

Haiku Cut!

Reading and Writing Haiku Poetry Workshop and Kukai

MOST VALUABLE PROGRAM 2008 RUNNER UP

WHAT: A haiku and *haiga* (haiku paired with art, in this case, original student photography) competition. It comprised two afternoon haiku workshops followed by a haiku and *haiga* competition.

WHERE: Centennial High School Library, Champaign, Illinois.

WHO: 35 students, grades 9 through 12; haiku master.

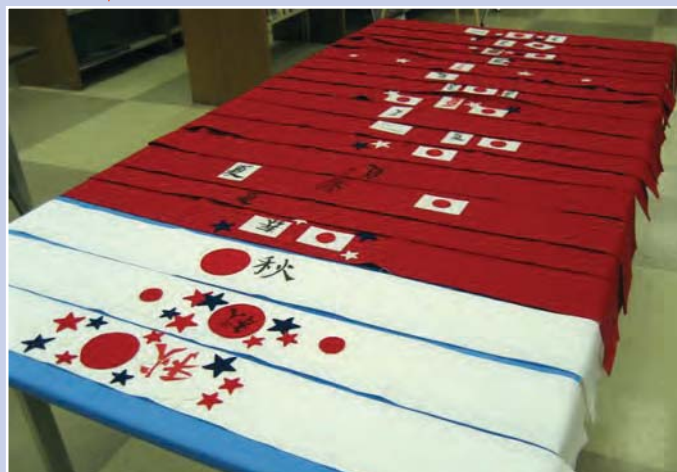
WHEN: April 2007, during school hours.

WHAT HAPPENED

Having sponsored several poetry workshops, including school-wide poetry slams during National Poetry Month, school library director Cynthia Helms decided to do something different. After a trip to Japan, Helms wanted to bring some aspects of Japanese culture to Centennial High School. She secured local grant funds and worked with some support from her city's public library in order to bring a professor and haiku master, Dr. Randy Brooks from Millikin University, to her students. They created a series of haiku workshops, where students learned about this art form. One week later, they held a friendly competition, a *kukai*, where student haiku were paired and then discussed side by side. At each level of the competition, one student's work was declared the winner of the round, culminating in a grand haiku champion. The haiku pairings were judged by the students and haiku master.

In addition, the students created *haiga* (haiku combined with art or photography). The original photography was produced by the school's advanced photography students, who also wrote the accompanying haiku. Again the *haiga* were judged by the students and the haiku master. The haiku and *haiga*, both the runners up and winners, are posted online at <http://www.millikin.edu/haiku/competitions/CentennialHighSchool>.

HEADBANDS
DECORATED WITH
KANJI CHARACTERS
AWAIT TEAM MEMBERS.



DR. RANDY BROOKS FIRES UP THE COMPETITORS WITH HIS ANIMATED EXPLANATION OF HAIKU.

Students divided into three teams and constructed team headbands. Each team selected a *kanji* character of one of the seasons to represent their team.

Participants were given a Haiku Cut! T-shirt, a haiku journal, and a copy of *Mayfly*, a haiku magazine. During the *kukai*, each student composed a haiku for the haiku signature book. Winners of the *kukai* were presented with haiku books.

INSPIRATION

Helms went on a study tour to Japan as a Japan Memorial Fund recipient and wanted to share what she had learned about Japanese culture and traditions with her students.

She chose the creation of Japanese haiku for her program, with its principles of minimalism and immediacy. In Japanese, haiku are written in one line, with "cutting" words to direct the flow of the poem, acting much like verbal punctuation. Traditional haiku contain a seasonal word or activity to fix the setting. Modern haiku in other languages are slightly less structured, but still contain seventeen syllables or less.

