



Creative Writing: Haiku Riddles

Writing haiku, with its limited number of syllables, encourages students to select most effective and resonant words. Creating and solving riddles engage their minds in a fun and imaginative manner. We use brainstorming and word association to create haiku riddles such as:

1

Made from trees and ink
I'm full of words, fun and wise,
for you to enjoy

2

Snow white, ruby eyes
I can hear you from afar
with my floppy ears

3

Morning sun shines on
teardrops from a frozen spear
piercing winter sky

4

Big fish made of wood
People cross the deep water
in its empty belly

5

No doors, no windows
A small red house on a tree
Inside lives a star



6

Hungry twin sisters
Same height, always together
Try every food first

7

Boil water and pour
Over the dried leaves, and sip
Its steamy fragrance

8

I travel at night
Dressed in black, to carry out
My secret mission

9

I may seem still, but
I'm turning, spinning, whirling
If I stop, I'll fall

10

Listen to my rhythm!
I'm the sound of your heartbeat
Played since ancient times

(Answers: 1 a book; 2 a rabbit; 3 an icicle; 4 a boat; 5 an apple; 6 chopsticks; 7 tea; 8 ninja; 9 a top; 10 a drum)



In my residency program, students may write an original folktale, using riddles as a problem-solving device. Here is an example story:

Ringo's Adventure **Written by Motoko**

Once upon a time, in old Japan, there lived a young boy named Ringo. Ringo lived with his father and baby sister, Momoka, in a little village right by a big river in northern part of Japan. Ringo's father owned a farm and an apple orchard, and Ringo enjoyed helping his father do all kinds of farm work.

One hot, muggy summer, a mysterious thing happened. The big river that went right by Ringo's family farm suddenly began to swell. The water became higher every day, covering the banks and spilling out into the roads and grassy fields. Ringo thought it was very strange, since they had not had much rain. In a few days the water began to cover the orchard, invade the barn, and creep into the basement of his farmhouse.

Ringo watched his father's face crease with worry. Little Momoka cried a lot, saying she was scared of water. The other villagers began to flee, anticipating a major flood.

"Hurry! The whole village may end up under water!" some villagers shouted as they struggled toward higher ground.

"Dad, what should we do?" Ringo asked. His father said, "I can't leave my orchard. Maybe you and your sister should escape without me."

"I can't do that, Dad," Ringo cried out, yet he had no idea what to do.

Ringo decided that he needed an advice from a wise person. The wisest person he knew was his grandmother, who lived in a little cottage across the village. Ringo walked two miles to her house. Every step brought him knee-deep into the muck.

When he finally reached her cottage, he found her sitting quietly in the living room, in front of the family altar where she paid respect to their ancestors' spirits. Ringo ran to the small, chubby woman with a mass of silver hair.



“Grandma! We are expecting a huge flood, but Dad refuses to leave! What should I do?” Ringo asked breathlessly, “And what are you going to do? Your front yard is flooded already, too!”

“Calm down, my child,” the grandmother said in a solemn voice. “I am not going anywhere. I am staying right here with our ancestors’ spirits. However, I’ve been waiting for you. You may be the only person who can save the village.”

“Me? Save the village? How?!” Ringo was confused.

“You must travel up the river to its origin at the highest peak of Mt. Adatara. Legends say that there lives a giantess named Sasuga, who has the power to control all the rivers. You must talk to her and ask for her help.”

“But what if she does not listen to me?”

“One thing I know about this giantess is that she likes riddles. Ringo, I know you are smart enough to handle her riddles. But are you brave enough to go?”

“Yes, grandma, I will go,” Ringo answered.

Ringo set off right away. He had no time to waste. He traveled uphill alongside the river. The ground felt drier as he climbed higher, yet he was surprised how much water there was in the stream. Soon he was walking through a deep, dark forest. Thick tree branches and lush leaves blocked the view of the sky. The air felt dense with the smell of wet earth. He heard nothing but his own footsteps and the constant sound of flowing water. Ringo felt creepy and a little scared, but the thought of saving his family and village kept him going.

