

SPARKS 2011: Haiku Competition: General Information

1. The SPARKS Competition is open to all who are participating in the festival, whether as readers, listeners, display table overseers, or as volunteers. The announcement of the winner and the presentation of the prize will be made in the last session of the festival, around 5.30 p.m. on January 23, 2011.
2. The haiku ought to have some sort of fire or sparks image in it.
3. The prize for the winning haiku is a package of books and a gift book certificate from the Bookery on Signal Hill Road.
4. Entries will be judged anonymously, i.e. without their authors' names attached, as in the NL Arts and Letters Competition.
5. Competition judges are poets Nick Avis and Tom Dawe. Both have worked in the haiku form, Tom Dawe most notably in the brilliant nine-haiku sequence, "Abandoned Outport." Nick Avis is a major haiku poet, whose achievements in the form have gained widespread recognition; he has also written about the form. For this competition he has provided a guideline sheet which can be found below, after this list, and which may prove helpful.
6. Entrants may submit one or two haiku to: SPARKShaiku@gmail.com
Or send entries by post to: SPARKS Haiku Competition
c/o Department of English
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland A1C 5S7.
7. If you are sending your entry by post, please put your haiku on one page, and put your contact info (address, telephone, e-mail) on a separate sheet. If you are submitting by e-mail, do not use attachments. Type the haiku in the body of the message.
8. The deadline for submissions is noon on Thursday, January 13, 2011.

Some Guidelines for Haiku as a Poem in English

Inaccurate definition: Dictionaries define haiku as a poem about nature written in 3 lines of 5-7-5 syllables. This is inaccurate and misleading. A haiku is not “about nature” and too many attempts at haiku are nothing more than nature sketches. Haiku containing only natural images without some explicit human presence are extremely difficult to write and it is all too easy to imitate a natural scene. Japanese haiku are written almost exclusively in one line vertically down the page and Japanese syllables are not the same as English syllables. Seventeen Japanese syllables are about the same length as around 12 English syllables.

A definition of haiku: a short poem focusing on the relationship between nature and human nature most frequently written in 3 lines with no required syllable count. The next most common form in English is haiku written horizontally in one line (less than 5%). The average syllable count is around 12, and 17 is considered to be the outside limit. Most haiku poets have written some 17 syllable haiku and some still do, at least occasionally. A few write exclusively in 17 syllables, some in less than 10 syllables and some occasionally use as many as 18 to 20 syllables. Experiments with form are many and varied.

Poetry of the seasons: The time of year and to a lesser extent the time of day is an integral part of haiku. A **season word** is a natural object or image that determines the season. Apple blossoms in Newfoundland, for example, would indicate mid to late spring; buds, early to mid-spring; opening buds, a little later; falling blossoms, late spring. The season can also be indicated by naming it or the month.

Poetry of the noun (verb): Adjectives and adverbs are used sparingly. Images and language are usually simple and concrete. Poetic devices are used infrequently and while haiku may not be explicitly written as metaphors, metaphorical interpretation, as one level of interpretation only, is essential to an appreciation of haiku. (Many would erroneously disagree with this.) The season word, for example, operates on several levels. It is taken literally and provides all kinds of background information from the time of year to the length of the day. It functions metaphorically in the sense of the human life cycle or “the seasons of life” and may also reflect the poet’s inner state. Most, for example, feel much differently when watching a summer sunset than an autumn sunset, especially as you get older. It may also have some cultural significance such as the time to mend nets or when the lobster season has just started.

Sound, rhythm and cadence are as important in haiku as they are in any poetry. The Japanese do not use rhyme (all their words end in an “n” or a vowel) and rhyme is rarely subtle enough in such a short poem.

Poetry of sensation: Feelings, thoughts, ideas and emotions are very rarely expressed directly but they are implied. The emphasis is on immediate sense experience: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Haiku are intuitive, not intellectual; open, incomplete and suggestive. Events are rarely interpreted for the reader.

Poetry of experience: The more successful haiku tend to be actual experiences rather than imagined ones, although imagination is as important in haiku as it is in any other form of poetry. Most live in cities and rarely commune with nature and are often unable to appreciate haiku because natural events and their implications do not form part of their experience.

All haiku with few exceptions are written in the present tense.

Reading haiku is considered as much of an art as writing them. Haiku poets write less than half the poem, the rest is implied and the reader completes it.

A **senryu** is a poem that is identical to haiku in form but the emphasis is on human nature and they are often humorous. Natural images are not essential and there tends to be a more liberal use of poetic devices. Many do not distinguish between haiku and senryu and feel that the distinctions are unnecessary or meaningless which results in much confusion and leads to the mistaken impression that any short poem can be a haiku.

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