



# Poetry Talk

**By:** Kathy Keidel, Michael Carlson, Leah Ebel, Brenda Gates, Stacey Mandel, and Christine Cervera

**Featured Children's Literature:** *The Girl Who Loved Caterpillars*, adapted by Jean Merrill

## **Objectives:**

1. Students will experience poetry as a form of communication.
2. Students will learn about an ancient poetic tradition of Japan.
3. Students will write *tanka* poetry in the correct form.

## **National Content Standards:**

### ***Reading and Writing***

*Reading Standard 1:* Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

*Reading Standard 2:* Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

*Reading Standard 3:* Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

*Writing Standard 3.* Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

### ***History***

*5-12 History Standards in Historical Thinking, Standard 1: Chronological Thinking (F: Students should be able to reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration in which historical developments have unfolded, and apply them to explain historical continuity and change)*

*5-12 World History Standards, Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300-1000 CE (Standard 3B: The student understands developments in Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia in an era of Chinese ascendancy)*

**Plan for Assessment:**

1.

- x “The Old Pond,” by Matsuo Bashō (translated by Harry Behn),  
<http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-old-pond/>
- x “KKS:114, OHI: 9 (Spring),” by Ono no Komachi’s (translated by Donald Keene),  
<http://www.gotterdammerung.org/japan/literature/ono-no-komachi/>
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passage of time and were used to communicate messages of love, new or lost. Tell students that this lesson will focus on *tanka*.

2. Practice reading in the *tanka* form by giving the class *tanka* on familiar themes to read first. Show the first two *tanka* on the **Tanka Examples** visual aid. Have students count out the syllables aloud.
3. Introduce the students to the book, *The Girl Who Loved Caterpillars*. Share that the story is an adapted version of a story in the *Tsutsumi Ch Inagon Monogatari* written by an anonymous Japanese author in the 1100s. The story is set in the late Heian period in Kyoto, Japan. Many of the characters are court nobles.
4. Read aloud *The Girl Who Loved Caterpillars*.
5. After reading the story, ask students: What forms of communication were used in the story? (*Spoken communication was used with those one knew well. Written messages, in the form of poetry, were used with people with whom there was a more distant relationship.*) Review the points in the book where the ladies-in-waiting, the nobleman, the Captain, and Izumi communicated through written messages. Emphasize that the notes were written in a poetic form, with hidden meanings and metaphors. Share with the students that it was common in the Heian Period (794-1185) for people, especially of different genders, to communicate by exchanging *tanka*



3. Optional: Commend all students and celebrate with a snack of green tea, rice, and Japanese pickled vegetables.

### **Extensions and Cross-Curricular Ideas:**

1. *Visual Arts:* Show students the second-to-last illustration of *The Girl Who Loved Caterpillars* and point out the hand scroll and brush. Share with students that Japanese of the Heian period wrote stories with a brush on scrolls. Explain to students that they will create a hand scroll with a copy of their third *tanka* and an appropriate word, written in Japanese *hiragana* characters. *Hiragana* characters are a simpler way of writing than the *kanji* borrowed from Chinese and were popular with Heian court ladies. Have the students choose a word from the **Japanese Words for Use on Scrolls** handout (provided) that reflects their future-prediction *tanka*. With paper and paint, have students practice painting the *hiragana* word.

Next, have students reflect on the materials characters in the story used to write messages. Point out Izumi's choice of paper and handwriting to respond to Snake Man (page 20) and the Captain's choice of paper and ink to write to Izumi (page 23). Explain that the Heian period was a time in which beauty was appreciated, including the beauty of the materials used for writing, as well as the author's handwriting. When potential couples exchanged letters, the recipient scrutinized the handwriting, the paper on which a poem was written, the scent of the paper, and perhaps the inclusion of a flower with the note, to assess the author's taste and background.

On a long, horizontal piece of paper (from a roll), have students write a final version of their third *tanka* in their best handwriting and paint with black paint a final version of the accompanying *hiragana* word. Attach a small dowel rod, or long straw, at each end of the paper by wrapping the edge of the paper around the rod or straw. The thick end of the scroll should be around the left dowel/straw because East Asian

