

## CHILDREN'S HAIKU BOOKS: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

*by Brad Bennett*

Years ago, when I was dabbling in free verse poetry, I participated in the “Favorite Poem Project: The Summer Poetry Institute,” a collaboration between Boston University’s School of Education and former Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky’s “Favorite Poem Project.” I thoroughly enjoyed myself and learned a lot about teaching poetry to older kids, but I remember leaving the institute thinking that we really needed to start earlier. While elementary teachers like myself were invited, the presentations and readings were geared toward the high school end of the K–12 continuum. My feeling at the time, and one I still hold, is that if we want kids to love poetry, we need to start teaching poetry early and we need to teach it well. We want to help kids develop a love of poetry first, before they begin to analyze poems in middle and high school. Asking a child who hates poetry to analyze a poem only serves to justify their odium.

This holds true for haiku as well. I wager that many of us became hooked on haiku as adults. Think where we’d be if we all boarded the haiku train early on in elementary school and stayed on for a long and continuous ride. Perhaps one of our goals then, as promoters of haiku, should be to try to get children excited about haiku early and often. One way to inspire kids about haiku is to teach them about the form that most English-language haiku poets are currently using. And one important part of this endeavor is to share these quality haiku with kids. Many of the haiku being published in adult haiku magazines and journals today are accessible and appropriate for children; I frequently use examples of these wonderful haiku when I teach my third and fourth graders. But what about haiku books that are published specifically for kids? Who is writing them? What kind of haiku do they contain? Do they reflect the trend in contemporary adult English-language haiku away from strict syllable counts? Do they contain other elements of haiku, such as the “haiku moment”?

Over my twenty years of teaching third and fourth graders, I have collected over thirty children's haiku books. I've tried to obtain all of the quality children's haiku books I could find. I've used most of these texts with my students for instruction during class lessons, workshop activities, and poetry club sessions. Others I have kept on my classroom shelves for kids to peruse if they so desire. Most of them are picture books, but there are several manuals as well. The following bibliography is by no means complete—I've merely included books in my personal library and a few I've found in local libraries. However, I think it includes most of the haiku books that have been published for kids.

Obviously there is a difference between the preferences of adults and children when it comes to books. Many of the picture books in this list are very attractive and kids enjoy them. Some of these books are themed (e.g. dog haiku, guy haiku, food haiku), a very popular strategy for children's poetry books. It seems that librarians and teachers are more likely to use a book of poems if it dovetails with the curriculum in some way. Unfortunately, many of the haiku these books contain would not be considered of high quality by most knowledgeable adult English-language haiku enthusiasts. Many of them are examples of punctuated prose arranged to fit the well-known 5-7-5 syllable structure. Some of them even contain mid-line punctuation. Many of these books are filled with "pseudohaiku" that ignore most, if not all, of the elements of current English-language haiku parlance. I think our challenge, if we choose to accept it, is to produce more books that are attractive to kids (well-illustrated and with high thematic interest) that also contain quality haiku. I haven't come across many children's books that fit both these major criteria. We need more children's book manuscripts written by current English-language haiku poets placed on editors' desks. We need more haiku poets teaching haiku well in the classroom. We need more haiku poets offering workshops and classes for kids at schools and community education organizations and workshops for elementary and middle school teachers. Then, hopefully, our beloved haiku will continue to be refreshed and replenished by young writers.

While examining these books, I found that they naturally grouped themselves into some helpful categories based on their authors or

anthologists (e.g. adult haiku poets or children's book writers), their internal organization (e.g. by season or in the service of a narrative), and their functions (e.g. manual or biography). I thought it would be helpful to keep that categorical structure, but also add a rating system based on my analyses. Thus, I have assigned three stars to books that are highly recommended, two stars to books that are recommended, and one star to books that have some limited value. The books in each category are listed by ranking then alphabetically by author.

If we want to see our haiku garden blossom with future generations, we need to do what we can to promote it to our children, our grandchildren, our nieces and nephews, our friends' kids, and our students. A passion for haiku often starts with one book—I know mine did. Perhaps you have a particular child in mind and want to buy him or her a haiku book. Hopefully this list will help you choose one that meets your needs. Perhaps you teach young children and this list will help you construct a haiku lesson or unit. Unfortunately (and sometimes fortunately) most of these books are out of print. But used copies can still often be found on the internet, which is how I've bought many of the books on the list. And we can continue to dream that greater interest in haiku will spur new editions of the better ones.

#### CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY ENGLISH-LANGUAGE HAIKU POETS

★★★ *Shadow Play: Night Haiku*, by Penny Harter. Illustrated by Jeffrey Greene (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

Like many poetry picture books, this one is devoted to a particular theme: nighttime. *mountain thunder / lightning / between the stars*. The thirty-nine haiku in this book, written by a well-respected haiku poet, present lovely haiku moments that do not follow the 5-7-5 structure. The poems are from four of Harter's books published between 1980 and 1994. The illustrations are intriguing pastels that accompany groups of three haiku on the facing page. This is a great example of a book of high-quality contemporary English-language haiku that is themed for teacher and student use.

★★★ *Spring Rain Winter Snow*, by Edward J. Rielly. Illustrated by Angelina Buonaiuto (Brunswick, Maine: Shanti Arts Publishing, 2014).

This book is a model example of the kind of work we need to promote quality contemporary English-language haiku to children. Rielly, a well-known, veteran haiku poet from Maine, has included twenty-nine strong haiku organized by season. There are one to three on each page, written in curved lines on beautiful illustrations that look like cut paper collages. Though the illustrations contain seasonal images, they are not specific depictions of the text, and act more like haiga. Each haiku is written in one curved line with asterisks to mark the line breaks in a very effective way: *spring melt... \* a baseball rises beneath \* the forsythia*. Rielly does a great job portraying haiku moments and this book is very useful to classroom teachers. Hopefully, we'll see more books like this in the future!

★★☆ *Bug Haiku: Original Poems in English*, by J.W. Hackett. Illustrated by Earl Thollander (Tokyo: Japan Publications, 1968).

This book, written by one of the founders of English-language haiku, includes over one hundred haiku organized into sections called "In the Garden," "At the Beach," and "Fields and Mountains." The poems' subjects are certainly themes that resonate with children: bugs, garter snakes, hummingbirds, kittens, etc. *Moon fades into dawn... / an ivory moth settles / within the lily*. Hackett is a master of the moment, but his strict 5-7-5 poems sometimes sound like prose and may seem outdated to youngsters who have been taught a more contemporary haiku. At the end of the book, Hackett includes "Suggestions for Writing Haiku" that describe helpful hints for the young writer.

★★☆ *Haiku*, by Kala Ramesh. Illustrated by Surabhi Singh (India: KATHA, 2010).

This brightly colored "book" actually consists of one large piece of card stock folded into a pleated square; kids must surely enjoy unfolding it and finding all the poems. Ramesh includes seventeen haiku, mostly three-liners with just two monoku. The haiku are moment-strong and

should appeal to children around the world, even though the blurb describes them as “distinctly Indian.” *kite contest / the rise and fall / of obs and abs*. The illustrations are brightly colored and whimsical. The book is accompanied by a small sixteen-page “Activity Book for Young Haiku Lovers” called *My Haiku Moments*. It’s designed to inspire kids to pick up a pen and write some haiku of their own.

#### COLLECTIONS OF JAPANESE MASTERS’ HAIKU FOR CHILDREN

★★★ *In a Spring Garden*, ed. by Richard Lewis. Illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats (New York: Dial Press, 1965).

This is a lovely book published fifty years ago that probably launched some North American haijin careers. Lewis chooses twenty-three haiku by ten different Japanese masters (all male) and two anonymous poets. Ten are by Issa, including poems about a grasshopper, a puppy, and a fire-fly. The translations come mainly from Blyth and Henderson with a few other sources and don’t adhere to the 5-7-5 model. The bold illustrations are by the famous and talented children’s book illustrator Ezra Jack Keats and are simple and specific (e.g. a painting of a snail next to a snail poem). Here’s one by Buson: *A flash of lightning! / The sound of dew / Dripping down the bamboos*.

★★★ *Spring: A Haiku Story*, ed. by George Shannon. Illustrated by Malcah Zeldis (New York: Greenwillow Books, 1996).

