



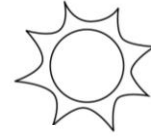
# Maggie's Activity Pack

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Sensing the Feel of Poetry: Writing a Tanka



More than 1200 years ago, people in Japan wrote special poems. These poems use one or more of the five senses to give the reader a strong feeling. Like another Japanese poem you may be familiar with, the haiku, the tanka uses a certain number of syllables, 31. But the tanka is different than the haiku. Haikus usually don't use metaphor, similes, or personification. These literary devices may be found in a tanka.

Read the tanka below. See if you can identify which one of the five senses the poet is using. Circle the sensory words in the poem.

**Lush, carpeted green  
Squishes on our spongy stroll.  
The sun bath warms us  
As the Earth springs with new life.  
We, too, bounce with all that sprouts.**

Why do you think the poet used the word springs as a verb?

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What mood do you think this tanka gives the reader?

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## Discovering How to Tanka!

The word, tanka, means short poem. A tanka may be short, but it follows a certain pattern. See if you can find the pattern for the 31 syllables that make up a tanka. Read the poem again. Count the syllables in each line. Write the pattern below.

First line - \_\_\_\_\_ syllables

Second line - \_\_\_\_\_ syllables

Third line - \_\_\_\_\_ syllables

Fourth line - \_\_\_\_\_ syllables

Fifth line - \_\_\_\_\_ syllables



## Now It's YOUR Turn to Tanka!

Think about a tanka you would like to write. What is your subject? \_\_\_\_\_

What sense would you like to make your readers use or feel? \_\_\_\_\_

Make a list of words that you could use to help your readers use this sense. \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Now try your hand at writing a tanka:

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Dear Colleague,

As I sat down to write an activity for poetry month, I reflected on the recent conferences I had with my pre-teachers. We discussed the need to break activities into the smallest possible components for children. So many times we ask children to do too much at once. We may tell them to edit their work. This is often overwhelming for elementary students who may not even know where to begin. I suggest getting students into the “zone of proximal development” by first counting the number of specific errors they may have made in their own writing, such as 5 capitalization errors. By giving them this number and the type of edit necessary, helps them to “hone in on” what you are expecting. You can gradually take away specific instructions. The idea of scaffolding learning is an important one and one which I relied on for this activity. You can see the step-by-step process which concludes in students producing their own tanka.

While we’re on the subject of tankas, I must again point out the difficulty of writing poetry. Many children need models and that is why I prefer specific formats such as the tanka to guide children. It is also a perfect companion for other language arts activities such as understanding syllabication.

You may want to ask children to put their poems away for a few days and then get them back out for review. The time away can be important as children, like adults, can then bring fresh eyes to material. First ask children to reread their work. As I discussed above, it is best to ask specific questions as children “edit.” Suggest they recount their syllables to check for structure. At another reading, tell them to circle all the sensory words in the tanka. Have them reflect on the use of these words. Next ask them to consider whether other words might convey a stronger image. Finally ask them to have a peer read the tanka to see if the sensory mood has been conveyed. I like to praise students for the changes they make. I hold up work and get very excited about any changes. This often is enough to encourage other children to follow suit and look at their work with a more critical eye.

Happy tanka – ing!

Kathy

### **Answer/Discussion Key:**

Talk about the sensory words: lush, squishes, spongy, etc. Note the appeal to our sense of touch. Point out to children that the word springs is used to help the reader understand that this tanka is about the season, spring but its use gives the idea that new grass and spring rains can make the ground feel “springy.”

Children will have various emotions about the poem likely focusing on positive feelings about the warmth and new growth of spring.

Make sure that children understand the pattern of the tanka before they write:

First line - 5 syllables

Second line – 7 syllables

Third line – 5 syllables

Fourth line – 7 syllables

Fifth line – 7 syllables

### **Goals:**

The ancient Japanese form of poetry, the tanka, is highlighted in this activity. Children are guided in a step-by- step process to understand the form and sensory imagery found in this poetry type. The activity concludes with children writing their own tanka. The Dear Colleague letter discusses ideas for helping children revise their work. This activity is available on the primary and intermediate levels and correlates with the IRA/NCTE Standard, “Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.”