

But Who's Counting?

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In my 25 years of teaching, I always believed haiku had to have a 5-7-5 syllable pattern. And I thought haiku also had to have a title.

When I retired and joined a learning-in-retirement group called the Renaissance Institute of the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, I signed up for a 13-week haiku class. I thought, “What will she do after the first day after she shows us the 5-7-5 pattern?” I didn’t know that I had a major learning experience before me.

Anita Weiss, the instructor, who was nearing 90, had begun to work with haiku when she was 88. She was excellent, and in her class, I learned the “Isn’ts of Haiku,” one of which is that haiku is NOT a poem with 5-7-5 syllables. The class was amazing. We all wrote haiku and some followed the 5-7-5 syllable pattern, but most did not. Anita taught us for several years until her physical problems made teaching too demanding. However, she did encourage me to give it a try — and to learn as I taught, just as she had done.

Just before Anita’s death this spring, I met her good friend, Cathy Drinkwater Better (Walker), who is a vibrant, outgoing, prolific freelance writer. Cathy writes wonderful haiku and her poems appear in many journals. Cathy and I both belong to Towpath, a haiku group in the Washington, D.C., area. We agreed that we would like to have a haiku group closer to Baltimore. Thus, the Haiku Poets of Central Maryland was formed. Our modest dues, \$5 a year, will be used to produce chapbooks or anthologies of our members’ writings. We meet bi-monthly on Saturdays for 2 hours to share information and workshop our poems.

Cathy inaugurated the annual Anita Sadler Weiss Memorial Haiku Award. This competition awarded a total of \$500 in prize money. We received over 350 entries from 26 states and many foreign countries.

The “Isn’ts of Haiku” can be found online at this address: <http://members.aol.com/usdare2/kuisnt.htm>

Also, the Haiku Society of America (HSA) has an excellent teaching packet that can be used with students of all ages. <http://www.hsa-haiku.org/res-teach.htm>

Another good article can be found at this site: <http://www.haikuworld.org/dogwood/8/viii.html>

There is a wealth of information available online.

Now that I have taught three semesters of haiku, I feel I am beginning to know more about haiku as an art form. I have begun to submit my haiku and experience the joy of having them accepted. All my class members say they view the world in a new way, looking for the “haiku moment.” I fully agree with this and I have written over 100 haiku in four years — but who’s counting?

suburban night
fireflies dimmed
by security light

one library corner —
small children sit quietly
in another world

white hair and pink scalp —
her crooked fingers knit
hats for newborns

silent summer morning —
she won’t hear
the next cicadas’ song

(written for Anita’s memorial service)