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College Students and the Casual Haiku

Upon taking “Global Haiku Traditions,” I was fearful that I would not be able to produce haiku “worthy” enough for the class. I had never written much poetry, let alone haiku, and I understood that haiku contains several nuances that are valued highly in Japanese culture. Nevertheless, for my second assignment in class, I was asked to produce haiku on an open topic. My first attempts were certainly not my best, but alas, I had written haiku. As the class progressed, I had the opportunity to read more haiku written by fellow college students, and I quickly discovered that the sophistication of the haiku had no correlation to the emotional response from the reader. In fact, some of the haiku that my classmates and I best resonated with were very informal, utilizing curse words and referring to bodily functions, hangovers, and sexual relations.

I believe that these haiku create such a connection between the reader and the poem for a multitude of reasons. For one, Generation Z is quite famous for coping with trauma and stress through humor; after all, that is what primarily led to the success of several social media platforms, most notably Tik Tok. So naturally, haiku that college students of that generation relate to the most involve intertwining anxiety with comedy. Additionally, college students are drawn to these casual haiku because they create the notion that *anyone* can write a haiku that is meaningful. No one has to be a professional poet or immersed in a culture that values haiku in order to write a haiku that generates a connection with the reader. The greatest proof of this concept: Kukai. There is a reason that Kukai has become the motivation for students to arrive at haiku class after a crummy day. We love reading each other’s poems—honest, real, funny—and discovering the mysterious author behind each one. From beautifully written haiku about love and loss to poems that leave classmates gasping for air as they laugh, Kukai has educated haiku students greatly, teaching them the most valuable lesson I have gained from the class: haiku is for everyone, no matter how serious or silly the poem.

Examining *The Art of Reading and Writing Haiku: A Reader Response Approach*, Millikin University Haiku Anthology, and several examples from Kukai found on “Global Haiku Tradition Assignments Blog - Fall 2021,” I will pull examples of haiku I believe to be casual and humorous in nature that have generated a response in myself, a stressed out college student taking “Global Haiku Traditions.”

mom and me
drinking on the porch...
we do that now?

Isabelle Loutfi, Fall 2018, *The Art of Reading and Writing Haiku: A Reader Response Approach*, 63

I read this haiku and connected so deeply to its contents, and I am sure that other college students feel the same. Once I was off at college, my parents gave me a completely new set of freedoms, the most exciting of which being able to smoke and drink with them. At first, I did not know exactly how to relax in front of them in that sense, and I had the sneaking suspicion that judgement would surely come by way based on how the festivities went. Nevertheless, a lot of people my age are adjusting to a new level of adulthood, and I believe that Isabelle captured that wonderfully in this haiku. “We do that now?”: that phrase develops the notion that the author cannot believe that they have reached that point of their lifetime. There has been so much

anticipation leading up to this point, whether or not they are of the legal drinking age when writing this, and now that it has arrived, the author experiences enthusiasm and confusion. The structure of this haiku and the final line being a question does wonders in establishing those moods; I believe that more people than just myself feel the same way.

dragonfly
I have become the master
of Wii Fit Yoga"

Nicholas Sanders, Spring 2015, *The Art of Reading and Writing Haiku: A Reader Response Approach*, 85

I read the first line and thought this haiku would be "zen" to the max; well, I was sort of right. After all, that is the intended direction behind the haiku so that the final line could misguide the reader and potentially receive a laugh. Anyone who owned a 2009 Nintendo Wii bought Wii Fit the second it was available in stores and spent hours trying to master every fitness activity. So, reading the poem, I knew exactly what the author was going for: the idea that the author has the spirit of a yoga *sadhguru* because they own a little white board connected to the television. I giggled both from the misdirection of the poem and its relatability, and it quickly became one of my favorites in *The Art of Reading and Writing Haiku: A Reader Response Approach*, taking me back to my childhood.

in bed at night
I fart
so loud

Josh Wild, *Millikin University Haiku Anthology*, 88

When selecting our favorite haiku from this book in class, Pricilla Sabourin could not hold in her laughter, and every student in the room, along with Professor Brooks, knew *exactly* what haiku she was chuckling about. Too embarrassed to *actually* call out the haiku herself, Randy Brooks read Josh Wild's words aloud, and we all could not contain ourselves. Eight single syllable words had the ability to return us to a childlike state; after all, none of us would have ever thought we'd hear the word "fart" in a haiku, let alone in a classroom. What truly makes this haiku is the line separation. The simple word choice already benefits the poem well, setting a scene that the reader could both see *and* hear, but the line breaks for "I fart" and "so loud" create emphasis for the individual lines, making the lines even funnier. This haiku is straightforward, visual, and honest, and I think that is why we all found the poem hilarious in class.

her thong
forgotten on the floor
Mom walks in

Brittney Gillespie, *Millikin University Haiku Anthology*, 39

I am ashamed to admit how much I relate to this haiku, but I bet that almost every college student can. Whether an instance of this sort occurred in high school in our homes or at college as parents paid impromptu visits, we can all imagine our mothers or fathers seeing someone's underwear on the floor (that

clearly does not belong to us). From there, our parents will either attempt to disregard the underwear together or interrogate us about our sex lives until we storm out or spill the beans, and for our sake, I hope it is *not* the latter. This haiku establishes its environment well. Personally, I read this and pictured my tiny freshman dorm room. After the space has been set, the reader can clearly visualize the look on their mother or father's face as they see the underwear on the floor. What comes next? Panic! I know that when I read this, I felt that instantly; "Oh, crap. Please do not say anything about that." This haiku did an excellent job of instilling a rush in the reader. Sure, the poem says "thong," but that does not make the blood rushing through the body when reading that final line any less real.

