

# USING THE HAIKU EYE

Recommended for  
Middle and High School

This lesson is primarily based on reading *The Narrow Road to Oku* (also known as *The Narrow Road to the Far North*) by Matsuo Basho (1644–1694). The translation by Donald Keene is powerfully written, accurate, and compellingly illustrated (Matsuo, 1996). After learning about Basho's adventures and reading his powerful yet simple poems, students will follow his example, starting their own haiku notebook that will interweave personal experience, poems from their favorite writers, and their own haiku.

Simple but expressive, the haiku poetry of Matsuo Basho is beloved. Basho lived the life of a wandering poet while studying classical poetry, history, and Zen Buddhism. His verses reflect upon aspects of nature, from the mundane to the universal. The 1689 travelogue *The Narrow Road to Oku* combines both prose and haiku and is considered one of his best works.

### Text-to-Self Questions

Basho was exceptionally knowledgeable, and his writing weaves together his understanding of history, religion, and mythology. At one point, he is moved to tears when he discovers the Tsubo Monument, an important stele. He reflects:

*Time passes and the world changes. The remains of the past are shrouded in uncertainty. And yet, here before my eyes was a monument which none would deny had lasted a thousand years. I felt as though I was looking into the minds of the men of old.*

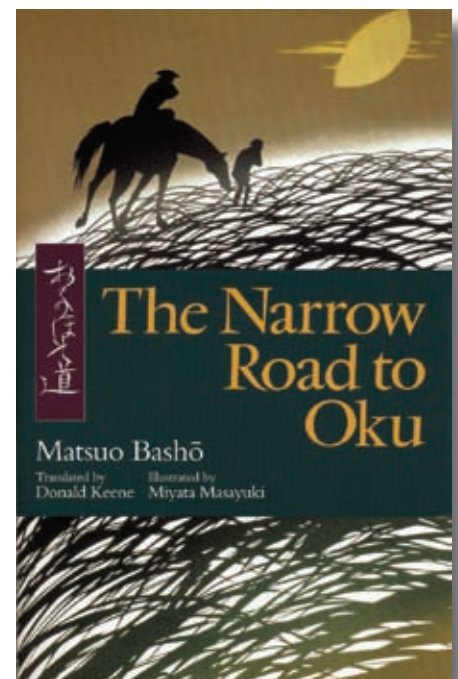
From *The Narrow Road to Oku* by Matsuo Basho,  
trans. by Donald Keene (Kodansha International, 1996), pp. 75.

Do you or people in your family have any objects that help you connect with the past? Describe an object, how it came to your family, and what it means to you personally, and then write a haiku about it.

## INTRODUCTION

## LITERATURE

*The Narrow Road to Oku*  
by Matsuo Basho, trans. by Donald Keene  
illus. by Miyata Masayuki



### **Analyzing Text**

Basho's notebook is unusual in that it weaves together two very different types of writing: memoir and haiku. In some places, Basho provides two descriptions of one experience that highlight the different attributes of these styles. For example, look at his descriptions of climbing up to, and behind, a waterfall. His narrative description provides the facts:

*We climbed a mile or so up the mountain to a waterfall that cascaded a hundred feet from the roof of a cave down into an azure pool lined with a thousand stones. By crawling into the cave one gets the view of the waterfall from behind that gives the name of "Rear View Falls."*

From *The Narrow Road to Oku* by Matsuo Basho,  
trans. by Donald Keene (Kodansha International, 1996), pp. 31.

In his haiku, Basho provides his subjective experience of the waterfall, with references to a spiritual journey:

*For a little while  
I'll shut myself inside the falls—  
Summer retreat has begun.*

From *The Narrow Road to Oku* by Matsuo Basho,  
trans. by Donald Keene (Kodansha International, 1996), pp. 31.

Be alert to the tension of the objective and subjective in the writings of Basho and other authors. Which genres of writing are inherently more subjective or objective?

