



A *Haiku* is a short Japanese poem consisting of seventeen syllables set into three lines comprising of 5, 7 and 5 syllables



Haiku - a way seeing, a way of saying

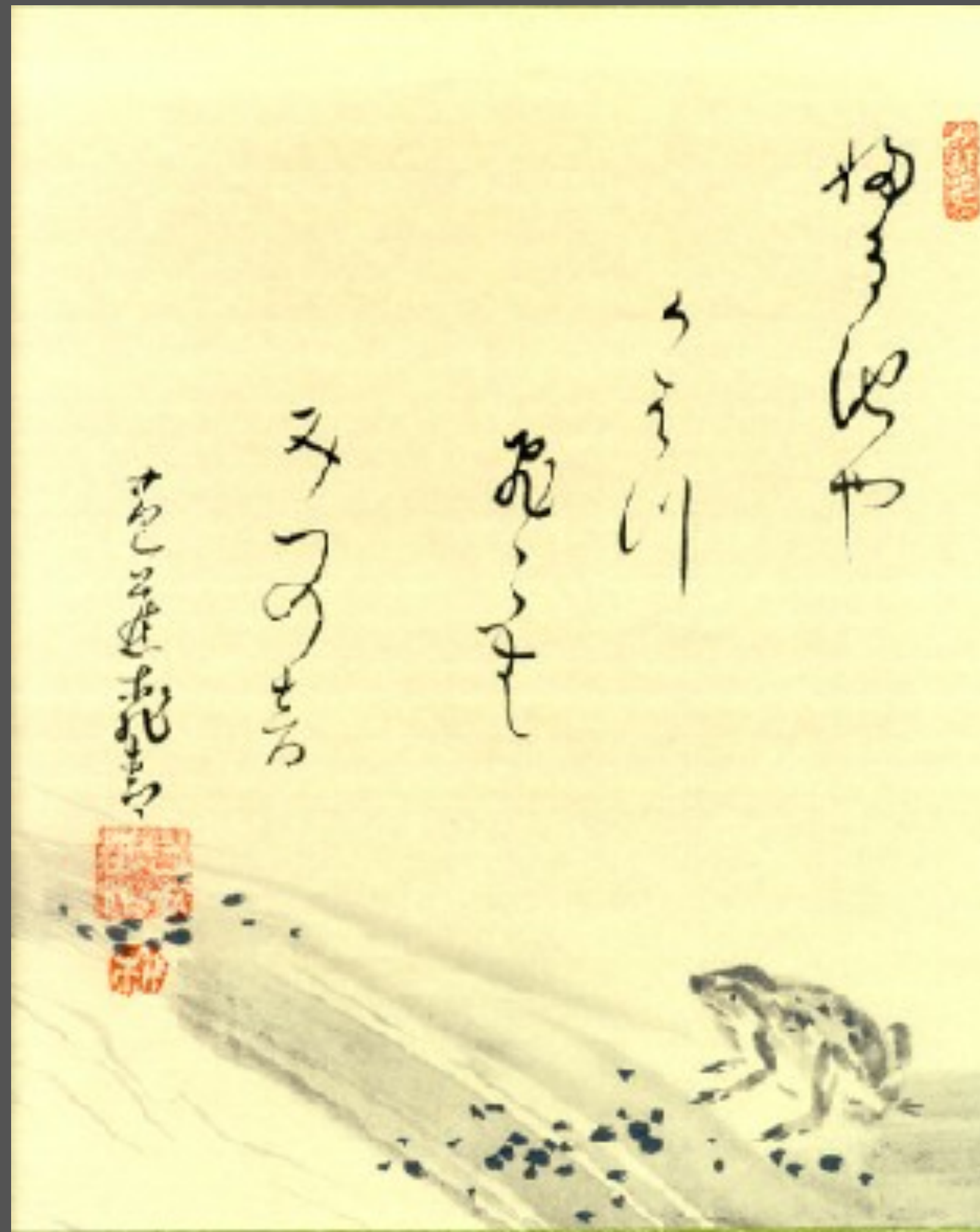


*Sengai* (1750-1837), 'The Universe'

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It is a simple way to recognise, preserve and share a special moment or feeling.



## THE PROCESS

Working with on your own or with a partner, note down words and phrases that occur to you as you contemplate your encounter with a chosen image or object, encounter, feeling or thought.

Share your partner's words and allow each word, feeling or idea to suggest another.

Keep writing those words down until you feel you have created a rich reservoir/resource of significant ideas, images, words and phrases.

Now choose seventeen or so of those words or phrases that mean the most to you.

Do this by discarding those words that seem superfluous until just the seventeen remain.

Remove the overtly personal i.e. words like 'I' and 'myself' - the final poem should be impersonal - allowing the reader to feel their own response to what you have captured in words.

These are your key words and phrases.

Think of each word within the sequence as a separate moment for contemplation; like stepping stones across a fast flowing stream that takes you from here to there.

Each word acts as an affective and essential element, working as part of a greater whole.

Keep it simple.

The more the reader interprets, the richer their response.

A useful image to bear in mind is that of a caravan crossing the desert. [The term haiku derives from two Chinese words relating to the idea of *performance* and *caravan* or *convoy*]

1. As each camel bears its own precious cargo, but each is part of a greater whole taking goods from their point of departure to their point of arrival. To carry something from 'here' to 'there': from invisibility to visibility. Instead of sharing things, our cargo is made of words, words that carry feelings, ideas, thoughts and sensations.

Or instead of a convoy think of the haiku as a fishing net, cast onto the water, not to catch fish, but to catch ideas and feelings and bring them home.

A crucial part of the haiku is the Japanese syllable "ya" - the "cutting or "axe" word. In translations it is often denoted by a comma, dash or exclamation mark. It marks a break in the poem - a move from one place, one idea to another.