Children’s book author Shannon selects fourteen haiku by Issa, Basho, Shiki, Chiyo, and other Japanese poets to accompany beautiful folk art paintings by Zeldis. In the foreword, Shannon mentions that English translations of Japanese poems are shorter. He also describes the “Ah!” moment to which haiku aspire. The poems have been arranged “to suggest the story of an early spring walk that is filled with ‘Ahs!’” The illustrations are set in modern times and they (and many of the poems) include animals—a choice that appeals to young readers. The translations vary in quality, though six of them are by Blyth.



★★☆ *In the Eyes of the Cat: Japanese Poetry for All Seasons*, ed. by Demi. Translated by Tze-si Huang (New York: Henry Holt, 1992).

The poems in this small book were selected and illustrated by Demi, an award-winning author of over 300 children's books. These haiku and short poems include some classics from Basho, Buson, Issa, and Shiki, as well as other Japanese masters pre- and post- Basho. None of them are by women poets. The translations vary from two to four lines and some of them rhyme. The poems are organized by season and all the poems are animal themed with delightful illustrations that would appeal to children. Interestingly, one of the poems is labeled "Poet unknown," although I found it in James Hackett's book: *This garter snake / goes in and out of the grass / all at the same time!*

★★☆ *A Few Flies and I: Haiku by Issa*, ed. by Jean Merrill and Ronni Solbert from translations by R.H. Blyth and Nobuyuki Yuasa. Illustrated by Ronni Solbert (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

The book starts with an epigraph by Henry David Thoreau about the importance of reverence for animals, and sure enough, this volume is full of Issa's haiku about creatures: *A few flies / And I / Keep house together / In this humble home*. There are a hundred haiku that will appeal to kids mostly because of their portrayal of small creatures like flies, frogs, crickets, and the like. The poems translated by Yuasa are all four-line translations, so that may throw some kids off if they're used to three lines. The simple and small illustrations look like they were done with pen and ink.

★☆☆ *Cricket Songs*, trans. by Harry Behn. Illustrated with pictures by Japanese masters (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964).

★☆☆ *More Cricket Songs*, trans. by Harry Behn. Illustrated with pictures by Japanese masters (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

These two books of English translations of Japanese haiku masters were some of the earliest to be published for children. According to Charles Trumbull<sup>2</sup>, Behn studied Japanese literature and culture to create these poetic versions, although we don't know who translated them originally

(Behn didn't know Japanese). The translations are 5-7-5, as were many during the 1960s and 1970s, and he includes male and female poets. Here's one by Chiyo included in *More Cricket Songs: Above the meadow / a skylark, singing, flies high, / high into silence*.

★☆☆ *Birds, Frogs, and Moonlight*, trans. by Sylvia Cassedy and Kunihiro Suetake. Illustrated by Vo-Dinh with calligraphy by Koson Okamura (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

This early picture book collection of twenty-one haiku by Basho, Issa, and other Japanese masters adheres to English translations of 5-7-5. Hence, they are quite wordy: *Old pond, blackly still— / frog, plunging into water, / splinters silent air*. The English versions are accompanied by both the romaji and brush stroked Japanese characters. The illustrations are sketchy ink drawings.

## MANUALS

★★★ *Haiku: Asian Arts & Crafts for Creative Kids*, by Patricia Donegan (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 2003).

This is the definitive manual on haiku for kids written by a well-respected haiku poet. It's part of a series on Japanese culture that includes books on origami, ikebana, Asian kites, and the tea ceremony. Donegan does a marvelous job of explaining the essentials of haiku in sections entitled "Entering the Haiku World" and "The Seven Keys to Writing Haiku." This last section includes form, image, kigo, "here and now," feeling, surprise, and compassion. I have taught lessons to kids using several of these sections and have found them very helpful and accessible. As examples, she includes haiku by historical Japanese masters, contemporary North American haiku poets, and children from around the world. I've used this book as a springboard to teach haiku lessons, but when I've showed it to my third and fourth graders, they weren't as interested in perusing it on their own. Although the jacket blurb claims that this book is designed for ages seven to twelve, I think older kids in that age range would be

more likely to pick this book up independently. The haiku in the book are well-chosen, wonderful representatives of English language haiku that don't follow the 5-7-5 structure.

★★★ *How to Write Haiku and Other Short Poems*, by Paul Janeczko (New York: Scholastic, 2004).

