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 Reader Response Essay
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Haiku of Lenard D. Moore

Lenard D. Moore was born on February 13, 1958, in Jacksonville, North Carolina. In 2008, Moore was elected president of the Haiku Society of America becoming the first African American president in this society. Moore also became the executive chairman of the North Carolina Haiku Society and executive director of the Carolina African American Writers' collective. Some awards given to Moore include the Tokyo Museum of haiku literature award, Indies Arts award, Margaret Walker creative writing award and many more.

Moore has performed poetry readings alongside Quintets, Trios, Jazz bands and Symphonic bands. Capturing the essence of music within various settings Moore wrote haiku with various musical components. In his book *The Geography of Jazz*, published in 2018 by Mountain and Rivers Press, Lenard D. Moore expresses his love for music, in particular jazz music. Some examples of these haiku include:

quiet rain
 a Coltrane tune I know
 on the radio

Lenard D. Moore, TGOJ, 5

John Coltrane is an American jazz saxophonist and composer. He was one of the most inspiring players in free jazz. His music is classical, yet the passion poured into his playing speaks to the heart of his audience. Each song leaves everyone speechless as they try to interpret the meaning of the melody in their lives. Rain can be calming and provide a silence enough to be trapped in one's own thoughts. The beautiful Coltrane tune brings Moore back from his long thoughts. When reading this haiku, I was pulled from a dark gloomy day in the rain and greeted with a big smile as Coltrane's lovely melody saves my day. Moore sets the scene to contrast from the music coming from the environment. Rather than leaving the readers stuck on a quiet day, the loud and bright playing of Coltrane emphasizes the celebration of life despite the rain. I really enjoyed how Moore included a very well-known musician to attract a larger audience to share their common love of Coltrane. In this context, Coltrane wasn't a person but a feeling that evokes when you hear his music or even name.

bobbing and bobbing
 on the jazz club wall
 the bassist's shadow

Lenard D. Moore, TGOJ, 12

Moore's love for jazz inspired brilliant haiku to describe the atmosphere. In this haiku the use of "bobbing" creates the image of a cool yet catchy tune that everyone can vibe to. Jazz clubs usually have a lively atmosphere with a well-lit stage and dark wall. There is a split of atmosphere between the upbeat lively environment and the shadow of the bassists. The word "shadow" is often interpreted as a dark reflection of sadness and gloom. Bassists in the bands often link the rhythm and harmony to provide a strong beat. They are a key component to carrying out the music and setting the dynamic of the club. Yet describing only the bassist's shadow evokes an emotion of neglect for the true talents of the bassist. Moore eloquently emphasizes the contrasting emotions provided by jazz and the underappreciated bassist that produces the

beautiful tunes. I really liked this haiku because I am a big fan of jazz music. This haiku vividly described the lively atmosphere of jazz clubs. Rather than describing just the feeling of the music, Moore took a different approach and decided to describe what makes the music.

riff
of radio jazz . . .
wren

Lenard D. Moore, TGOJ, 9

Being unfamiliar with music terms, I discovered that riff meant a repeated chord progression usually displayed in jazz. However, wrens are small brown singing birds. Moore efficiently tied all components of music to describe his environment. The repetition of the wren's tune could be like the riff of a jazz song. Additionally, wrens often symbolize spring and rebirth but are also associated with the arts in particular musicians. I interpreted the haiku as the rebirth or increasing trend of jazz on the radio once again. It could also mean that jazz is more popular during the spring, so the simple mention of the wren bird illustrates it is time to once again dive into new jazz music. I really enjoyed this haiku because it is one of the shortest haiku filled with a variety of sounds that bring to life everything around me. The signing of wrens accompanied by the jazz music from the radio created a feeling of admiration at the beauty found within the world.