(This can be an intellectual or emotional development, characterised either in spatial or temporal metaphors).

This will happen probably quite naturally, many haikus or poems begin with a description of a moment, and end with the emotional implications of that recollection.



The poem should be utterly simple and elegant - not a word should be wasted or out of place.

It should always relate to the original moment of inspiration and be embedded in world.

A traditional haiku always has a reference to the seasons or time of day - however discretely.

The initiator and most famous exponent of Haiku was Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), a great writer. His 'nine laws' of Haiku are:

1. Humour (i.e. being aware of our humanity, a lightness of touch)
2. Freshness of meaning
3. Craftsmanship - respect for language
4. The proper exercise of freedom within restraint
5. The grace of simplicity
6. The grace of profundity
7. Subtlety
8. Respect for the enduring and universal act of communication
9. The significant relationship between ourselves and the natural order of which we are an integral part.



Basho's most famous *Haiku*

*furu ike ya*

*kawazu tobikomū*

*mizu no oto*

*old pond*

*a frog in-leaping*

*water-note*

*Sengai* (1750-1837), another great writer and artist, was a Japanese Zen Buddhist monk who wrote a wonderful and deeply evocative response to Basho's poem.

*On Basho's Frog*

*Under the cloudy cliff, near the  
temple door,*

*Between dusky spring plants on the  
pond,*

*A frog jumps in the water, plop!*

*Startled, the poet drops his brush.*





Jan Vermeer  
*Woman Reading a Letter by an Open Window*  
1664

Let's use this painting  
as a catalyst for a  
haiku.



Ask yourself some simple questions concerning the painting - jot down as many descriptive words or phrases as come to mind; you can use the catalogue entry of the relevant museum to spur on some associative ideas or evocative words.

Don't be afraid to borrow words from wherever you please - it's not which words you steal, borrow or choose - it's how you use them.



‘With painter’s gaze  
We see a moment stilled  
Milk falls hidden thoughts.’

(as far as I’ve got.)

Don’t forget, these words can be added to as you work on your haiku.

Once satisfied ,share or swop the result with a friend - working with partners on the same image or landscape is great fun.

Don’t forget reading poetry is great,  
But speaking it out loud is even better.

# My ideas

- who is she? alone in the room
- light softly caressing
- reading quiet paint
- in the light beauty creamy
- morning map I am an intruder
- absence presence empathy
- memory stillness absorption
- blue tranquility gentle
- silence security
- map distant places
- far away friends I am here you are there
- shadows fall light
- empty chairs closed book
- touching embracing encircling time space no longer alone
- distances close I am here once again we touch



**Step Two: Revising:** choose an arbitrary number of favourite words, phrases [say 17] and set them down in three lines and then begin to edit them until it catches exactly what you want to communicate.

### **First Draft**

Who is she? alone in the room  
light softly caressing  
I am here once again we touch

### **Second revision**

Alone in the room  
Soft light gently caressing  
I am here once again we touch

### **Third revision**

Alone in the room  
Soft light gently caressing  
Open letter we touch

**And so on.**



Jan Vermeer  
*The Milkmaid*  
1658-60

Next page is a netful  
of words taken from  
the literature  
written on this  
particular painting.





Unaware we see private public domestic servant woman room carefully pouring milk into a squat earthenware container Dutch oven table. bread young, sturdily built crisp linen cap blue apron work sleeves pushed up from thick forearms. A foot warmer Delft wall tiles Cupid viewer's left) and a figure with a pole Intense light streams from the window foot warmer man with a pole clothes basket Vermeer brilliant blue dress painting detail showing the foot warmer, with tiles of Cupid and a man with a pole the clothes basket brilliant blue dress.milkmaids milked cows; kitchen maid kitchen work suggestive weight table light, though bright rough texture of the bread crusts thick waist and rounded shoulders face in shadow downcast eyes and pursed lips wistfulness concentration painting mystery daily task, What is she thinking?' Dutch domestic virtue male desire security of the home, empathy and dignity amorous symbols jugs erotic element, gestures understated working daydreaming about what? amorous symbols wide-mouthed jug whitewashed wall milk cool kitchen cooking dairy products butter bread pudding careful pouring trickle milk careful cooking everyday scene humble common ingredients stale bread pleasure measured demeanour modest dress preparing food honest hard work drudgery of housework servitude virtuous monumentality low vantage point pyramidal building forms diagonal lines. wrist tactile illusionism optical light-filled balance treatment of light sculptural figure tangible objects luminous interior pattern of bright dots bread basket scintillating daylight rough textures humble workroom cold kitchen bare walls.tactile visceral taste thick creamy milk escaping the jug cool dampness room starchy linen white cap shoulders corseted waist real brilliant colour scheme natural ultramarine crushed lapis lazuli lead-tin-yellow luminous white walls reflect the daylight uneven textures plastered surfaces white lead umber charcoal black coarse features dabs of impasto.plaited handles pointillé dots thin swirls paint dabs of ochre yellow small roll thick dots knobbly seeds diffuse stains shadows nail hole seams fastenings woman's dress gleaming polished brass container crack reflected window scratch pane frame woman's bulky green oversleeves Broad strokes coarse work clothing blue cuff brilliant blue yellow bodice painted then seen now masterpiece priceless museum art reproduction screen pixels stillness



I've cut all the words I don't want until I have three lines.

Pouring milk a young woman light falls  
blue dress  
bread crusts thick waist downcast eyes  
painting mystery daily task, What is she thinking?'  
wide-mouthed jug whitewashed wall

I stop here, I don't need any more, I'll work with these  
and ignore these all the others, unless I want them later.

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