This book is a manual, not a picture book. Janeczko is a pillar in the children's poetry genre, having published almost fifty books in the field. He is a poet himself and a very accomplished anthologist. This book is like a children's version of classic manuals written in the field by Gurga, Higginson, Reichhold, and Ross. Kids from ages ten to fourteen might be interested in this book if they brought a passion for haiku to the reading. Janeczko includes 5-7-5 as one of the key elements of haiku, but many of the haiku he chooses as examples (by Penny Harter, George Swede, and others) do not follow this strict structure. This book includes discussions of other Japanese short form poems and how to share haiku with others in various ways.

★★☆ *Haiku*, by Valerie Bodden (Mankato, Minn.: Creative Education, 2010).

This kids' introduction to haiku was written by a children's author as part of a series of books about different poetic forms. Bodden has written other titles in the series on concrete poetry, limericks, and nursery rhymes. She includes a history and description of haiku and even mentions linked forms. Her description is accurate—she did her research—but the writing is pretty dry for kids. However, the last section called "Think Like a Poet" encourages young writers to start with 5-7-5 and then pare the poem down.

★★☆ *Haiku: one breath poetry*, by Naomi Wakan (Torrance, Calif.: Heian International, 1993).

This book received the Canadian Children's Book Centre Choice Award. Wakan seems to have attempted to write a manual that appeals to all audiences, from elementary school kids to adults. But I'm not sure a child



would pick this up on his or her own—so this book would need to be taught by a parent or teacher. Wakan’s example haiku contain seventeen syllables and were written by Japanese masters and by children for a Japan Air Lines student competition. She describes steps kids can use to begin to write haiku: looking out the window, writing about what you see, and deleting all the “words that don’t add to the picture.” She includes sections that are more kid-friendly called “What? Where? and When?,” “Becoming the Object,” and “Haiku and the Senses.” There are other sections that focus on kireji, seasonal words, “special ideas” like wabi and aware, and women and haiku. She also includes a history of haiku.

★☆☆ *Henry and Hala Build a Haiku*, by Nadia Higgins. Illustrated by Brian Caleb Dumm (Chicago: Norwood House Press, 2011).

As far as I know, Higgins hasn’t written any haiku herself. She is a children’s book author and editor and has written a variety of fiction and nonfiction titles, many about scientific topics. This book explains some elements of haiku via a story, but it doesn’t live up to its potential. Although this is one of the more recently published books in this list, the poems are 5-7-5 and seem either too crowded or explicitly metaphoric.

#### CHILDREN’S POEM ANTHOLOGIES THAT INCLUDE HAIKU

★★★ *Firefly July: A Year of Very Short Poems*, ed. by Paul B. Janeczko. Illustrated by Melissa Sweet (Somerville, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2014).

This is a beautiful collection of short poems by a variety of writers. Most of the poems in this book are not technically haiku, but many are haiku-like. There are a few haiku by Cid Corman (*Daybreak reminds us— / the hills have arrived just in / time to celebrate*), Alice Schertle, April Halprin Wayland, and Richard Wright (*A wild winter wind / Is tearing itself to shreds / On barbed-wire fences.*). Some of the other short poems in the book might be classified as haiku but for an explicit simile or metaphor. Some of the poems by American poets William Carlos Williams and Carl Sandburg could be considered “imagist.” The illustrations are marvelous—it’s a lovely book.

★★☆ *One Big Rain: Poems for a Rainy Day*, ed. by Rita Gray. Illustrated by Ryan O'Rourke (Watertown, Mass.: Charlesbridge, 2010).

Gray has compiled an anthology of twenty poems about rain, organized by season. She has included eight haiku by Kyotai, Kyoshi, Shisei-jo, Sora, Rogetsu, Issa, Soda, and Buson. In the introduction, she adds a little note "About Haiku Translations" that she adapted from William J. Higginson's *Wind in the Long Grass* (see below). All the haiku in the book were translated by Higginson and Patricia Donegan.

### CHILDREN'S HAIKU ANTHOLOGIES

★★★ *Wind in the Long Grass: A Collection of Haiku*, ed. by William J. Higginson. Illustrated by Sandra Speidel (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991).

