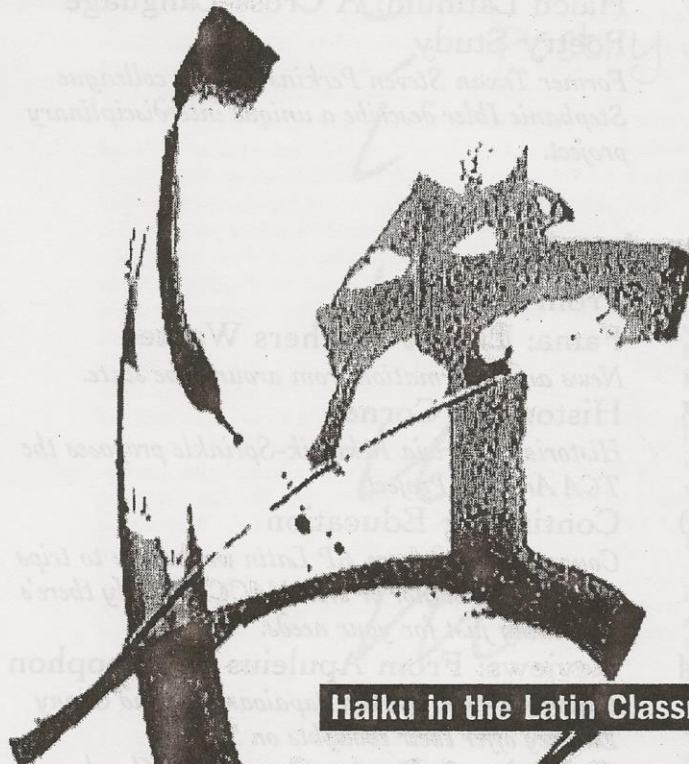


Texas Classics in Action

Winter 2002



Haiku in the Latin Classroom

Sins to Avoid when Reading Latin

Continuing Education That's Right for You

and more!

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a complex, heavily inflected language, frequently capable of expressing an entire thought in a single word. Immediate challenges present themselves to Latin haiku poets as they grapple with haiku themes using a language that at times seems more suited to describing the conquests of war.

Such was the context in which the Japanese and Latin teachers began to explore the possibilities of utilizing the haiku form between their classes. The initial task was to create a project that not only inspired students to create personal haiku in their target language, but also one that connected the Latin and Japanese classes through these haiku. With that challenge in mind, both teachers worked together to determine the project outline, student objectives, and the project schedule.

Project Outline

The overall goals of this interdisciplinary project were for students to: (1) develop a deeper appreciation for the unique Japanese literary form haiku, (2) see how haiku has transcended the Japanese language into other languages (particularly, English and Latin), (3) read and study professional haiku works in their respective languages, (4) work with another foreign language class, and finally (5) create their own personal haiku in the target language.

A third year Latin class and a combined fourth- and fifth-year Japanese class were chosen to participate in the project. These classes were chosen primarily because of their relatively small class sizes, their upper-level, working knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, as well as the maturity necessary to enjoy and appreciate an interdisciplinary project such as this. As their work

and their grades were somewhat dependent upon one another, these considerations were taken into account.

How would their work be dependent upon one another? Each student created two haiku in their target language along with English translations. After rough drafts had been written, checked and corrected, if necessary, each poem was then written on an 11 x 17 piece of paper in portrait orientation. The top third was for the original haiku, the middle third for the English translation, and the bottom third reserved for the respective Japanese or Latin translation of the original haiku, rendered by a peer in the other class who also illustrated the entire work. For example, a Japanese student created an original Japanese haiku, writing it neatly in the top third of the paper. The same student provided an English translation of the haiku, also in haiku format, in the middle third of the paper. The Japanese student then submitted it to the Japanese teacher, who turned it over to the Latin teacher. The poem was then given randomly to a Latin student who, based on the English translation, composed a Latin haiku rendering of the original. The Latin student was also responsible for illustrating and decorating this poem. The same was done in reverse as Latin students created Latin poems with English translations, which were given to Japanese students to be translated and illustrated. The final result was a collection of illustrated haiku poems written in three different languages.

