

# The Haiku

A haiku poem of 17 syllables is composed of three lines [or word groups], usually unrhymed, of these number of syllables:

- Line #1: five syllables
- Line #2: seven syllables
- Line #3: five syllables

**Haiku is brief and compressed, and suggests rather than explains.**

**Haiku** is distinguished by its compression and suggestiveness. It consists of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables. **Traditionally and ideally, a haiku presents a pair of contrasting images, one suggestive of time and place, the other a vivid but fleeting observation.** Working together, they evoke mood and emotion. **The poet does not comment on the connection but leaves the synthesis of the two images for the reader to perceive.** The haiku below by the poet Basho, considered to have written the most perfect examples of the form, illustrates this duality:

## TEN EXAMPLES

Now the swinging bridge  
Is quieted with creepers ...  
Like our tendrilled life

How silent and still!  
In the heart of the rocks sinks  
The cicada's shrill

On a withered bough  
A crow alone is perching;  
Autumn evening now.

Now how dear to me  
Seems my father's rage when I  
Shattered the flower.

As I clap my hands  
With the echoes, dawn arrives —  
The lone summer moon.

The lone traveler  
Walks on, scratching his lice bites;  
Spring draws to a close.

In the misty rain,  
Mount Fuji is veiled all day.  
Look! the silent coi.

The sad bough droops  
Offering a single leaf.  
His ancient eyes weep.

Come to my arms child  
Enfold this heart beating here.  
Ants obey not time.

Beneath the boughs  
The soup with fish and vegetables  
Flecked with cherry petals.



# Haiku and Metaphor

A well done haiku is about the meeting of two ideas in an unexpected or unlooked for way. In this way the haiku is about making a thoughtful metaphor. The beauty then comes in the careful selection of words or just the right words to produce a connotative effect which can bring both surprise and joy. It is this careful attention to diction that is demanded of any good poet as well as any good writer. The key may be in the revision, so time should be taken to really pay attention to craft.

## ACTIVITY

Using your set of “Metaphor Dice” or the online metaphor dice app (<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/metaphor-dice/id1464774349>) roll the three die to determine the metaphor. Then, use this simple formula.

### Line 1 is built around a Concept

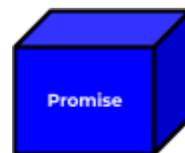
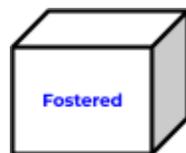
The first element is a concept word like “Love” or “Beauty” or “Friendship”. These concepts are in some sense thematic for the poet. They offer a commonly encountered, shared human experience, an experience which may bring with it much past baggage as well as hopeful expectation.

### Line 2 is built around the Adjective

This adjective description is the common unifying element characteristic of both original concept and concluding noun.

### Line 3 is built around a Noun

The final element is a noun that must now be considered in a new way, perhaps a way that is different from the original connotations held in the initial encounter.



### Haiku Result

He gambled the dice,  
As one fosters an infant,  
A broken promise.

Notice that I made a choice to change the 1st concept to a verb form, and I have also altered the ides of a promise slightly. Such writing choices are always possible and should be explored by you the writer as you seek the best wording to deliver your poem.

