

Teaching and Writing Korean Sijo Poetry

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Class: International Seminar and Global Scholars Seminar

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Matter: Chinese Culture

Teaching and Writing Korean Sijo Poetry



Essential Questions:

What is poetry? What is the purpose of poetry? What does Korean sijo poetry look like?
How does sijo poetry and art (or music) complement each other?

Objectives:

- Students define poetry; students analyze sijo poetry.
- To learn about Korean writers and their important sijo writings
- To read, investigate and interpret the style and meaning of sijo poems
- To learn about three line format, structure and syllables in sijo poetry
- Students write their own Korean sijo poetry depicting culture, seasons and/or everyday life.
- To create piece of art to complement the student's own sijo poem

Common Core Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

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1. In this lesson, the students will learn about the history and features of sijo, analyze sijo poems, think about what a reader of a sijo poem could discover about the Korean culture, compare and contrast different translations of the same poem, attempt their own translation of a few Korean words, and write their own sijo.

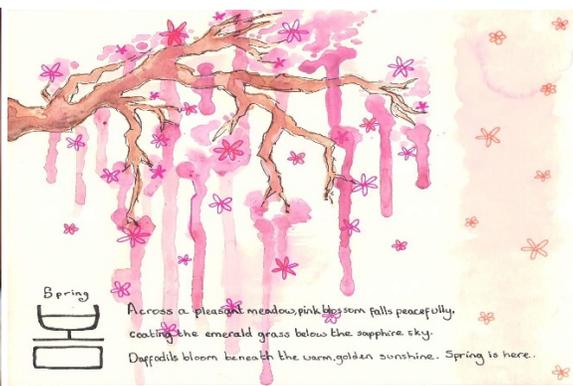
Directions: Students will define “poetry” and discuss in class the main purpose of poetry, especially in Korea society. Next, students will learn about Korean writers, read and analyze several important sijo writings. As a class or in small groups, students will read, investigate and interpret the style and meaning of sijo poems.

After practicing and writing their own sijo poems, students will create a piece of art to complement and/or interpret the meaning of their poems.

Introduction:

1. Have students define poetry in their own words.
2. Who can say poetry in a sentence?
3. Have students brainstorm and write down ten words they know about the purpose of poetry.
4. What words come to mind when they think about Korean or Asian poetry?

After the students have written down their key words, have students say some of their key words and write a list up on the board.



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2. General Information and History of Sijo Poems

Sources:

Korean Sijo Poetry by Chong Mong-Ju, Hwang Chini, Yi Sun-Sin, and Other Sijo Poets. Amy Stoltenberg; Highland High School, August 2010.

A Brief History:

When the verse form of sijo (she-jo) appeared at the end of the Koryo period in the late 14th century, it was considered a literary form truly unique to Korea, and has remained popular to this day. One of the reasons for its wide appeal is due to the fact that it was actually written in Korean. Chinese was the language used in all formal writing, while Korean was the language used in speaking. So then why did it all of a sudden become acceptable for a new, completely original literary form to be written in Korean? Because sijo was originally intended to be sung, the writers thought their audience would be more of a listening audience, rather than a reading one. In fact, the Korean alphabet wasn't even invented until the mid-15th century, so there was a period of about 50 years where sijo was mainly a performing art.

The word "sijo" wasn't universally used to describe this poetic form until the 1920's, when it was used as the title of an anthology of the poems. In Chinese (remember that was the written language used in Korea for much of its history), there are two characters that are used to write sijo: one meaning "time" or "period" and the other meaning "song." The name sijo has been used alternately as a description of seasonal theme of the poems or the music they are set to.

Before the 1920's, the word tan'ga ("short lyric") was used to describe the actual poem, and sijo was used for the music. Eventually, the term sijo became to mean both the poem itself and the music. Though sijo was originally intended to be sung, the music part of it was never a requirement for people to enjoy the poetry. Sijo singing was considered a classy art, reserved for the upper echelons of society, but that did not mean that everyone else couldn't be familiar with the actual words (think opera—with music, for the upper classes; just spoken, without the music, for the average people).



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3. Format, Structure and Syllables in Sijo Poetry

Sijo Form

- Sijo is a specialized poetic form, like Haiku.
- It is written in three (3) lines and must follow a syllabic (syllable) pattern:
 - My watch is broken = 5 syllables.
 - The clock is under the desk--what time does it say? = 13 syllables.
- Each line must have 14-16 syllables.