Eight class days were taken to complete the project, and the schedule is explained in detail below. On the first day of the project, both classes came together for a joint introduction of haiku. Most students

had been introduced to haiku in their English classes as a form of poetry and are familiar with the 5-7-5-syllable format, but many were unfamiliar with its origins and aesthetic qualities. Days two through seven were dedicated to reading and examining haiku in the target languages, writing original haiku, and finally translating and illustrating the haiku received from the partner class. The project culminated on day eight with both classes reconvening for a poetry reading. Here, each student's poem was read by the unknown peer who had translated and illustrated the work. The three-language poem was then returned to its author who then had a keepsake from the project.

Project Schedule

DAY 1 INTRODUCTION TO HAIKU.

- ❖ Both classes join together for a discussion on the origins, form and aesthetic qualities of Japanese haiku.
- ❖ Examples of famous Japanese poets and their haiku are given.
- ❖ Discussion of haiku today and around the world.
- ❖ Discussion of possible reasons why the ancient Romans did not compose haiku, and the development of modern Latin haiku writing.

DAY 2 BEGIN READING HAIKU.

- ❖ In their respective languages, each class reads, analyzes and discusses haiku poetry written by various poets and authors.
- ❖ In the Japanese class, students are given famous haiku in Japanese and a dictionary. They translate the haiku into English and see how their version compares to other

English translations.

- ❖ In the Latin class, students read and discuss Latin haiku on traditional haiku themes, as well as on typically Roman themes.

DAY 3 FINISH READING HAIKU; BEGIN WRITING OWN HAIKU.

- ❖ Japanese students are provided with a list of nature and seasonal words.
- ❖ Latin students have use of a Latin-English, English-Latin dictionary.

DAY 4 CONTINUE WRITING ROUGH DRAFTS OF HAIKU; PREPARE FOR THE FINAL COPIES.

DAY 5 COMPLETE THE FINAL COPIES OF EACH POEM.

- ❖ Copies due at the end of the period or by the beginning of the next school day.
- ❖ Students do not write their names on their work, but are assigned a number. The object is for the writers and translators to be anonymous.
- ❖ Students bring in their own materials for mounting and decorating, e.g. poster board, mounting board, etc.

DAY 6 RECEIVE THE POEMS FROM THE OTHER CLASS; BEGIN TRANSLATIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

DAY 7 FINISH TRANSLATIONS, ILLUSTRATION AND DECORATION OF THE POEMS.

- ❖ Finished product due at the end of the period or no later than the beginning of the next school day.

DAY 8 BOTH CLASSES REJOIN TOGETHER FOR A POETRY READING IN A SPECIAL ROOM RESERVED FOR THE

EVENT.

- ❖ The anonymous authors are revealed as students read aloud the poems they have translated and illustrated. The original author of the poem joins the translator as the poem is read and then returned as a keepsake.

An exciting challenge for both teachers was to design a cross-language project that would address all five of the National Foreign Language Standards. As it turned out, this project naturally lent itself to achieving this goal.

For those who are less familiar with the national standards, also known as the "five C's," they address five major components of foreign language instruction: communication in languages other than English, understanding of other cultures, connections with other disciplines, comparisons of one culture with another, and participation in multilingual communities. Each of these five areas contain numbered standards describing how students should be able to show proficiency within each goal.

Communication

The haiku project addressed two aspects of the communication standard, understanding and interpreting written language, and presentation. Composing poems in their target languages required students to understand the nuances, idioms, and limits of flexibility in their languages. This became even more evident when they had to translate the poems from the students in the other class. When a Latin student, for example, wrote a haiku about a uniquely Roman political office, the Japanese translator was forced to look past the details of language to inter-

pret the heart of the poem.

The students addressed the presentational component of communication in the summative activity in which they took turns reading aloud the poems they had written and translated. Students from each language were intrigued to hear their poems pronounced in the different language, and those within a particular language were often amused to hear how certain ideas had been rendered by their classmates.

Cultures

One standard for this particular goal is for students to understand the relationship between the products and perspectives of a given culture. During the initial session in which both classes joined for an introduction to the project, and throughout the project itself, students had the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss why haiku, in both its form and traditional themes, originated in Japan. They also explored why the epic content and rhythms of dactylic hexameter were the most popular among the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Connections

With this goal it is hoped that students will reinforce and gain knowledge of other disciplines through their language of study. Although this can certainly take the form of reading in the foreign language about other subjects, this project allowed for a more hands-on engagement with a wide range of topics. The Japanese students learned much about Roman culture by translating the Latin haiku, and the Latin students gained a deeper understanding of Japanese life in the same way. Additionally, through the specificity of vocabulary, students reinforced their awareness of differences and similarities in a vari-

ety of topics. A tree, for example, might conjure a certain image, but the words "oak" or "willow" imply distinct qualities, the appropriateness of which a student had then to consider for a particular poem.

