Japanese Travel Poetry: An Introduction

Class: Creative Writing  Duration: 10 Days (All period, every day)
Grade Level: High School – 11th and 12th Grades

TIP Summary
In this creative writing class, students will study Japanese travel poetry from the classical and medieval age focusing on the works of Saigyō and Bashō. Students will study the poems through the linkages across time by different poets visiting the same or similar places; second, by reading travel and renga (linked verse) sequences, and through discussions of specific waka (long poems) and haiku (short poems) from nikki (diaries). Poets activities and utamakura (allusions, particularly to historically and poetically significant places) will be mapped using a google earth-based tool that contains audio, video and text.

As the class reads and discusses Japanese waka and haiku, each will create a short travel diary using the nikki (diary) format. The poems will be mapped into the google earth mapping tool. The sequence will be work shopped by the class and then revised and submitted for publication on the fhspanthers creative space page.

Goals

- Students can describe, provide examples and express the importance of nikki and its place in Japanese literature.

- Students can analyze nikki with haiku and waka for travel sequences using Saigyo and Basho as points of reference.

- Students can adapt the nikki, haiku and waka forms into English poetic forms.

- Students can describe and analyze emotional elements of haiku and waka and can create poems using these elements in a travel setting.

- Students can spatially map places and add text and media files related to Japanese writers as well as mapping their own travel poetry.

Essential Questions

- What role did Japanese Travel Poetry have in the life and literature of the Japanese in the classic and medieval periods? Why? For what classes of people?

- In what ways did Buddhist thought and social structures contribute to travel poetry? Does the quote from Varley (pg. 96) summarize this influence?
- How do the aesthetic concepts of wabi-sabi, yugen, and mono no aware contribute to the poetical and emotional haiku and waka? In what ways do these concepts affect the traveler’s response to place and life as depicted in travel poems?

- In what ways do utamakura (allusions found in classical poetry) and haimakura (allusions found in the new haiku poetry) strengthen the nikki and associated poems? In what ways can the use of these places limit the haiku and waka? Are poems better because the poet visits the place he or she writes about? How did Saigyo and Basho handle the issue of utamakura?

- What is Basho’s relationship to Saigyo in *The Narrow Road to Oku*? How does this affect his journey, his form and his use of utamakura? Does Basho’s fictionalizing of his journey trouble you?

- What are the technical structures of waka, renga, renku and haiku. How is haiku related to the renga form? Are haiku and waka strengthened or weakened by the prose introductions?

- In writing haiku and waka in English, how important are technical aspects such as syllable count, turning point and utamakura? How important are wabi-sabi, yugen and mono no aware?

**Vocabulary**
Many poetic and aesthetic terms are found in wikipedia and in other internet sources. Resources listed below contain glossaries and indexes placing these terms in context.

emaki, engo, haikai no renga, haiku, inja, kake-kobota, kana, makota, miyabi, mono no aware, mujo, nikki, nikki bungaku, okashi, renku, ronin, sabi (wabi-sabi), wabi, waka, yojo, yugen, zuihitsu

**Poets and Poems**
Selecting poems and poets is a highly personal choice driven by your involvement with the students and their interests. Keene’s *Travelers of a Hundred Years* provides guidance to travel diaries. Both poetry anthologies listed below identify travel poems and support Keene’s book. I recommend Saigyo and Basho not only for the quality of their poetry, but also for their impact on poetry and travel. Ueda’s breakdown of Basho’s *A Winter Shower* is an effective introduction to form and technique, aesthetics and mood. Basho’s *Narrow Road to Oku* is generally well-received by my students, but I find many students react best to individual diary entries (prose and poem) that link across time through mood, metaphor or place. I will share the web site I use with my students upon request.  
erebmann@fairbanks.k12.oh.us  The poets Ki no Tsurayuki, Noin, Jukaren, Princess Shikishi, Fujiwara no Teika, Tonna, and Sogi. Keene’s *Traveler’s* provides an introduction to many of these writers. Carter’s anthology provides biographical details and poems for each. Both sources may be used for the period following Basho. Consider using Plutschow’s work as well for poets and travelers after Basho. It includes a road map of the Edo period.

**Culminating Products and Performances**

**Group**
  Workshop  
  Project to the web  
  Renga (Extension)

**Individual**
  Spatial map of individual travel sequence
Travel sequence of individual haiku or waka poems
Workshop response to the nikki of other students

Assessments

**Formative (During Project)**
Spatial maps of poem references with written, audio or image notes, e.g. Saigyo and Basho, journal responses, haiku and waka

**Summative (End of Project)**
Spatial map of individual travel sequence
Travel sequence of individual haiku or waka poems
Response to the nikki of others. (Workshop)
Rengu (extension)

Resources

**People/Facilities**
Lead teacher, English Teacher, Classroom, Mac Lab/Cart, Moodle, Google Docs

**Equipment**
Google Earth, Spatial Mapping Tool, Journals, Drawing Pads/Flash, Cameras

**Materials**
Reading shelf
Reading Packet
Part 1 - Selected Poems (Links across ages emphasized)
Part 2 - Selections of Travel poetry
Part 3 - Traditions of Poetry in Japan
Part 4 – Travel Poetry and utamakira/haimakura
Part 5 – An introduction to the waka and haiku forms

Saigyo’s *Mirror For the Moon*
Basho’s *The Narrow Road to Oku*
Media Files on Japan, Basho, Saigyo, Haiku and Waka

Schedule

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<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
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<td>The Japanese poetic tradition.</td>
<td>The nature of haiku and waka (Travel Poems). The nikki.</td>
<td>Read and discuss Saigyo and Basho’s work. Journal Response</td>
<td>Continue discussion, map specific utamakura and student responses. Journal Response</td>
<td>Writing Assignment (Craft a travel of your own with either waka or nikki separated by nikki creating drawing or media files to augment in spatial mapping. Journal Plan</td>
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<td>Waka and haiku response with explanation of form and tone.</td>
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Supporting Resources


**Standards**

**Language Arts**

**Writing Process Standard**
A. Formulate writing ideas and identify a topic appropriate to the purpose and audience.
B. Select and use an appropriate organizational structure to refine and develop ideas for writing.
C. Use a variety of strategies to revise content, organization and style and to improve word choice, sentence variety, clarity and consistency of writing.
D. Apply editing strategies to eliminate slang and improve conventions.
E. Apply tools to judge the quality of the writing.
F. Prepare writing for publication that follows an appropriate format and uses a variety of techniques to enhance the final product.

**Writing Application Standard**
A. Compose reflective writings that balance reflections by using specific personal experiences to draw conclusions about life.
B. Write responses to literature that provide an interpretation, recognize ambiguities, nuance and complexities and that understand the author’s use of stylistic devices and effects.

**English – Reference Standard**
A through E

**Technology**

**Standard 3 – Technology For Productivity Applications**

**Benchmark B:** Identify, select and apply appropriate technology tools and resources to produce creative works and to construct technology-enhanced models.