hard nipples
raising painted letters
game day

Joanne Weise, *Millikin University Haiku Anthology*, 81

While this poem may be more accurate for a larger state school or university, college game day is still captured perfectly in this haiku. Game day means finding any and all excuses to get drunk, eat greasy food, dress in revealing college merchandise, and proudly cheer on our school. Even as someone who is not very into sports, I love game day. The energy and crowd are incomparable to any theatrical experience. What this haiku does well is establish a point of view. Obviously, the highlights of game day will be quite different depending on the person, and with this poem, the author enjoys the *perky* perks of game day more than others. On top of that, the phrase "hard nipples... raising painted letters" is incredibly visual. The reader does not have to try too hard to imagine a chest with rather pointy nipples, and the painted letters will be personal for the reader, for they are imagining their own school colors and letters. The only loss on game day would be that of the team. Otherwise, the day is about togetherness and celebration of the highest of highs and lowest of lows. When reading this haiku, I clearly hear someone exhaling with satisfaction: "Ahh, game day."

for every smile you
take away
I eat more beans

Nico Velazquez, Kukai 3, "Global Haiku Tradition Assignments Blog - Fall 2021," 45

I vividly remember reading this haiku in class and everyone laughing uncontrollably. The misdirection of this haiku is perfect. Every person in the room was expecting the haiku to go in a sadder direction, indicating feelings of hurt and betrayal. Instead, we were met with beans. The phrase was so obscure and generic that we did not know what to do besides giggle. What kind of beans were they? How angrily was the author shoving beans into their mouth? Why beans? I enjoyed how all those questions popped up in my head, yet I never desperately wanted to know the answers. The poem was brilliant as is. Once we went around the room and voted, we discovered that Nico wrote the haiku that ended up winning Kukai 3! Nico wound up telling us that this was his "throw away poem," and I think that plays a large part into why this poem was my favorite one of Kukai 3. He did not have to write a heartfelt haiku nor put in tremendous effort in order for it to be received well. Nico wrote a poem, and it stuck with us, inspiring more bean-related haiku in the future. He proved that anyone could write a wonderful haiku about *literally* anything.

mascara runs down her cheeks
peace sign
mirror selfie

Barrett Van, Kukai 2, "Global Haiku Tradition Assignments Blog - Fall 2021," 86

When I said that Generation Z copes with any and all emotions through humor, this is exactly what I meant. I can easily name twenty people who have sent me crying selfies in which they are holding a peace sign or awkwardly smiling because at that point, what else can you do? That is why when I read this haiku, I nodded my head and thought, "same, girl." Despite whatever caused the mascara to run down this girl's cheeks, she decided to pick herself up and just move forward because that is what Generation Z does. Aside from being exceptionally relatable for college students, this haiku also has a great structure. Reading the first line, the reader expects the rest of the poem to be followed by sadness, but they do not. Rather, they read "peace sign... mirror selfie" and understand just *how* the author is coping with their troubles. This haiku was very well received in class and for good reason.

too late
to transfer
taco night

Nico Velazquez, Kukai 1, "Global Haiku Tradition Assignments Blog - Fall 2021," 43

Honestly, Nico Velazquez is the king of the casual college student haiku. This poem consists of six words yet develops the mood incredibly well. The mix of defeat from being stuck at the same college for another semester or year and coping with tacos speaks to college students on a relatable level. "We are trapped here, so let's celebrate, I guess." I deeply connected with this haiku for that reason. With that, taco night is very personalized depending on the reader. Some who read this imagined the author browning ground beef in their apartment at The Woods ready to scoop them into hard taco shells while others may have pictured someone cooking chorizo, making *good* authentic tacos to combat the semester that is about to come, and then there are those who thought, "this is a Taco Bell drive-through kind of night." Either way, any and all college students are able to interpret this poem and make it their own, which is what I love so much about it. "We're all in this together. Here, grab a taco!"

In summary, there are several nuances that make casual haiku written by college students relatable to readers. From a writing standpoint, the haiku that established the best connections with myself and others had structure with misdirection, acting as a plot twist line by line. This allowed for the change of emotions to hit harder, making the response much more sudden and genuine. Then, there is the content. Haiku does not need to be prim and proper all the time to get a positive response from the reader. Drinks, thongs, nipples, farts, and beans encouraged the reader to feel more relaxed reading the poems and relate to their contents, for life is full of casual, silly moments, especially as college students. Finally, these poems, above all else, are honest. Why write about all those aforementioned unsophisticated things? Easy answer: because they exist and entered the author's life one way or another. No one is pretending to be artistic or write a haiku for someone else's pleasure; they are writing this haiku because they lived it. These haiku, while humorous in nature, communicate several different emotions: confusion about growing up, childhood nostalgia, panic from parents, content to the fullest extent, heartbreak, and acceptance. College students are on the precipice of entering the "adult world" while feeling like a kid inside, and these haiku embody that notion. Anyone

can read a breathtaking emotional haiku and feel a connection, but in my opinion, what best completes the experience of reading haiku is taking in a poem that reads *real* on all fronts, and these haiku do that better than any I have read throughout the class.

Works Cited

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