- Poetry
- Prose
- Fiction
- Nonfiction (informational and expository)
- Dramatic literature

### **Writing Project**

If you have studied haiku poetry before, you know that it has a specific number of syllables per line (5-7-5). Actually, many poets feel that the structure is of secondary importance when writing haiku. Consider the words of 20th-century American writer and poet Jack Kerouac:

*The American Haiku is not exactly the Japanese Haiku. The Japanese Haiku is strictly disciplined to seventeen syllables but since the language structure is different I don't think American Haikus (short three-line poems intended to be completely packed with Void of Whole) should worry about syllables because American speech is something again... bursting to pop.*

Kerouac, Jack. *American Haiku*. 1959. [users.rcn.com/jhudak.interport/jack.html](http://users.rcn.com/jhudak.interport/jack.html); 15 February 2006.

Create a haiku notebook, or designate a part of your writer's notebook for haiku. Gather memories and observations in your notebook, and then write haiku based on these ideas. Think about how you can turn narrative into poetry by "pruning" words that do not convey much meaning (such as articles and pronouns) and rearranging those that do (such as nouns and verbs).

Don't forget to include haiku from other poets in your notebook. Basho's journal includes many poems by his friend Sora.

### *Object-to-Text Questions*

Select one of the Japanese works of art from the PEM Art Cards. Think about what the artwork looks like, how it may have been used, what you think it would be like to make an object like it, or how it makes you feel. Write a haiku to express your thoughts.

Ask students to spend some time with an individual object in the gallery. Remind them how Basho was moved by seeing the Tsubo Monument. Ask them to consider how their object speaks to them and to reflect on it in either a narrative or a haiku or both.

Find the work of art that inspired your haiku. Spend some time looking at the object and reading your poem to yourself. Then recite the poem to your classmates. Take this opportunity to create another haiku using a different object in the gallery. How would you compare the two haiku?

**ART DISCUSSION with  
PEM ART CARDS**

**MUSEUM VISIT LESSONS**

**ART ACTIVITY**  
**Making Yotsumi Toji**  
**Japanese Four-Hole Binding**  
**by Karen Fuller**

[freespace.virgin.net/beaux-arts.bindings/tutorial.html](http://freespace.virgin.net/beaux-arts.bindings/tutorial.html)

**Materials needed**

- 2 sheets of thin cardstock for the covers
- Stack of paper for the pages of the book
- Linen or colored embroidery thread (4.5 times the height of the book)
- Needle
- Drill with 2.5 mm or 3 mm bit (depending on thickness of thread)
- Old flat piece of wood to drill on
- 2 clothes pegs

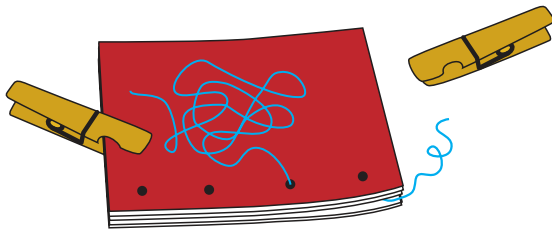
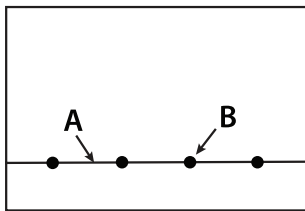
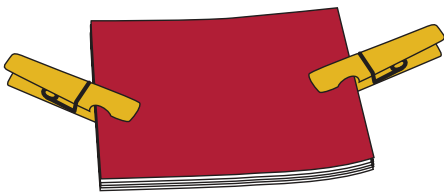
**Instructions**