It was dusk by the time he reached the top of the mountain. Finally he came to the highest peak of Mt. Adatara. A massive, jagged gray rock loomed in the sunset.

Suddenly Ringo saw the ancient rock slowly move and rise. He stifled his scream as he realized that the rock was not a rock at all, but a gigantic woman dressed in rags. Everything about her was gray; her hair, her clothes, her skin, her eyes. Even her fingernails were gray. Then Ringo noticed that the giantess was crying. Enormous teardrops, each containing about 10 gallons of water, poured from her eyes, and splashed onto the ground. So this was what made the river swell, Ringo thought.

“Oh, Sasuga the Great Giantess!” Ringo shouted, “Please stop crying! You are causing a terrible flood at the bottom of the mountain!”



“Go away, little boy. Why should I listen to you?” the 50-foot tall woman towered over him. “My son went to the war to fight the dragons, and he got killed! I am so sad I’ll never stop crying!” An immense teardrop rolled down her cheek and fell on Ringo’s head, nearly washing him away.

Ringo had to think fast. “Sasuga, I know you like riddles,” he hollered, “I challenge you to give me a riddle I cannot solve!”

“Riddles?” the giantess paused. “My son used to love riddles. Fine, I will give you an impossible riddle. If you can’t solve it, you must leave me alone!” Then she sang,

Morning sun shines on
teardrops from a frozen spear
piercing winter sky

“What’s a frozen spear?” Ringo thought for a while. He tried to remember the early morning sky he and his sister looked up together in wintertime. The ground was covered with snow then. His sister had asked him a question in her squeaky voice. She had said, “What are those, Ringo?” pointing to the window of their room....

“An icicle!” he shouted with joy.

“You’re right,” Sasuga admitted grudgingly.

“Give me another one,” Ringo pressed on quickly, noticing that the giantess had stopped crying. “How about this?” Sasuga sniffled and sang,

Seven sisters dance
Each wears a lovely color
on the sky-bound bridge

“Seven sisters?” Ringo knew that often in riddles words like “sisters” did not mean people, but things that are connected closely.

“It’s a rainbow! Seven colors in the sky!”

“You are smarter than I thought,” Sasuga sighed. Ringo was very proud of himself.

“This is the final riddle,” the giantess said, “My son made this one.”



No doors, no windows
A small red house on a tree
Inside lives a star

“A house without doors or windows?” Ringo thought hard, “The only thing I know that’s red and grows on a tree is apples, but...” Then he suddenly recalled a time when his grandmother cut an apple for him. She cut it sideways and showed him the seeds inside, shaped like a star.

“An apple!” Ringo shouted with glee.

“You are indeed a very clever boy,” Sasuga smiled, “You remind me of my son. He was a kind and brave boy, too. “

“Tell me about your son,” Ringo said. He stayed up all night listening to Sasuga’s stories. They were fascinating tales of exciting adventures she and her son had had traveling around the world. Sasuga enjoyed telling the stories, and even laughed out loud a few times.

When dawn broke, Sasuga told Ringo to go home. She thanked him, saying, “Your visit made me feel much better. I promise I won’t cause a flood again. Will you come back?”

“I will!” Ringo promised, “My whole family will come and visit you. We’ll bring you apples, too.”

Ringo ran down the mountain as fast as his legs could carry him. When he reached his village, he saw that the water had receded. The river again flowed peacefully between its banks. The villagers were gratefully moving back into their homes.

“Dad, Momoka, I’m home!” Ringo ran into the welcoming arms of his family. His grandma was there, too.

“We were so worried about you!” little Momoka squeaked. His grandmother smiled, “I knew you could do it, Ringo.”

“I’m very proud of you, my son,” his father beamed.

Soon the tale of Ringo’s heroic deed spread throughout the village. Later, Ringo and his sister often went to visit the giantess, and they had many more adventures together, but that’s another story.