Aside from haiku focused on music, Moore wrote various types of haiku focusing on the seasons, animals, and life within the black community. In his book *Gathering at the Crossroads*, published in 2003 by Red Moon Press, Lenard D. Moore writes ten powerful haiku accompanied by the photographs taken by Eugene B. Redmond. This book focuses on the experience of the Million Man March in 1995. On October 16, 1995, Louis Farrakhan called the Million Man March in Washington D.C around the National mall. Around 400,000 people gathered to listen to the speakers promote African American unity against the economic and social injustices. The goal of the march was to improve the African American community to receive the rights, and respect earned by their hard work. Capturing one of the largest march, Moore wrote captivating haiku such as:

Autumn dawn
a father briefing his son
in the parking lot

Lenard D Moore, GATC, 2

The beginning of Moore's book starts with a haiku about large crows awaiting the bus towards the march. Moore effectively writes powerful haiku that capture his journey on this historic day. Immediately "autumn dawn" gives a description of the importance of this march causing families to wake up even before the sun is up. The autumn weather tells us that despite the cold, families were still undoubtedly eager to raise early. Additionally, autumn dawn is usually a symbolism for illumination and hope. The image of autumn dawn as the first line immediately sets the tone of happiness for the improvement to come. However, once again, the second and third lines can create a shift in tone. For instance, although "a father briefing his son" could be interpreted as a positive interaction describing the upbringing of hope within the community, the briefing could also create a gloomy atmosphere. Parents had to shed light into the tragic reality of life as an African American person and discuss with their children the mistreatment of their community. While their stance in the march is something to be proud of, it is always a difficult topic to explain to young children the daily mistreatment of fellow African American citizens. It is a common theme in African American households to have a talk with their children about how to behave within society if they want to live. Unfortunately, that hasn't changed in current society. While people continue to hold hope that one day equality will be reached, parents must continue to discuss with their children how to prepare for any incidents that may put their lives at risk.

I really enjoyed this haiku because although it was written over decades ago, the constant issues in society make this haiku timeless. Even if society does reach true equality, this haiku is the embodiment of the shared history between all African American families. Moore uses his view of his surroundings to not only describe the events of the march but to set the tone to place us back in his shoes. The incorporation of the photograph with the haiku takes us physically back to that moment in time. The distressed, tired, but hopeful faces of the father and son in the photograph brought the haiku to life.

the cadenced footsteps
of one million black men
a warm fall day

Lenard D. Moore, GATC, 3

the speaker's hand
bends the microphone down
deepening autumn

Lenard D. Moore, GATC, 5

These haiku take us from entering the march to being a part of the march. Although very similar, these haiku are different approaches to describe the strength of the march. The first haiku automatically left me breathless as I realized the power of unity between all the men. Moore likes to use seasons in his haiku to allow the reader to incorporate their senses allowing them to be in the moment with him. Immediately in the first haiku we see the gathering of thousands of men, we hear their footsteps, and we feel the warm bright sun on the skin. Despite all the chaos, the reader isn't overstimulated by the senses but rather feels the proudness pouring out of the soul of everyone there. Not only are they unified by their actions but by their goal for standing side by side. Similarly, the second haiku takes the proud unity and narrows down the focus to the individuals' giving speeches to the large crowd. Moore describes the little details such as the bending of the microphone to describe the eagerness of the crowd watching every move of the speaker to await the revolutionary hope they need. Keeping with the fall theme, Moore describes the late afternoon as getting darker through the "deepening" of autumn. However, if analyzing the symbolism behind autumn, Moore could not only be describing the long day, but the increasing hope given after each speech. Overall, I choose to compare these haiku because of the similar emotions they evoke through different situations.

