

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Poetry Club

~ Music and Poetry ~

Unit 4 of 8

haiku by Carla Walker

*rhythmic staccato
will bounce and flow and sashay
across the paper*

As Carla Walker's haiku implies, poetry is music played with words instead of instruments. Her use of the musical term "staccato" paired with the image of words dancing on the paper is a clever example of how closely these art forms are connected. You could even say that the lyrics to songs are poems. Walker's poem was a Creative Language assignment on haikus – remember the 5-7-5 syllable format?

The following poems are about the profound effect music can have on a life.

INSTRUMENT OF CHOICE by Robert Phillips

*She was a girl
no one ever chose
for teams or clubs,
dances or dates,*

*no one else wanted;
the tuba. Big as herself,
heavy as her heart,*

*its golden tubes
and coils encircled her
like a lover's embrace.
Its body pressed on hers.*

*Into its mouthpiece she blew
life, its deep-throated
oompahs, oompahs sounding,
almost, like mating cries.*

1. Why is the girl's choice of a tuba the perfect instrument for her?
2. Write a poem about a different musical instrument and the person who chooses it.

SCRAMBLED EGGS AND WHISKEY by Hayden Carruth

*Scrambled eggs and whiskey
in the false-dawn light. Chicago,
a sweet town, bleak, God knows,
but sweet. Sometimes. And
weren't we fine tonight?
When Hank set up that limping
treble roll behind me
my horn just growled and I
thought my heart would burst.
And Brad M. pressing with the
soft stick and Joe-Anne
singing low. Here we are now
in the White Tower, leaning
on one another, too tired
to go home. But don't say a word,
don't tell a soul, they wouldn't
understand, they couldn't, never
in a million years, how fine,
how magnificent we were
in that old club tonight.*

3. We don't usually associate scrambled eggs with whiskey. Why are they such a good combination to use for this particular poem's title?

WHEN I MET MY MUSE by William Stafford

*I glanced at her and took my glasses
off – they were still singing. They buzzed
like a locust on the coffee table and then
ceased. Her voice belled forth, and the
sunlight bent. I felt the ceiling arch, and
knew that nails up there took a new grip
on whatever they touch. "I am your own
way of looking at things," she said. "When
you allow me to live with you, every
glance at the world around you will be
a sort of salvation." And I took her hand.*

A "Muse" (from Greek mythology) is an artist's inspiration, the part of the imagination that lets words and music flow with beauty, meaning, humor and truth. Artists of all kinds, including musicians and poets, find themselves taking their Muses' hands, permanently coloring the world around them.

4. Describe the feeling when you have a great idea for a poem, or find a perfect metaphor to match your message.

I KNOW HOW EVERY POET by James Laughlin

*feels about his new poem
(and usually every poem)*

*it's the best he ever
wrote and better than*

*anybody else's rush it
off to a magazine the*

*presses are waiting they
say there are a hundred*

*thousand poets writing
in the USA (maybe more)*

*and if each one writes
at least one poem a week*

*that's a lot of diffused
satisfaction but Horace*

*was smarter he put his
new poems in a trunk*

*and left them there for
seven years or so he said*

but I don't believe him.

The ancient Greek poet Horace was smart and supposedly waited seven years to make sure each poem was really good... or did he?

5. What is James Laughlin saying by ending his poem this way? How do you feel when you end a poem?

Note the format of this poem – it's one continuous sentence beginning with the title. Many of the poems you'll read in Poetry Club have a single thought or phrase that runs onto the next line. In fact, this is true of all the poems in this unit. Many have little or even no punctuation at all.

6. What's your personal opinion of this technique? Why would poets use it so often?

7. When do you think punctuation should be used in a poem?

8. Write a poem about beginning or completing a song, a poem or a piece of art.

WHY DO POETS WRITE by Richard Jones

*My wife, a psychiatrist, sleeps
through my reading and writing in bed,
the half-whispered lines,
manuscripts piled between us,*

*but in the deep part of night
when her beeper sounds
she bolts awake to return the page
of a patient afraid he'll kill himself.*

*She sits in her robe in the kitchen,
listening to the anguished voice
on the phone. She becomes
the vessel that contains his fear,*

*someone he can trust to tell
things I would tell to a poem.*

9. Is the poet in this story most like the psychiatrist, patient or vessel? Explain.

POETS by Kay Boyle

*Poets, minor or major, should arrange to remain slender,
Cling to their skeletons, not batten
On provender, nor fatten the lean spirit
In its isolated cell, its solitary chains.
The taut paunch ballooning in its network of veins
Explodes from the cumberbund. The hardening artery of neck
Cannot be masked by turtle-throated cashmere or foulard of mottled silk.*

*Poets, poets, use rags instead; use rags and consider
That Poe did not lie in the morgue swathed
Beyond recognition in fat. Consider on this late March
Afternoon, with violet and crocus outside, fragile as glass,
That the music of Marianne Moore's small polished bones
Was not muffled, the score not lost between thighs as thick as bass-
fiddles
Or cat-gut muted by dropsy. Baudelaire did not throttle on corpulence,
Rimbaud not strangle on his own grease. In the unleafed trees, as I write,
Birds flicker, lighter than lace. They are the lean spirit,
Beaks asking for crumbs, their voices like reeds.*

*William Carlos Williams sat close, close to the table always, always,
Close to the typewriter keys, his body not held at bay by a drawbridge of
Flesh
Under doctor's dress, no gangway to lower, letting the sauces,*

*The starches, the strong liquor, enter and exit
With bugles blowing. Over and over he was struck thin
By the mallet of beauty, the switchblade of sorrow, died slim as a gondola,
Died curved like the fine neck of a swan.*

*These were not gagged, strangled, outdone by the presence
Of banquet selves. They knew words make their way through
navel and pore,
Move weightless as thistle, as dandelion drift, unencumbered.
Death happens to fatten on poets' glutton hearts. ("Dylan!"
Death calls, and the poet scrambles drunk and alone to what were once
swift, bony feet,
Casting a monstrous shadow of gargantuan flesh before he crashes.)*

*Poets, remember your skeletons. In youth or dotage, remain as
light as ashes*

10. What is this poem really about?

11. What is a simple statement of Kay Boyle's message?

POETRY CLUB by Ruben Rivera

*I break out of the cage of dullness
And travel the freedom forest of ideas
Exploring the river phrases
Climbing the tree of punctuation*

*It feels like a vacation
Not actually leaving the cage
Just imagery creating freedom*

*Fighting the lion obstacles
Of ignorance and deceit
Overcoming time and holding
The leash of creativity and
Imagination*

*Ultimately reaching the top
Of the mountain and thanking
The eagle of poetry as new
Ideas hatch in the nest beside me.*

12. Ruben Rivera has filled his poem with metaphors. Which one(s) do you associate with your own writing?

13. Write a poem about the freedom of ideas or imagery creating freedom.

- 14. Write an original poem, one created specifically for this course, on the subject of your choosing.
- 15. What have you learned from one of these poems or poets that you might want to apply to your own work?
- 16. Which poem is your favorite and why?

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes