



World Literature

Students read the works of international authors, both contemporary and historical, and refine grammar and composition skills through numerous writing assignments. In addition to active reading and critical evaluation of literature, students' writing instincts are further honed and challenged with a variety of essays (expository, compare/contrast, personal opinion, and interpretive), a biographical research paper, poetry, movie reviews, news articles, an analysis of symbolism and irony, and a one-act play.

The following materials are needed for this course:

Oak Meadow World Literature Syllabus

Don Quixote

The Ramayana

The Metamorphosis

A Doll's House

Oak Meadow World Literature Syllabus

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Item #12010

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Lesson 12: Masters of Japanese Haiku

Matsuo Basho and Kobayashi Issa

Matsuo Basho (1644–1684) and Kobayashi Issa (1716–1783) are considered among the greatest haiku poets. The haiku originated in Japan during the 15th century. It began as a 17-syllable verse, or stanza, but soon became a poem in itself. The form is simple: Haiku consists of three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables, respectively. (The poems below are in translation, so the syllable count is not exact.)

Still popular among poets, haiku is concise, combining imagery to produce emotions and meaning. Often, haiku is a celebration of nature and the union of all living things. The words are clear, simple, and precise.

Assignments

1. Carefully read the series of haiku below.
2. Answer the questions on haiku.
3. Read a dozen more haiku. See question 7.
4. Write six haiku. See the instructions below.

Haiku by Basho

Come, see
Real flowers
Of this painful world.

Poverty's child—
He starts to grind the rice,
And gazes at the moon.

To the willow—
All hatred, and desire
Of your heart.

The cuckoo—
Its call stretching
Over the water.

Haiku by Issa

Withered grass,
Under piling
Heat waves.

To the capital—
Snow-clouds forming,
Half the sky to go.

Just by being,
I'm here—
In snow fall.

Don't weep, insect—
lovers, stars themselves,
must part.

Under cherry trees
There are
No strangers.

Melting snow:
And on the village
Fall the children.

A world of dew:
Yet within the dewdrops—
Quarrels.

With bland sincerity
Gazing at the far hills:
A tiny frog.

Questions

1. Many haiku include a seasonal word, called a *kigo*. The *kigo* announces the time of year and invites the associations that go with the season. A haiku that uses the word “heat,” for example, suggests summer.

Give at least two examples of *kigos* in the haiku above. Describe the associations that they awaken. How do they contribute to the meaning of the haiku?

2. Basho's haiku often contrast images of suffering to images of natural beauty. Give examples of these contrasts. Are they effective? What emotions do they evoke? What is Basho's message, or moral, in these poems?
3. “Under cherry trees,” says Issa, “There are/No strangers.” What does he mean by this? Why is the image of the cherry tree central to the poem?
4. Japanese haiku cannot be separated from Zen Buddhism. In fact, many haiku poets, including Basho, were Zen masters. To them, haiku was a vehicle for conveying a spiritual revelation. The poems, therefore, are meditations on enlightenment, or enlightened moments.

Discuss the religious/spiritual nature of Basho's and Issa's haiku. What is the essential message of these poems? Assuming you knew nothing about Zen Buddhism, what would you say are the religion's central values? Are these poems devotional? Prayerful? Be sure to cite examples from the poems to support your answers.

5. Describe the tone of Basho's and Issa's haiku. Imagine they were reading their poems; what would their voices sound like?

- 6.

- a. Successful haiku depend on the juxtaposition of images to create meaning. Like paintings, haiku *show* rather than *tell* their meaning.

This devotion to imagery is still alive. In fact, one of the 20th century's greatest poets, Ezra Pound, inspired a movement called Imagism. Like haiku poets, the Imagists relied on concentrated, precise images to unify the poem and evoke the reader's emotions. One famous example is Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro." As Pound says, "I wrote a thirty-three line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work 'of second intensity.' Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later I made the following haiku-like sentence..." Here is the poem in its entirety:

In a Station of the Metro

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

What is this poem about? What is the poet feeling at the station? What is the effect of the word *apparition*? In your opinion, does the poem succeed? Does it need more explanation?

Now compare Pound's poem to the haiku you have studied. How are they similar? How are they different?