WHO HELPED

Through the Japanese Consulate in Chicago, Illinois, and the editor of *Modern Haiku*, "an independent journal of haiku and haiku study," Helms found Dr. Randy Brooks, haiku master, instructor, and editor and publisher of *Mayfly* magazine at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. The two worked together to create the syllabus and the schedule for the workshops and haiku competition. Helms

CHAMPIONS CARRY ON JAPANESE TRADITIONS OF RESPECT AS THEY CONGRATULATE EACH OTHERS' SUCCESS.



teamed up with her school's Creative Writing and Advanced Photography teachers in order to bring these students into the program.

PAYOFF

Students were actively engaged throughout the multipart program. They were participants and judges and were able to use their increased knowledge of haiku in order to run the competition. In addition, the series fostered collaboration between creative writing and photography teachers, with the students getting an opportunity to see their art in new lights. Equally significant, it created ties between the school librarian and the community—the public library, Millikin University, and local grant sources. Ultimately it led to greater awareness of Japanese culture and both the Japanese and American traditions of haiku.

HOW TO DO IT

Planning and Preparing

Helms found the funding—in this instance through local grant money from The Tepper Electric Arts Endowment (Champaign, Illinois) and a donation from the Champaign Public Library—and then located an expert. The two worked out the scheduling and created the workshops. Helms worked with the Advanced Photography and Creative Writing teachers to reach out to those students who might be interested in the Haiku Cut! event. Helms suggests that other schools can also seek funding from parent/teacher organizations; district school, public library, and state library grants; and other community organizations.

The planning, including research, took a year leading up to the event. Helms worked out the T-shirt design with the vendor, purchased and cut the fabric for the headbands, and provided class instruction on the meaning and making of the headbands. *Mayfly* haiku journals and other haiku books used as prizes were ordered and purchased from Brooks Books, Dr. Brooks's haiku publishing company. The overall budget of approximately \$1,450 can be broken down into \$750 for the guest speaker, \$300 for book prizes, \$250 for T-shirts, and \$150 for miscellaneous supplies.

Publicize

Because this program took place during the day at school, the event was open to ninth through twelfth graders enrolled at Centennial High School. Publicity occurred within the school in the student-run school newspaper, daily announcements, and flyers and posters;

TEAM MEMBERS WORK TO CREATE THE QUINTESSENTIAL HAIKU FOR THE KUKAI, OR FRIENDLY COMPETITION.

however, on the day of the *kukai*—the friendly competition—the local community newspaper was contacted, and news about the program was published there.



BLOOPERS AND DO OVERS

Helms recommends more time for students to read, write, and discuss haiku as an art form with an expert, providing students a greater opportunity to explore an unfamiliar literary tradition. Most students assume that haiku are merely a 5-7-5 syllable poem. In reality, it is the least significant and most misunderstood aspect of haiku. Modern haiku are freer flowing, with less structure.

▲
HAIKU CUT!
PARTICIPANTS ARE
EAGER TO PRESENT
THEIR WORK AND
MOVE UP THE
COMPETITION LADDER

WHAT THE TEENS THOUGHT

- "I learned much about the true nature of haiku in Japanese culture."
- "I started to understand time and seasons are very important to haiku, being a form of both art and culture. People like to feel the words and the sounds of the haiku."
- "I learned [about the] . . . impact of Japanese art."
- "One sentence can be broken up into three lines and still make you feel something."
- "The writing is very deep and needs to be thought through."
- "I never wrote haiku before this workshop, and I really liked it; now I can write haiku on my own."
- "I got to learn some of the [kanji] symbols."
- "The form of haiku isn't most important. It's the content."
- "I thought a haiku was just a sentence with 3-5-3 or 5-7-5 syllables, but now I realize it goes deeper than that and has a lot of meaning."
- "They (Japanese) think deeply into things."
- "I didn't know they had haiku cuts or that they had a ritual."
- "I learned a lot about their customs when it comes to haiku."

DR. BROOKS AND THE TEAM MEMBERS FROM THE ADVANCED PHOTOGRAPHY TEAM CELEBRATE THEIR SUCCESS.

Compiled by Sarah Couri with Cynthia Helms. ■