Comparisons

This project provided a unique opportunity to develop deep insights into the nature of their own languages and cultures of study. Most of the students conceived the ideas for their poems in English and then attempted to write them in their language of study. They quickly discovered that a word-to-word correspondence does not always exist between two languages, and that even when it does, connotative differences and idioms often require different ways of stating an idea. For those who attempted to conceive their ideas first in the target language, the syntactic and syllabic challenges of working within the haiku framework prompted them to explore a variety of modes of expression.

The Japanese and Latin students also developed a keener insight into the cultures of their languages through the translation component of the project. The Japanese students had followed traditional themes of nature in their original compositions, whereas the Latin students often chose to explore various aspects of Roman society. When they translated the work of their counterparts, students in both classes confronted the strengths and gaps of their own vocabularies. Questions arose regarding why Latin students knew multiple synonyms for "kill" and Japanese students knew the words for many types of flowers. Students discovered the answers to such in questions in part by considering more closely the time periods

and cultures that produced these two languages.

Communities

Though unable in practice to address this goal this year, the teachers hope to invite native speakers of Japanese who live in the school community to participate in the final sharing of haiku between the two classes. The interaction of native speakers and second-language students, while always of value to the students, can also benefit the native speakers as they witness their language and culture continuing and developing in a new setting.

This interdisciplinary project proved to be an overwhelming success for the Japanese and Latin teachers and their students. The students met, even exceeded, the project objectives of learning more about the haiku literary form through hands-on experience. In the end, they walked away with a deeper understanding of the aesthetic Japanese belief of how a simple word or object can convey such deep meaning. The students also gained an appreciation of the poetic form itself. Most found it very challenging to create feelings, personal experiences or ideas in the target language in such a simple, concise form. Indeed, it was an exercise of the mind.

Perhaps the biggest challenges for both Japanese and Latin students were vocabulary, grammar and content issues. For example, most Japanese students created haiku with the traditional themes of nature and the four seasons, learning a host of new vocabulary. However, after years of grammar and particle drilling, they found certain conjugations and particles to be largely unnecessary. In addition, the Japanese students found it as difficult a task

to translate Roman concepts such as *gladiator* or *praetor*, as the Latin students had with Japanese themes such as cherry blossoms in the spring. The teachers encouraged their students to think about the overall essence of the poem as opposed to word for word translations. Certain words convey images in the mind. Therefore, detailed descriptions or direct translations are not needed.

Evaluating the project, the Latin teacher was pleased to see some of his students thinking and creating in Latin first as opposed to writing the English version first and then translating it into Latin. He was also thrilled to see the use of traditional Roman themes in student poems, as well as synthesis of material students had learned earlier in the year. True language usage and learning! The Japanese teacher saw in her students a true eagerness to create their own haiku. Most sought to utilize the traditional Japanese themes of nature and seasons while conveying their own personal experiences. The project also inspired some of her less-motivated students to embrace a deeper engagement with the language. For all students, there was a general anticipation of how their poetry would be presented and illustrated. Both teachers were very pleased with the way the students approached the project and with the final results of the students' work and presentations.

As with any project the first time around, it is a learning process. While both teachers enjoyed the success of their first Japanese-Latin haiku project, they are already looking forward to the second annual interdisciplinary project in which they hope, among other goals, to involve members from the local community. The multi-level successes of this project, however, prove its validity and feasibility in almost any curricular environment. Thus, it can truly be said,

Haicu Latinum
Iaponicumque iunctum
Optimus mundus

• • •

Additional Reading:

Higginson, William J. *Haiku Handbook: How to Write, Share and Teach Haiku*. Kodansha International, 1992. ISBN 4770014309.

Sacré, Dirk and Marcel Smets, Ed. *Tonight They All Dance*. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc. 1999. ISBN 086516440-1. See also the review in the Reviews section of this journal.

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