

HAIKU TEACHING KIT - The British Haiku Society

Oral Starter Session

Gather the children around and talk to them about ways of recording impressive things that they see. Begin a list; including such items as a digital camera, a mobile phone with a camera, a sketch pad and pencil, a traditional camera, a handycam, etc.

Key questions:

- How would I record impressive things that I had seen if these methods of recording had not been invented?

- How did people record wonderful sights before photography?

[... *by painting, drawing...*]

- What could people do if they wanted to record something quickly?

[...*often by the time I have got my paints out the moment is gone...*]

- What about sounds? And smells? And feelings? And tastes?

[... *remember that pictures make it very hard to record these things...*]

Explain to the children that you saw something really impressive on the way to school this morning, but were in a rush and had no camera to hand. You wrote it down instead:

an old plastic bag
dancing in the wind
alive with movement

Tell the story of how you saw a carrier bag being taken by the wind and it seemed to be alive.

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Task One - Familiarisation

Explain to the children that you are going to tell them a number of other descriptions like this and you want them to fill in the story. Choose haiku from this kit's list that will work with the age and abilities of the children. Tell the children that these descriptions take the form of very short poems. Refer back to the oral starter and tell the children that in place of the camera the poems are 'sketches using words'.

Gather together and share the children's ideas and stories.

Key questions:

- When you heard this description what did it make you think about?
- What picture did you have in your head?

At this point you may want to explain to the children some of the history of haiku and about the origins of the poems in Japan.

Depending on the age and abilities of the children, you might mention the 5-7-5 tradition here and the use of season words. However, with younger children it may not be necessary. In any case, today most non-Japanese haiku do not follow the strict Japanese form.

Conclude the task by asking the children to draw a picture of their favourite haiku that they have heard. Compare the pictures, and display them with the original haiku if space and time allow.

You might follow with Task Two – Writing. Or Task Four – A Haiku Walk. Or use a worksheet from this kit such as 'Pick Your Own Haiku' or 'Haiku Writing Machine'.

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Task Two - Writing

Depending on the resources that are at your disposal, organise the classroom so that the children can see a number of striking images. Have these ready before the children enter the room. If you have a method of projecting images onto a wall, darkening the rest of the room will increase the impact. If you are relying on large posters, have them in a place where all the children can see them easily.

There is no 'right choice' of images to display, but pictures that have generated a good response in the past include:

a newborn baby, the skeleton of a dead tree, a sunset, the face of an elderly person, striking images of wildlife, images of urban decay, landscape photographs, pictures of extreme weather, etc.

It is useful if some of the images promote thought about senses other than sight, although this is not easy.

Ask the children to choose a picture and to write a list of all of the words that come to mind whilst they are viewing. When the children have lists of lots of adjectives, ask them to start refining their ideas by putting the words into a framework.

You may wish to ask them to write three lines on the following themes:

image
image
reflection / observation

season word
image
reflection / observation

When they have written a three line poem, explain to the children that what makes a haiku special is the fact that it uses words sparingly ('No words are wasted'), and they have the opportunity to remove any words that they think are unnecessary.

Give the children the chance to re-write their poems and read aloud.

Alternatively at this stage you could use one of the worksheets included with this pack. 'Pick Your Own Haiku' gives direct prompts. 'Haiku Writing Machine', in two variants, gives examples and is more suitable for older children. Another option is Task Four – A Haiku Walk.