



Mini-Lesson: The Poem that Inspired the Music

OVERVIEW

In this lesson students will read the text of the haiku poem that inspired Jodie Blackshaw's *Letter from Sado*. Haiku poems are short, but can express multiple images and moods. Students will communicate personal interpretations of the text through expressive readings.

LEARNING GOAL

Students will demonstrate their understanding of Matsuo Bashō's haiku by creating an expressive interpretive reading of the text.

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Handout of the poem's text or visual image to display
- [Musical Inspirations](#) student reading

PROCESS

If students have not already learned that the music was inspired by the text of an old **haiku** and the images that it conjured up for Jodie Blackshaw, provide some introductory background information. Review the information from the [Musical Inspirations](#) reading from Folder Two, or present it with this lesson.

1. Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō was born in 1644, near the city of Kyoto, Japan. He often traveled alone and on foot through the Japanese islands, and wrote this haiku while standing on the western shore of Honshu (the main island of Japan). He was gazing across the Sea of Japan to Sado, a small island located just off the west coast of Honshu.

**Stormy sea:
Stretching over Sado,
Heaven's River**

2. Write the word **interpretation** on the board, and generate a group definition of the term. (The action of explaining, expressing, or in some way showing your understanding of something – music, a text, an art work, etc. People who translate one language into another are called interpreters because they understand and can explain what a speaker is saying to someone who does not understand the words.)
3. Read the text together without any attempt to interpret it.

- Ask students to identify the words that they could make more interesting by changing the way they speak them.
 - Encourage them to focus on the “stormy sea” in line one, and note that “Heaven’s River” is synonymous with the Milky Way – the still, starry nighttime sky.
 - Ask for a courageous volunteer to speak the same text with changes in dynamics, articulation, and pitch to express some of the meaning in the text – their interpretation.
4. Have students work together in small groups for a few minutes to create an interpretive reading of this poem. They can use the ideas generated in the discussion or their own interpretations. Reconvene to share impromptu performances. Remind them to take their time as they speak the words.

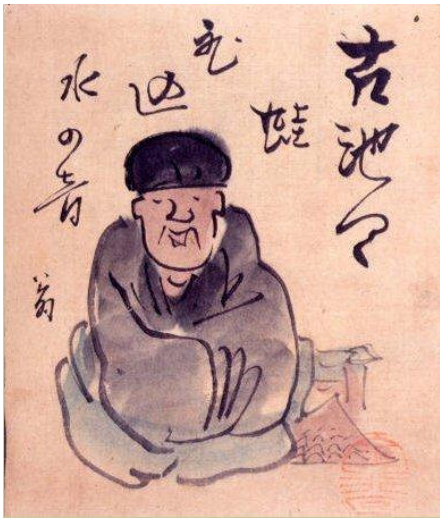
EXTENSIONS

Students can create original musical interpretations of their haiku on their own instruments and play them for each other.

[Listen to the original haiku read in Japanese.](#)

ASSESSMENT

The dramatic readings provide evidence of the how fully students understand the text and at what level. This can be a very informal assessment, or a more rigorous assessment depending on how teachers frame the activity.



A portrait of the poet Bashō, with his most famous poem "An old pond - a frog jumps in -"

MUSICAL INSPIRATIONS

Here is the poem that inspired Jodie Blackshaw's piece for Middle School bands. The author was the Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō. He was born in 1644, near the city of Kyoto, Japan. He traveled the islands of Japan and wrote this haiku about Sado Island.

Read the poem, look closely at the images, and **make predictions** about how you think the music will sound.

Stormy sea:

Stretching over Sado,

Heaven's River¹

Stormy seas have been interpreted by many artists. Here are images to help you imagine how a stormy sea might sound.



Stormy Sea with Shipwreck-Marcus Larson (1857)



The Great Wave off Kanagawa, a Ukiyo-e print by Hokusai

Heaven's River is one way the people of Japan talk about the Milky Way. Look at this recent Hubble image of the Milky Way and think about how music might sound like Heaven's River.



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