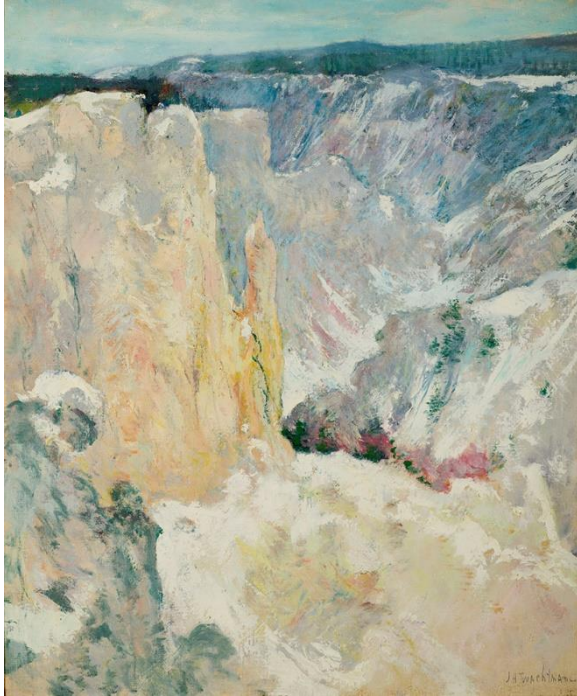


**American Museum of Western Art – The Anschutz Collection**  
Writing the West: Season 6, January 2025  
***The Seasons of Haiku***

Haiku is a Japanese poetic form. Its well-known three-line syllable count of 5-7-5 makes for a seemingly simple writing process. With the help of AMWA's paintings, let's try to dig a little deeper into the form. See the subsequent pages of the prompt guide for 'Haiku Guidelines' and 'Haiku Examples.'



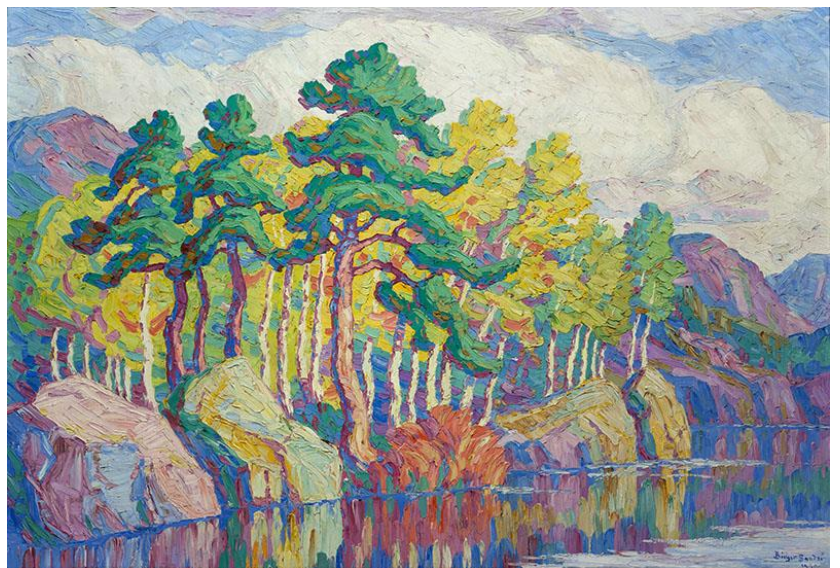
**John Twachtman, *Canyon in the Yellowstone*, 1895**



**Childe Hassam, *Sand Springs Butte*, 1904**

Traditional haiku typically include a seasonal reference. Choose either of these paintings and make a list describing the painting's season. When your list feels complete, use it to write a haiku whose focus is the season. Your poem's setting can be the painting you chose, or about the season itself. If you finish early, repeat the process with the other painting.

Depending on the distance you view *Autumn Symphony*, your experience of it will change. Choose an area of the painting to focus your haiku. Then, write your three lines from three different distances. The more contrasting the images, the better.



**Birger Sandzen, *Autumn Symphony*, 1930**





**Sheldon Parsons, *Springtime at Santa Fe*, 1928**

Sometimes we forget that the word 'imagery' references all five senses, not just sight. Vivid imagery is a quality of haiku. This painting is full of vivid sensory images. The vibrant colors of the tree petals and sagebrush. The smell of the burros and the chopped wood. The sound of the men talking and the bees pollinating the flowers. The temperature of the adobe walls and the bread baking in the oven. Choose a sensory image (sight, sound, taste, touch, or smell) inspired by the painting and write a haiku focusing on it. When you finish one sense, try another.

## Haiku Guidelines

1. Write in three lines. You may adhere to the syllabic form 5-7-5, or not. The reason why not is simple. In Japanese, a typical haiku has 17 sounds, however, when translating a Japanese haiku into English, often the poem only reaches 12-14 syllables.
2. Use seasonal references. For example: tadpole = early spring, frog = late spring, river frog = summer.
3. Use present tense.
4. Avoid punctuation, capital letters, and obvious rhyme.
5. One and two-syllable words are great.
6. Create a vivid sensory image.
7. Choose great nouns—they're more necessary than verbs.
8. Focus on one idea.
9. If you choose to use two images, contrast them. For example: silent pond/splashing frog. Another example: the act of writing/blooming poppy.
10. Connect humanity to nature.

## Haiku Examples

### Untitled

Unknown haiku poet

blowing out the lamp  
my shadow  
returns to my body

### The Old Pond

Matsuo Bashō

An old silent pond  
A frog jumps into the pond—  
Splash! Silence again.

### A World of Dew

Kobayashi Issa

A world of dew,  
And within every dewdrop  
A world of struggle.

**Birds Punctuate the Days**

Joyce Clement

Period

One blue egg all summer long

Now gone

**Haiku [for you]**

Sonia Sanchez

love between us is

speech and breath. loving you is

a long river running.

**A Poppy Blooms**

Katsushika Hokusai

I write, erase, rewrite

Erase again, and then

A poppy blooms.