This is an anthology of haiku selected by a North American haiku guru. The poems were written by poets from around the world (17 countries and 6 continents) and they are organized according to the seasons. These poems have a variety of syllable counts and styles. There are some very interesting haiku in this collection, like this one by Pablo Mora of Mexico: *On the branch of a tree / a bird / weighs itself*. The illustrations look like pastel drawings and complement the haiku nicely.

★★★ *Stone Bench in an Empty Park*, ed. by Paul B. Janeczko. Photographs by Henri Silberman (New York: Orchard Books, 2000).

In his introduction, Janeczko states, "The writers of those haiku realize it is important to fulfill the spirit of the haiku rather than being slaves to syllable count and form." So the haiku in this book don't always follow the 5-7-5 maxim. The focus of this book is city haiku. The photos are in black and white and the subjects all seem to harken to earlier times: a bridge toll booth, a news stand, and baseball in the street. In this collection, you will find poems by stalwarts in the field of English-language haiku, including Margaret Chula (*sudden shower / in the empty park /*

*a swing still swinging*), Penny Harter, Alan Pizzarelli, and Cor van den Heuvel. He also includes some of the haiku masters like Buson, Issa, and Shiki. And other haiku are by pillars in the children's poetry genre, like Virginia Brady Young, Nicki Grimes, Paul Janeczko, Bobbi Katz, J. Patrick Lewis, Myra Cohn Livingston, and Jane Yolen. This is a fine collection and the haiku are top notch.

#### HAIKU COLLECTIONS BY CHILDREN'S POETS

★★★ *Black Swan White Crow*, by J. Patrick Lewis. Illustrated by Chris Manson (New York: Atheneum, 1995).

J. Patrick Lewis alerts the reader that haiku writers today write shorter poems in English and do not always include season words. The thirteen haiku in the book range from twelve to seventeen syllables. The quality is not quite up to the par of one of our contemporary haiku magazines and journals, but some of them portray strong haiku moments: *The meadow reddens— / my old black lab fills / the sky with quail*. One of the highlights of this book is the beautiful woodcut prints by Manson, each simply but powerfully executed in two or three colors only.

★★☆ *Don't Step on the Sky: A Handful of Haiku*, by Miriam Chaikin. Illustrated by Hiroe Nakata (New York: Henry Holt, 2002).

This collection of poems "in the haiku tradition" is written by a seasoned children's author of over thirty titles. In introducing the poems in this book, Chaikin mentions that, "In modern times, rules for writing haiku have become more flexible." The twenty-nine poems range from haiku to small, punctuated prose poems. Chaikin includes many lovely haiku moments, but few are expressed in pure haiku. *After the rain / a puddle. / Careful. / Don't step on the sky*. The watercolor illustrations are fun and vibrant.

★★☆ *Wing Nuts: Screwy Haiku*, by Paul B. Janeczko and J. Patrick Lewis. Illustrated by Tricia Tusa (New York: Little, Brown, 2006).

This is one of only two books in this list purposely and entirely composed of senryu, what the authors call “...the kissin’ cousins of haiku.” Most of these twenty-three poems are built on puns, but there are a few quality senryu. *Irksome mosquito, / kindly sing your evening song / in my brother’s ear* and *Traveling circus— / the knife thrower / hiccups*. A few of these poems suffer from “Tontoism” and could use an article here and there.

★★☆ *Cricket Never Does: A Collection of Haiku and Tanka*, by Myra Cohn Livingston. Illustrated by Kees de Kieffe (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1997).

Livingston is one of the pillars in the field of children’s poetry. She obviously did some research on the history of haiku: the poems are divided into seasonal sections. The haiku are all 5-7-5 however, and while many are beautifully written, they often sound like sentences that are twisted to fit the syllable structure. *How angry you are / today, Ocean, as your waves / knock me off my feet!* Some are reminiscent of Issa’s haiku that address animals or things in nature; she talks to seagulls and the ocean. Livingston captures some wonderful haiku moments, but she also slides into telling rather than showing.

★★☆ *One Leaf Rides the Wind: Counting in a Japanese Garden*, by Celeste Davidson Mannis (New York: Viking, 2002).

