related in some unexpected or indirect way. In Japanese, this break is marked by what haiku poets call a "cutting word." In English and other languages, the break is often marked by punctuation. This two-part structure is important to the poetic effect of a haiku, prompting a sense of discovery as one reads or a feeling of sudden insight.

Language: Haiku should include what Japanese poets call a *kigo* -- a word that gives the reader a clue to the season being described. The *kigo* can be the name of a season (autumn, winter) or a subtler clue, such as a reference to the harvest or new fallen snow. Through the years, certain signs of the seasons have become conventional in Japanese haiku: cherry blossoms are a *kigo* for spring, mosquitoes a *kigo* for summer. Sometimes, too, the *kigo* will refer to an individual moment in the natural cycle, such as dawn or moonrise, without reference to a particular season. The *kigo* is also important to the

haiku's effect, anchoring the experience it describes in a poetic here and now that helps sharpen the imaginative focus.

Subject: Haiku present a snapshot of everyday experience, revealing an unsuspected significance in a detail of nature or human life. Haiku poets find their subject matter in the world around them, not in ancient legends or exotic fantasies. They write for a popular audience and give their audience a new way to look at things they have probably overlooked in the past.

ACROSTIC POEMS

Acrostic poems are simple poems in which the first letter of each line forms a word or phrase (vertically). An acrostic poem can describe the subject or even tell a brief story about it. This type of poem is one of the simplest for a student to write because it gives the child a concrete format to use.

This exercise will use an acrostic poem as a way to show what students have learned about know about a place after they have visited.

- Have students make a list of all the things they know about the place: how it feels to be there, what it looks like, what's under your feet, what's over your head, what materials you see, what you hear, what you smell, etc. Then ask them to imagine their favorite space at the place. Think about why it is their favorite. How they would describe it to somebody.
- Next, using the name of the place, have them write the word vertically and then use each letter in the name as the beginning of a word or line that tells something about that place.

An example by Des'Tina Paige about her experience at the Fallingwater Teacher's Residency Program in Summer 2007:

Forever
Anticipating
Longing
Loving
Intertwining
Nature
Gathering the
Wonderful
Artistic

Talents of
Everyone in
Residence