- b. Discuss the influence of images in contemporary society and in your life. Consider the difference between natural images—such as mountains and sunsets—and the images the media portrays. What about one's personal image? Feel free to expand on this question.
7. Read a dozen more Japanese haiku. You might need to ask your local librarian for help. Write at least one page about the haiku. What are their central concerns? How do they compare to Basho's and Issa's works? Be sure to use direct quotes in your writing.

Photocopy the haiku and send them to your Oak Meadow teacher. If you cannot photocopy them, write them by hand or write the first line and the author of each haiku.

Writing Haiku

Now it's your turn to write haiku. The form, you remember, includes three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables. Here is an example of a seventeen-syllable haiku:

The light rising fast (5)
Over the far eastern plains (7)
Brings daytime to all. (5)

Write at least six haiku. Although haiku might appear simple to write, they require great precision, economy of language, and strong imagery. Ultimately, your poem should evoke an emotional response from the reader.

Feel free to adorn your haiku with illustrations before you send them to your teacher.

Lesson 27: A Doll's House

Assignment

1. Read Act II.
2. Vocabulary: Remember to use the words in sentences, and to find three words on your own.
3. Answer the comprehension/critical thinking questions.
4. Add a scene to the play (this is explained below).

Vocabulary

tactless	impulsive	jaunty	refinement
excruciating	resolute	hack [noun]	retribution

Comprehension/Critical Thinking

1. In addition to his realism, Ibsen was revolutionary for his elaborate sets and his detailed stage directions.

Discuss the significance of the setting. What scenery stands out as especially important? Give examples of scenery that takes on symbolic qualities.

Discuss Ibsen's stage directions. Give examples of how it contributes to the realism and meaning of the play. Would a performance of *A Doll's House* suffer if Ibsen had not provided the stage directions? Explain.

2. Outwardly, Helmer comes across as a model of confidence, morality, and generosity. Inwardly, however, it might be a different story.

Is there evidence to suggest that Helmer is not as secure and righteous as he seems? What does Krogstad have to say about his old friend? Is Nora correct in accusing Helmer of having "petty

considerations”? Do you think that Helmer will have the “strength and courage enough as a man to take on the whole weight” of any disaster that should befall the couple? **Details!**

3. Once she is threatened by Krogstad, Nora is shaky and uncertain. How does she respond to Krogstad’s threats? Does she believe something terrible is coming? Is she in denial about the gravity of the situation? Does she seek help? Does she have faith in Torvald’s understanding?

What are some of the more extreme measures Nora contemplates? What does Krogstad have to say about these alternatives?

4. Now that he is near his deathbed, Dr. Rank is willing to confess his sentiments to Nora. How does he feel about her? How does his confession affect her? After hearing this, why won’t she ask him for help, knowing he will do anything for her?
5. As Nora’s anxiety grows, her behavior is increasingly complex, her dialogue more honest and revealing. Ironically, this is true of her conversations with everyone except her husband. As she confesses to Dr. Rank, “there are some people that one loves most and other people that one would almost prefer being with.”

Why is this statement so significant? How does it apply to Nora’s relationship with Helmer and with her father?

Do you think this statement is true for most people? Explain.

6. When Krogstad visits Nora, he says he has “little of what they call a heart, you know.”

Do you agree with Krogstad’s assessment of himself? Is there evidence that, like Nora and Mrs. Linde, he sacrifices himself for the good of others? Do you condemn Krogstad for his actions? What is he seeking to gain by blackmailing Nora?

Do you think there is any substance in his claim that Helmer “forced me back to my old ways”?

7. Describe the quality of conversation between Mrs. Linde and Nora. How does it differ from Nora’s conversation with the men in the play?
8. The dancing of the tarantella is a significant moment in the play. Suddenly, the domestic, yielding Nora “dances more and more wildly.” Indeed, once Helmer “strikes up the first notes of the tarantella,” every line of dialogue resonates with meaning.

Describe and interpret Nora’s dance. Cite at least three lines of dialogue that carry double meanings.

Add a Scene

Composing believable dialogue is perhaps the greatest challenge to the playwright. Because drama is meant to be performed, its success depends on dialogue rather than narration. Ibsen was a master of dialogue, painstaking in his insistence that every line be relevant to the plot and theme of the play.

Now it's your turn to compose believable dialogue and meaningful interactions. Add a short scene (two typed pages minimum) to *A Doll's House*. Staying within the parameters of the plot, write a scene between two or more characters. Be sure to include stage directions, and make sure to have the scene come to a close.

Turn this assignment in with Lesson 28.