This is an award-winning counting book using haiku set in a Japanese garden. In the notes, Davidson explains that the 5-7-5 convention is “no longer strictly followed,” but hers all adhere to this structure. The illustrations are lovely and the haiku are accompanied by little snippets of factual information about the haiku’s theme and parts of Japanese culture. For instance, we learn about shih tzu dogs, bonsai, Shintoism, pagodas, koi, lanterns, and the tea ceremony. The haiku are wordy and sentence-like, but this is a lovely introduction to Japanese gardens and counting!

★★☆ *Flower Moon Snow: A Book of Haiku*, by Kazue Mizumura (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977).

Mizumura, a Japanese-born American author and artist, included thirty haiku in three sections indicated by the title and illustrated with her own simple three-color woodcut prints. In “A Note about Haiku” she mentions that haiku “depends a great deal on suggestion to convey its message.” She also states that haiku have seventeen syllables, but that “some variation is possible.” And she does vary her lines, sometimes using less than seventeen syllables and a variety of line lengths. Her poems include questions, exclamations, and personification; and a few address the moon and a bird, reminiscent of Issa. She punctuates and enjambes sentences. My favorite? *The party is over. / The moon in the swimming pool / Is all alone.*

★★☆ *Hi, Koo! A Year of Seasons*, by Jon J. Muth (New York: Scholastic press, 2014).

Muth comes to haiku from a Zen perspective, having written other titles like *Zen Shorts*, *Zen Ties*, and *Zen Ghosts*. This book stars a panda named Koo who presents one haiku per page arranged by season. In the “Author’s Note,” Muth clearly explains the evolution of English-language haiku from “the five-seven-five syllable pattern that many of us grew up learning haiku must be” to its less rigid current incarnation. Some of his haiku are mere sentences in three lines and some use personification. But others resonate wonderfully, like *flashlights / sparkle in puddles / shadows climbing trees*. He includes twenty-six haiku, each including one letter of the alphabet. Kids love pandas, kids love Muth’s illustrations, so therefore kids also love this book. At least my students do.

★★☆ *If Not for the Cat*, by Jack Prelutsky. Illustrated by Ted Rand (New York: Greenwillow Books, 2004).

Prelutsky is a famous children’s poet who has published over seventy books and is best known for his humorous offerings. He was designated the first U.S. Children’s Poet Laureate in 2006 by the Poetry

Foundation. Prelutsky sticks with 5-7-5 and the poems often consist of sentence-like content, but kids love these poems. I like to read these animal riddle poems aloud and my students love to guess what they are. One of their favorites is about a sloth: *I am slow I am. / Slowest of the slow I am. / In my tree I am.*

★☆☆ *If it Rains Pancakes: Haiku and Lantern Poems*, by Brian P. Cleary. Illustrated by Andy Rowland (Minneapolis, Minn.: Millbrook Press, 2014).

This book is split in half with one page explanations and examples of each of these two poetry forms. Cleary sticks to the 5-7-5 structure, even though this book was published in 2014. The “haiku” are titled and punctuated and often seem like restructured jokes: *When you’ve written one / without enough syllables, / you add words. Football.* Lantern poems consist of five centered lines with syllables of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 1. The first line is a noun and the rest describe it. Cleary claims that a lantern poem is a “Japanese form of poetry,” although I could not find the origin of this form. I suspect that someone created this form, thought it was shaped like a Japanese lantern, and dubbed it as such.

★☆☆ *The Year Comes Round: Haiku through the Seasons*, by Sid Farrar. Illustrated by Ilse Plume (Chicago: Albert Whitman, 2012).

This book includes twelve poems, one for each month of the Gregorian calendar, and one extra about the Earth orbiting the sun. The poems include frequent personification and some seasonal clichés. *Apples loll beneath / emptying branches, dreaming / cider and hot pie.* Farrar includes a description of haiku that sticks to the traditional 5-7-5 structure.

★☆☆ *A Pocketful of Poems*, by Nikki Grimes. Illustrated by Javaka Steptoe (New York: Clarion Books, 2001).

This book, by an award-winning children’s book author, stars a city girl named Tiana who plays with words. Each word she pulls out of her pocket inspires paired poems, a free verse and a haiku. The haiku are often



enjambéd complete sentences (sometimes three of them) of seventeen syllables. *April showers scrub / the air. No wonder I can / run now. I can breathe!* In her “Author’s Note” Grimes states that “The style of haiku depends on the personality of the poet. And, while this form of poetry originated in Japan, haiku is as exportable, and as open to universal interpretation, as the American art form, jazz.”