*Section 1: Compiling the book*

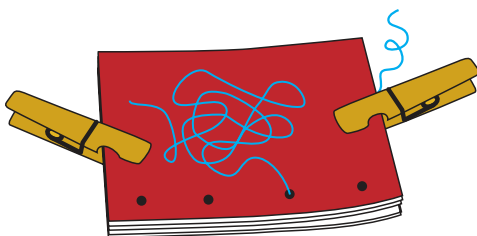
1. Tear or cut the pages of your book to size and stack in a pile. Similarly do the same with the covers (making them slightly larger) and place on the top and bottom of the pile. Make sure the edges are level on one of the longer sides and clip a clothes peg on either end.
2. The second stage is to mark the holes. Take a spare piece of paper cut to the size of the book.
  - A. Draw a line 2 cm in from the edge.
  - B. Mark holes 2 cm in on either end along the line.
  - C. Measure the amount remaining between those points, and divide by three to give an equal spacing between the other two holes
  - D. With four holes marked, clip this sheet of paper on top of your pile.
3. Place your old piece of wood under the book for protection. Use a drill (with a 2.5 mm bit) to make the holes. Remove the top sheet of paper from the book. Cut a length of thread four and a half times the height of the book, and thread your needle.

*Section 2: Binding the book*

1. Remove one clothes peg. From about halfway through the pages of the book, take the needle up through hole B. Leave enough thread trailing in the book to fasten it off. (Example A)  
Securely fasten the thread and book with the clothes peg you just removed, making sure that it is away from the binding edge. (Example B)

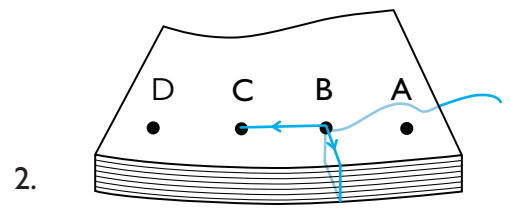


Example A

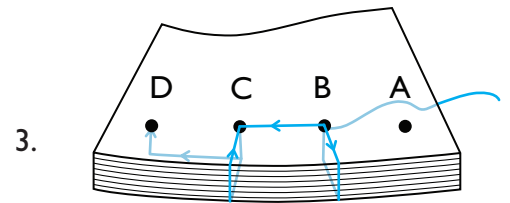


Example B

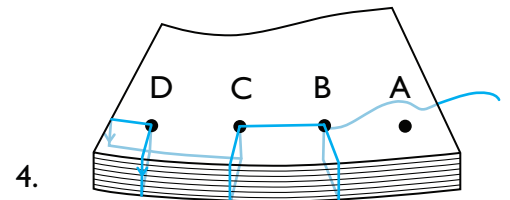
2. Take the needle around the spine of the book and back through hole B. Then push it through hole C.



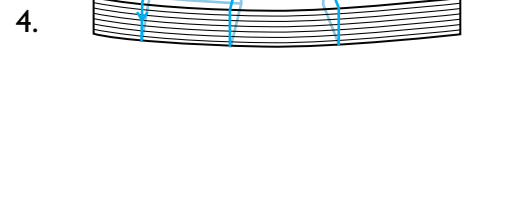
3. Repeat the procedure, and pull tightly, sewing around the spine by bringing the needle underneath the book and back up through hole D.



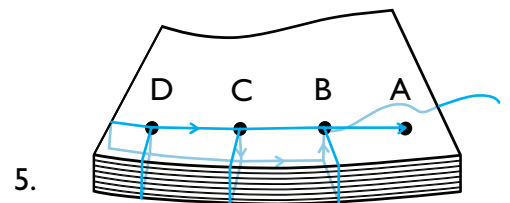
4. Repeat the procedure around the spine of hole D and around the end of the book and hole D.



5. Make a running stitch along the book to hole A.



6. Repeat instruction 4 above through hole A.



7. Remove the clips, and open the book to the loose thread inside. Push the needle through to the other thread, pull tightly, and tie a double knot. Cut the thread to leave around 2 cm ends.

## MASSACHUSETTS FRAMEWORKS

English Language Arts Strands: 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26

Foreign Language Curriculum Standards: 4

Visual Arts Learning Standards: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 10

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Yotsumi Toji Tutorial*. Karen Fuller. [freespace.virgin.net/beaux-arts.bindings/.beaux-arts.bindings](http://freespace.virgin.net/beaux-arts.bindings/.beaux-arts.bindings).

*Yin Yu Tang: A Chinese Home*. December 2002. Peabody Essex Museum. [pem.org/yinyutang/](http://pem.org/yinyutang/). Design by Second Story Inc.