Sources:

http://sejongculturalsociety.org/writing/current/resources/sijo_guide.php

The sijo (Korean 시조, pronounced SHEE-jo) is a traditional three-line Korean poetic form typically exploring cosmological, metaphysical, or pastoral themes. Organized both technically and thematically by line and syllable count, sijo are expected to be phrasal and lyrical, as they are first and foremost meant to be songs.

Sijo are written in three lines, each averaging 14-16 syllables for a total of 44-46 syllables. Each line is written in four groups of syllables that should be clearly differentiated from the other groups, yet still flow together as a single line. When written in English, sijo may be written in six lines, with each line containing two syllable groupings instead of four. Additionally, as shown in the example below, liberties may be taken (within reason) with the number of syllables per group as long as the total syllable count for the line remains the same.

The first line is usually written in a 3-4-4-4 grouping pattern and states the theme of the poem, where a situation generally introduced.

The second line is usually written in a 3-4-4-4 pattern (similar to the first) and is an elaboration of the first line's theme or situation (development).

The third line is divided into two sections. The first section, the counter-theme, is grouped as 3-5, while the second part, considered the conclusion of the poem, is written as 4-3. The counter-theme is called the 'twist,' which is usually a surprise in meaning, sound, or other device.

Example:

You ask how many friends I have? Water and stone, bamboo and pine. (2-6-4-4)

The moon rising over the eastern hill is a joyful comrade. (2-4-4-6)

Besides these five companions, what other pleasure should I ask? (2-5, 5-3)

-Yun Seondo (1587-1671), excerpt from "Song of My Five Friends."

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4. Analyze and Interpret the Style and Meaning of Sijo Poems.

Sources:

<http://chosonkorea.org/index.php/culture/literature/sijopoetry>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sijo>

*Though I die, and die again; though I die one hundred deaths;
Long after my bones have turned to dust; whether my soul exists or not;
My one red heart, forever and always loyal to my lord, will never fade away.*

- Chǒng Mong-ju (1337-1392) was sentenced to death because he would not betray the Koryŏ king that he served from Koryo to Choson Dynasty.



조선글 한글

*Sun lights up the hill behind, mist rises on the channel ahead.
Push the boat, push the boat!
The night tide has gone out, the morning tide is coming in.
Jigukchong, jigukchong, eosawa!
Untamed flowers along the shore reach out to the far village.*

-Yun Seon-do (1587–1671) wrote a famous collection of forty sijo of the changing seasons through the eyes of a fisherman.

*Where pure snow flakes melt
Dark clouds gather threatening
Where are the spring flowers bloom?
A lonely figure lost in the shadow
of sinking sun, I have no place to go.*

— Yi Saek (1328–1395), on the decline of Goryeo Kingdom.

*The spring breeze melted snow on the hills then quickly disappeared.
I wish I could borrow it briefly to blow over my hair
And melt away the aging frost forming now about my ears.*

— U Tak (1262–1342)

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*All alone, I see the moon so bright, as I sit on fortress walls.
My sword held close tonight I keep the watch with anxious heart.
Yet somewhere in the darkened night, a pipe lulls worry away.*

-Admiral Yi Sun-shin wrote the following Sijo in the 1590's during his campaign against the Japanese while on an island fortress in seas just south of Korea at Hansan Island Fortress.

5. Ideas For Writing a Sijo Poem

- Think of a season, a place or occasion you would like to set your poem in.
- For example, does it occur in the spring or winter, is it located on a hillside or by the sea, or is it on a birthday or a special holiday?
- Next, which season you want to associate with the "twist."
- Decide what you want the theme of your poem to be, and then think about what the opposite of that would be—that's your anti-theme, or "twist."
- It can occur in historical or modern times. Be creative!!

Sources:

McCann, David R. *Early Korean Literature: Selections and Introductions*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

McCann, David R. "The Sijo, A Window into Korean Culture." *Education About Asia*. 15 (2010): 53-54.

Utt, Richard. *The Bamboo Grove: An Introduction to Sijo*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1971.



Assessment:

Students will be given several days to work on their projects in class or computer lab. They will create a piece of visual art to complement the sijo poems. Students will read aloud their sijo poems, explain the significance of their art work and how it relates to the poem. Students will be graded on their knowledge and accuracy of content, creativity and organization of the product, and presentation skills.

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Try your hand at writing a Sijo poem. Use the space below to work on a first draft about the picture above as your inspiration.