★☆☆ *Yum! !MmMm! !Que rico! America’s Sproutings*, by Pat Mora. Pictures by Rafael Lopez (New York: Lee & Low, 2007).

Mora is an award-winning Mexican-American adult and children’s poet. This beautifully illustrated book (also published in Spanish) contains descriptions and haiku about foods native to the Americas (e.g. blueberries, chile peppers, and potatoes). It seems that Mora did her research on foods of the Americas but not on the current practice of haiku construction. The haiku read like prose, complete with punctuation. *Underground magic. / Peel brown bundle, mash, pile high. / Salt and pepper clouds.*

★☆☆ *Guyku: A Year of Haiku for Boys*, by Bob Raczka. Illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2010).

Raczka includes twenty-four complete sentence enjambéd 5-7-5 haiku organized by the four seasons. The poems themselves are about solid haiku moments, and could easily be pared down into simpler haiku. For instance, his *From underneath the / leaf pile, my invisible / brother is giggling.* could be pruned to *underneath / the leaf pile / giggling.* I was initially turned off by the title and delayed buying a copy—I shy away from books I think might perpetuate gender stereotypes. But the author argues that haiku are perfect for boys, because boys like nature, and that they’re written in the present tense because “guys are always interested in what’s happening now.” Somewhat stereotypical, sure, but the poems are about being outside, and not about sports, video games, or superheroes. And the illustrator’s mission is to “help people defy stereotypes—to think creatively and bravely.” He’s hoping this book inspires boys to start writing haiku.

★☆☆ *The Cuckoo's Haiku and Other Birding Poems*, by Michael J. Rosen. Illustrated by Stan Fellows (Somerville, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2009).

Rosen claims, in the blurb on the book jacket, that “haiku and bird watching are kindred arts: the subject of both is often a fleeting impression—a snatched glimpse.” While I think he’s trying to point to the phenomena of haiku moments, I think this is a bit of a stretch—everything we observe can be noted by a “snatched glimpse.” The poems are all 5-7-5 and utilize explicit metaphor and similes. *first feeders at dawn / paired like red quotation marks / last feeders at dusk*. This book looks lovely and the poems are part of what the book jacket states is an “artfully compiled field notebook” with notes about the bird illustrations done with pencil and watercolor.

★☆☆ *The Hound Dog's Haiku: and Other Poems for Dog Lovers*, by Michael J. Rosen. Illustrated by Mary Azarian (Somerville, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2011).

Rosen has written another book of haiku about an animal. This book includes twenty poems about different breeds of dogs. He starts with nice haiku moments, but often packs too much into each poem. He includes explicit metaphors and similes in his 5-7-5 structure. Some of his poems include abstract lines (e.g. *joy is no phantom*) and some vocabulary that might be tough for little kids (e.g. *staccato* and *hieroglyph*). The book is beautifully illustrated with woodcut prints.

#### STORIES TOLD IN HAIKU

★★★ *Today and Today*, ed. and illustrated by G. Brian Karas (New York: Scholastic Press, 2007).

Karas chooses sixteen Issa haiku, almost all of them translated by Sam Hamill and Robert Hass, to cleverly create a story about a family with a mother, father, son, daughter, and grandfather. The book takes place

during the course of four seasons of one year. This is a daunting task, to create a narrative using someone else's haiku, but Karas totally succeeds! The story is bittersweet and shown, not told, through the poems and the illustrations. This book is very haiga-like.

★★☆ *Wabi Sabi*, by Mark Reibstein. Illustrated by Ed Young (New York: Little, Brown, 2008).

This is an intriguing story told in prose and haiku about a cat named Wabi Sabi. The book does a lovely job of articulating the concept of wabi sabi with the story, haiku, and cut paper illustrations by a well-known children's book illustrator. Unfortunately, the haiku by Reibstein are in the 5-7-5 form and are not haiku moments but rather help to carry the story along: *A wise old monkey / living among the pine trees / knows wabi sabi*. Ironically, there are some wonderful haiku by Basho and Shiki in Japanese and translated by haiku scholar and author Nanae Tamura that "appear decoratively throughout" the pages. But the reader has to turn to the back of the book to get the English translations. These haiku actually accompany the text in a haibun-like way.