Night after the march
Reading the million-man pledge
To my pregnant wife

Lenard D. Moore, GATC, 10

The last haiku in his book describes Moore reading about the historic march he was a part of to his wife. First off, the use of "night after" implicated that the news of the march traveled fast and gained large publicity which is always a goal for any march. The more publicity there is, the greater change there is to bring attention to the problems and inspire change all over the world. Additionally, not only was the million-man march written about in the newspaper, but their pledge, a strong promise agreed by every male in the march, was shared to inspire others to take a stance with them. Even after the march, the thousands of men were able to remain unified and inspire others to join the cause to create a better world for them and future generations. Mentioning the pregnant wife creates a highly loving and hopeful family and future. His purpose for attending the march is to create a better future for their children to one day end the injustices they constantly face. Overall, this book was full of vivid imagery of the haiku's supported by the photographs. Moore effectively captured one of the most historic days filled with conflict yet hope for a better future. I really enjoyed this book because the double meaning of autumn really tied the book together. Not once did Moore ever mention what he felt that day, but his use of the seasons and other senses made

me understand everything he was feeling. While this book was filled with promise, unity, and life, the book *One Window's Light: A Collection of Haiku*, published in 2017 by Unicorn Press, included my favorite haiku:

hot afternoon
the squeak of my hands
on my daughter's coffin

Lenard D. Moore, OWL, 40

This is one of the haiku that tugged at my heart and left me speechless. At first, I was confused by the meaning of "squeak of my hands" because unless you are rubbing something together, hands don't make sounds. The use of "coffin" made me realize that he was probably carrying his daughter's coffin and his hands were beginning to sweat due to the hot weather. He could also be running his hand over the coffin creating a sound caused by friction. However, I interpreted it as a father sobbing into his hands over the coffin. Either of these interpretations all lead to the same emotion. I am left with a heavy heart as I realize that rather than teaching his young girl how to ride a bike, he is taking her to the cemetery to be buried. This haiku really spoke to me because although I haven't shared this experience, I can only imagine the fraction of pain the parents are in. Moore's first two lines are general statements, and it isn't until the third line that we tie everything together and all the overwhelming senses of sadness flood in.

Similarly, in the book *Morning Haiku* published in 1992 by Beacon Press, Sonia Sanchez writes haiku that focuses on the emotions caused by extreme racism. A good example of a haiku is:

a mother's eyes
remembering a cradle
pray out loud

Sonia Sanchez, MH, 12

Comparing the haiku written by two different authors demonstrates a common theme of the tragedies faced as African American people. In this haiku written by Sanchez she is talking about the death of Emmett Till. The lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till made millions of people realize the cruelty of racism. Yet, it seemed inevitable for people to avoid lynching due to how common racism was. When the world turned to look at Till's mother for her reaction everyone could see her remembering who he was. She didn't want the last memory of her loving son to be the beaten limp body in the casket but instead the young playful baby boy he once was. When she prayed out loud, she wasn't praying for her son to return to this cruel world but rather prayed for everyone to open their eyes and see what hatred can cause. She prayed to keep alive the good memory of her son and to not let his death go by without recognition. Both haiku recognize the death of innocent souls leaving the readers to mourn alongside the writers. The pain of losing a child is a pain I hope to never experience but I still sympathize for the emotions the parents must feel. Both Moore and Sanchez use words to describe the sounds they hear to set the tone for their haiku. Moore's haiku incorporated more components to do with weather and his surroundings while Sanchez focused her haiku on the feelings and emotions behind powerful words such as "cradle" and "pray". With two different approaches Moore and Sanchez wrote two of my favorite haiku.

Overall, Moore is an incredible haiku author who writes about some of his favorite activities in his life. For instance, Moore has many haiku about jazz and the way it is present throughout everyday life. He doesn't explicitly state his love for haiku but subtly includes it through the tone of his haiku. Moore also does a phenomenal job capturing the historic million-man March. In his haiku Moore includes a variety of aspects that include all our senses to bring us back to that moment in history. Lastly, many African American individuals face the loss of loved ones due to harsh discrimination and racism. Sonia Sanchez and Moore both write haiku that describe the feelings behind losing a child. The trauma behind that experience is

something a parent will never forget, and both of these authors used different methods of demonstrating those emotions.

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