

Reflecting on Reflection

How Haiku Has Changed Me for the Better

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I had heard of haiku before taking this class and even had some interest in the subject. The earliest instance I can remember writing haiku would be for a small group of online friends, where I was using it to explain small parts of lore of a larger story I had created. Essentially, the haiku were intended to be written by a character in the world who was stuck underground but could not die. To keep himself entertained, he would create things like haiku in his head and listen to the world above. Aside from that, I had also played the game *Ghost of Tsushima*, in which the main character, Jin Sakai, can stop and reflect on his life and his surroundings. The game gives players a few options for lines based on the scenery around, and then, once all three lines are selected, Jin voices what the player created.

Of course, in these two instances, I didn't actually know what made a good haiku, and I still thought the 5-7-5 rule was integral to the formation of any such poem. After taking Global Haiku, though, I have been far more thoroughly educated on how haiku is formed, how it is shared, and how the principles of haiku can be applied to the rest of life as a whole. For example, in many of my haiku exercises, I've found myself focusing on smaller aspects of life that I would normally ignore, such as bugs on the ground or the stains in the carpets of Shilling. This was of course to generate haiku and complete assignments, but it also helped me realize that slowing down and appreciating the small stuff is just as good as the next big thing or project. I've become much more attentive to my surroundings, noticed things I wouldn't normally notice even without a haiku assignment present, and have even created a few haiku in my mind whilst observing things without thinking about it. This method of creating haiku is actually how I came up with one of my very favorites—one I used in my collection, project and signature haiga. I was looking through the window and thought of the sound of the waves of Lake Decatur as they hit the shore. Because the shore is rocky and not sandy, they are different from the waves of ordinary beaches, and so, I was inspired to create a haiku that could encapsulate an experience I had come to enjoy so much.

The lessons of haiku are applicable to more than the material world as well. Throughout my time in our class, I've noticed that it's easy to get a good grasp on someone's personality, experiences, interests, disinterests and opinions just through the haiku that they write. In fact, haiku has made me more observant of people's writing overall. It's easy to see personality through haiku, as it is a creative endeavor, but the same can be said for all writing. Based on what people bring up, the mannerisms they use and word choice—all of which haiku demands we closely observe—we can see what people are like in the greater world of writing as well. This is helpful not only for things like evaluating sources, where experiences and opinions can reign supreme, but also simply when wanting to learn more about a person, be they close or distant to us. Additionally, haiku

has made me more open to sharing my own writing as well. I write stories as a hobby, but I'm often somewhat hesitant to share them with others, or even the fact that I do so, for fear that they won't like them. Being essentially forced to open up and share my work with others, as I have in Global Haiku, has helped me gain some more confidence in sharing what I create. Reading haiku by other students has helped me to realize that we're all on the same level, and the positive feedback I've received on my work has boosted my confidence in the realm of creative writing overall.

Speaking of the wider world of writing, haiku has helped me to see just how many different forms of writing there are. For example, all throughout grade school, middle school and high school, I had a distaste for poetry because I found that trying to dig out a meaning for an assignment was irritating and there were so many rules to follow, whether it be stanzas, rhyming, word counts or other aspects of poetry. This doesn't mean that traditional poetry is bad by any means, I was just of the opinion that it was too complicated, and I thought that applied to all poetry. Haiku has caused me to realize that there are so many other forms of creative writing out there. Short form, long form, interpretive or in-your-face, all kinds of writing can be found in the world, and haiku is an example of a form of poetry I don't mind. It's not complicated, the rules (should one even choose to follow them) are few, and there's room for many interpretations.

Another aspect of my life that haiku has helped me understand is that learning does not always have to be dull or boring. Throughout most of my life, I've viewed classes as something that I have to do. A series of tasks that I have to complete to ensure I have a job and stable income in the future. Global Haiku is the second in a series of classes I've taken at Millikin—the other being Video Games and Digital Literature—that has helped me realize that learning doesn't have to be dull. Learning can be hands-on, cover abstract yet interesting subjects, and not focus too harshly on exam-taking or completion of difficult projects and homework. Classes can be just as effectively taught in a relaxed and inviting method, perhaps even more so, than they can in a stressful, high-workload class. Lectures can be reformed into interesting presentations, homework can be based on effort rather than arbitrary scoring, and most of all, students can be given agency to learn the subject in the best way for them, rather than strict guidelines laid out by harsh professors. Global haiku has helped to undo some of the harmful and inefficient ideas of modern schooling drilled into my head, and keep me open to new forms of education that may just be more effective than the tried-and-true.

Lastly, something I've brought up but haven't directly spoken on is haiku's tendency to break its own rules. One of my core values is efficiency; if there's a faster or better way to do something while still keeping the end result high in quality, then we should by all means use that method instead. Haiku is a unique form of poetry in that, throughout history, it has reshaped itself and the very rules that define it to achieve the purposes of its authors. From the way Basho changed the form of his haiku—and in turn the popular form of haiku—throughout his life all the way up until now, where modern poets play with haiku lines, spacing, and appearance to help accentuate their poems, haiku breaks rules, even its own. I love the idea of changing something to serve a purpose better, but am often disappointed when I find how set-in-stone the world is and how unwilling to change many people are. By seeing how flexible haiku is, a form of writing that professionals study and publishers pay attention to, I'm given hope that other facets of the world may eventually do the same. For example, text styles in books almost never differ from the

expectations set at the very first word. There are so many possibilities, though. Whether it be different fonts representing different characters or different font sizes representing a character's size or status, traditional writing can be enhanced in so many ways with so many unique ideas, we just have to be open to them. Try something out, see if it works and, if we see in the end it doesn't, then it's just as easy to change back the original formatting and try again, as I have done several times in some of my own haiku.

Overall, I am very glad that I decided to take Global Haiku for one of my honors courses this semester. Global Haiku has been one of the few classes I've actually looked forward to attending each day at Millikin, and I've enjoyed reading, sharing, and learning about the class's poetry in such a relaxed setting. Learning more about haiku has changed how I view life, people and poetry, and I know that these views will persist into the rest of my college experience and beyond. Haiku has kept me open to new ideas and presented them to me in ways such that I've found them applicable to the rest of the world, and I am grateful to have been part of such a long line of haiku classes taught at Millikin. More than anything else, though, I'll always be on the lookout for new scenes and experiences to turn into haiku.