★☆☆ *Dogku*, by Andrew Clements. Illustrated by Tim Bowers (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

Andrew Clements is an award-winning children's book writer of over sixty titles. He mostly writes realistic fiction, and this book tells a narrative too. He uses haiku to tell the story of a stray dog that gets adopted by a family. What he calls haiku stick to the 5-7-5 structure, but are not really haiku—they are little prose poems. He uses capitalization, punctuation, and many of his poems are merely three sentences. *The house is quiet. No kids, no mom, and no food. What's a dog to do?* Kids love dog stories, and they love this book for that reason, but these poems do not really possess the soul of haiku.

★☆☆ *Won Ton: A Cat Tale Told in Haiku*, by Lee Wardlaw (New York: Henry Holt, 2011).

The story of a shelter cat adopted by a boy and his family. The author explains that these are senryu about the foibles of “cat nature.” However, most of them are conglomerations of very short sentences, including punctuation. *No rush. I’ve got plans. / Gnaw this paw. Nip that flea. And / wish: Please, Boy, Pick me.* And the name of the cat is borrowed from Chinese cuisine, not Japanese.

#### STORIES STARRING BASHO

★★★ *Basho and the Fox*, by Tim Myers. Illustrated by Oki S. Han (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2000).

★★☆ *Basho and the River Stones*, by Tim Myers. Illustrated by Oki S. Han (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2004).

Myers created two folk tales that star Basho. In the first one, Basho is challenged by a fox to create “one good haiku” in order to claim the delicious fruit from his favorite wild cherry. The winning haiku? *Summer moon over / mountains is white as the tip / of a fox’s tail.* In the second, Basho is tricked by a different fox into giving up his cherries, but his generosity humbles the fox into ultimately sharing the cherries. In both books, Basho is portrayed as humble, generous, and honorable and Han’s watercolor illustrations enhance the stories tremendously. The first story is more delightful and fun.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL HAIKU BOOKS

★★★ *Cool Melons—Turn to Frogs! The Life and Poems of Issa*, by Mathew Gollub. Illustrated by Kazuko G. Stone, Calligraphy by Keiko Smith (New York: Lee and Low Books, 1998).

This is a biography of Issa that incorporates some of his haiku. The author and illustrator did a great job of picking haiku that would appeal to young readers; many of the haiku have animal themes. The title comes

from *Cool melons— / turn to frogs! / If people should come near*. The biographical information seems correct and the mood of the book is somewhat melancholy, accurately portraying the sadness of Issa's life. But the main message in the book is that Issa continued to find "solace in writing haiku. And, despite the sadness that shadowed his life, he brought cheer to his many friends and inspiration to students. One night, during a party his students gave him, Issa composed a hundred haiku!" I have used this book every year since I acquired it, mostly as inspiration for a "Haiku Afternoon" during which the entire class writes haiku. The end notes are wonderful, consisting of an "Author's Note" about how the author and illustrator chose which of Issa's poems to include, a page that gives the Japanese pronunciation of four of the poems in the book, "About the Translations" that explains why the English versions are shorter, and "About Haiku" that describes some of the major components of haiku, such as juxtaposition, kigo, and letting the reader find his or her own meaning,

★☆☆ *Grass Sandals: The Travels of Basho*, by Dawnine Spivak. Illustrated by Demi (New York: Atheneum, 1997).

This picture book "compresses and combines events from several of Basho's travels." Demi's illustrations are wonderful and include kanji that exemplify different parts of the journey (e.g. yama: mountain). Some of Basho's poems (and, curiously one of Issa's) accompany the text. I assume that the translations are by Spivak, although there is no attribution of translation. If Spivak had included some history from Basho's childhood, that may have appealed to kids. And why not focus on a single journey of Basho's, say his famous trip that inspired *Narrow Road to the Interior*, rather than combine several? Included is a simple map of places Basho visited and what he saw at those places.

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Hannah Mahoney for her revision suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Trumbull, Charles. "Research Note: Harry Behn." *Modern Haiku* 37:3 (autumn 2006).