

# MoonInk® Tanka Poetry Workshop

## How to write a Tanka poem

### Learning objectives

This workshop has been created to help students to understand and derive pleasure from a Tanka poem they have written.

The aim is for them to appreciate the beauty of the language they use and the thought they have put into the poem, to inspire the students' imagination and develop their aesthetic sense.

Upon completion of this workshop students will have:

- Gained an awareness of the tradition of Japanese poetry
  - Expressed emotion through poetic metaphor
  - Selected and used a range of technical and descriptive vocabulary
  - Shown imagination through the language they have used to create emphasis, humour, atmosphere or suspense
  - Chosen and combined words and images for particular effect
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### Transferrable skills students will develop

- Creativity and innovative thought
  - Contextual awareness
  - Knowledge and understanding
  - Oral communication
  - Written communication
  - Self-appraisal and reflection on practice
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### Handouts

Appendix 2 of this Lesson Plan contains examples of 10 Tanka poems to be printed.

Place the examples of the Tanka poems on the desks around the classroom for students to refer to.

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### Preparation

Each pupil will need a copy of the worksheet included in Appendix 1 of this Lesson Plan and pieces of paper to write on.

# Plan of Activities

## Activity 1

The background of Tanka poetry

Tanka is a Japanese style of poetry dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century.

Tanka poems are written about nature, the seasons, love, sadness and other strong emotions, using strong imagery with a focus on the 5 senses.

- Sight
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste
- Sound

The structure of the poem is:

- Five lines with 31 syllables or less in total
- 1<sup>st</sup> line – 5 syllables or less
- 2<sup>nd</sup> line – 7 syllables or less
- 3<sup>rd</sup> line – 5 syllables or less
- 4<sup>th</sup> line – 7 syllables or less
- 5<sup>th</sup> line – 7 syllables or less

Most English-speaking writers apply the 'or less' rule as there are too many vast differences between the Japanese and English language.

Writing 5 lines of 31 syllables 'or less', following the short line/long line/short line/long line/ long line form will achieve the same basic effect as the Japanese Tanka.

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## Activity 2

A syllable is part of a word which has one vowel sound.

Explain how to count syllables.

- Swan – 1 syllable
- Bees – 1 syllable
- Classroom – 2 syllables
- Autumn – 2 syllables
- Butterfly – 3 syllables
- Sunflower – 3 syllables

Discuss the examples of the poems from Appendix 2 counting out the syllables so that students understand the poetic structure.

### Activity 3

Group participation to create a list of images and sounds from nature on the board. Examples:

- Rustling leaves
  - Squawking seagulls
  - Rushing river
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### Activity 4

Ask students to write down the theme of their poem on their worksheet. Examples:

- The rainforest
  - My grandmother or other relative
  - My pet
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### Activity 5

Ask students to write the 5 lines of their poem on their worksheet and to add up the total number of syllables on each line. Example:

a trail of thin mist	5
drifts along the riverbank	7
brushing the tall reeds	5
that bend towards the water	7
swirling its way to the sea	7

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### Activity 6

When the poems are finished ask students to write their poem onto the Tanka Poem Presentation Card (Appendix 3) and to illustrate the card with pictures.

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### Activity 7

Ask students to work in pairs to read their poem to their partner. Partners can provide feedback, something they like about the poem and a suggestion for improvement.

## Appendix 1

### Tanka Poem Worksheet

**The theme of my poem**

**Key words to use in my Tanka poem**

**My Tanka poem**

Line 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 Syllables

Line 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 7 Syllables

Line 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 Syllables

Line 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 7 Syllables

Line 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 7 Syllables

## Appendix 2

### Ten examples of Tanka Poetry

the deafening roar  
of waves crashing up the beach  
and the sound of stones  
being dragged back to the sea  
drowns out the rest of the world

the river flows  
golden in the evening light  
rowers silently  
drift to the bank returning  
the water back to the geese

a perfect day  
for a family picnic  
in the garden  
eating cupcakes  
under a green canopy

a small black puppy  
playfully runs on the sand  
at low tide  
wind tanned fishermen  
winch their boat up the beach

as the tide goes out  
sunlight reflects off wet sand  
father and small son  
with all the time in the world  
collect pebbles and seashells

humid summer's day  
people relax in the park  
no-one moves except  
young girls performing cartwheels  
in the dappled shade of trees

straight as an arrow  
a crow flies through the twilight  
heading for the moon  
I follow it out of sight  
keeping both feet on the ground

the grapes are mouldy  
and already fermenting  
we pick the ripe crop  
staining our fingers purple  
the same colour as your dress

luminous white foam  
forms on the crest of each wave  
washing up the beach  
this is where I find my peace  
amongst the shifting stones

illuminated  
by the pier's lights  
night fishermen  
cast into the tar black sea  
and say prayers beneath their breath

faded names and dates  
on weather beaten gravestones  
our precious time spent  
walking along a towpath  
observing all the wildlife

**Appendix 3**

**Tanka Poem Presentation Card**

**My Tanka Poem**

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