

芭蕉

MATSUO BASHŌ

JAPAN (1644–1694)

LANGUAGE: JAPANESE

古池や

Furu ike ya

蛙飛び込む

kawazu tobikomu

水の音

mizu no oto

(A *rōmaji* version has been included below the Japanese characters.)



Matsuo Bashō was born in Japan in 1644. Introduced to poetry at a young age, he became a well-known poet and teacher. He later renounced the social, urban life of the literary circles—choosing instead to wander throughout the country to gain inspiration for his writing. Traveling alone off the beaten path in medieval Japan was regarded as immensely dangerous, and at first Bashō expected to simply die in the middle of nowhere or be killed by bandits. As his travels continued, however, he met many friends and grew to enjoy the changing scenery and the seasons. Bashō was one of the earliest (some say the first) to write *haiku*—a type of poem comprised of just seventeen syllables. He is internationally appreciated as one of the greatest poets of all time.

Source:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matsuo_Bashō

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY			
WORD	RŌMAJI	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
古	furu (adj.)	lived long	old, ancient, venerable
池	ike (n.)	pool	pond, lagoon
蛙	kawazu (n.)	a small web-footed water animal	frog
水	mizu (n.)	liquid of rain	water
の	no (possess.)	letter and symbol that signifies ownership—belonging to	's
音	oto (n.)	sound of spattered water	splash, plop, ker plunk
飛び込む	tobikomu (v.)	move suddenly downward	flies into, dives, plunges, jumps, leaps
や	ya (interj.)	expressing surprise	Wow! Alert! Pay attention! Look at this!

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

PHRASE BY PHRASE

古池や

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MAKE IT FLOW

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水の音

mizu no oto _____

DEFENDING YOUR TRANSLATION—FINDING THE MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: _____

Pick a scribe for the group and work together to answer the questions.

Note three phrases or words that were challenging or interesting to translate and explain why.

How did this poem make you feel?

What do you think the poet is trying to communicate in this poem?

POETRY INSIDE OUT TRANSLATION CIRCLES[®]

Begin by seeking volunteers to read the poem aloud to the whole class. Several readings are fine. When possible, have a native speaker of the language read the poem. Hearing the poem is the first step in literary translation. A big part of translation is to have a sense of the piece, which begins with listening. Examine all the parts of the poem page and read the biography of the poet together.

Then break into groups of four—with mixed levels of language expertise, if possible. It is helpful—but not necessary—if one member of the group is a dominant English speaker and at least one is bilingual. NOTE: If a person in the class is a native speaker of the language of the poem, he/she should hold back on telling what the words are in English until the Make It Flow step in the translation process.

1. Become acquainted with the poem.

- Each member of the group reads the poem silently to him/herself.
- Anyone who is willing can read the poem aloud. If possible, start with someone who speaks the language of the poem.
- Search for cognates—words that look and sound the same as the English word. Use the cognates as clues to figuring out what the poem means.
- Once the poem has been read aloud several times, and the group has found all the cognates, make a prediction about the content of the poem.

2. Translate the poem—phrase by phrase.

- The group of four breaks into pairs. Balance the spoken language strengths of the group members when possible.
- The person least fluent in the language of the poem begins by guessing at all possible words. This can be done using the Translator's Glossary, if desired.
- If there is a person with knowledge of the language in the pair, this is the time to add her/his input.
- Remember, sometimes when you translate a poem from one language to another, you need to add small words like *the, it, etc.* Be on the lookout for where those words might be needed.

3. Make it flow.

- Once the phrase-by-phrase translation is complete, meet with the rest of your group.
- Share the translations.
- Make changes or adjustments based on what you learned from each other.

4. Defend your translation—find the meaning.

- As a group, discuss possible interpretations of the poem.
- Talk about words or phrases that were particularly difficult to translate, and why.
- Discuss which words were most interesting, and why.
- In the whole-class discussion be prepared to:
 - (a) Discuss and support your group's interpretation of the poem.
 - (b) Talk about what was interesting or difficult to translate.
 - (c) Share possibilities about what the poem might mean.

INTERESTING THINGS TO KNOW...

About Matsuo Bashō

- In the seventeenth century, two masters arose who elevated haiku and gave it a new popularity. They were Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) and Ueshima Onitsura (1661–1738). Both the imperial government and Shinto religious headquarters deified Matsuo Bashō one hundred years after his death because he raised the haiku from a playful game of wit to sublime poetry. He continues to be revered as a saint of poetry in Japan, and is one name from classical Japanese literature that is familiar throughout the world.

Fun Facts about the Country and the Language

- Japanese (日本語) is a language spoken by over 125 million people in Japan and in Japanese immigrant communities. It is a member of the Japonic (or Japanese-Ryukyuan) language family, which has a number of proposed relationships with other languages, none of which has gained wide acceptance among historical linguists.
- The Japanese language is written with a combination of three scripts: Chinese characters called *kanji* (漢字) and two syllabic (or moraic) scripts made of modified Chinese characters—*hiragana* (ひらがな or 平仮名) and *katakana* (カタカナ or 片仮名).
- The Latin alphabet, *rōmaji* (ローマ字), is also often used in modern Japanese, especially for company names and logos, advertising, and for Japanese text entered into a computer. Arabic numerals are generally used for numbers, but traditional Sino-Japanese numerals are also commonplace.

About *Haiku*

- *Haiku* (俳句 haikai verse) is a very short form of Japanese poetry typically characterized by three qualities:
 - The juxtaposition of two images or ideas and a *kireji* (“cutting word”) between them. This “cutting word” is a kind of verbal punctuation mark that signals the moment of separation and colors the manner in which the juxtaposed elements are related.
 - Seventeen *on* (syllable sounds, also known as *mora*), in three phrases of 5, 7, and 5 *on* respectively. Any one of the three phrases may end with the *kireji*.
 - A *kigo* (seasonal reference), usually drawn from a *sajiki*, a list of words that are divided into the four seasons and the new year, as well as categories that include the heavens, the earth, humanity, animals, and plants.

Sources:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matsuo_Bashō

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_language

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haiku>