Renga Poetry

Renga is an ancient Japanese style of poetry made up of stanzas. It is usually created by several people, each one taking a turn coming up with a stanza that relates to a single theme for the whole poem. The first stanza is three lines long. The first line is 5 syllables, the second is 7 and the third is 5. The second stanza is two lines long, both are 7 syllables each. The poem goes back and forth between the three and two line stanzas and ends with a two line stanza. It can be as long as you want to make it. The famous haiku poetry style came from just using the first stanza of a renga poem.

VOCABULARY

Stanza: A part of a poem that usually has at least two lines and creates the repeating pattern of the poem.

Syllable: A single sound. It’s usually part of a word, but some words are only one syllable long. Poem is pronounced po–em, it has two syllables. March has only one syllable. Tomorrow is pronounced to–mor–row, it has three syllables.

Haiku: A form of Japanese poetry that is three lines long. The first line is 5 syllables, the second is 7 and the last is 5.

EXAMPLE

First Stanza (5 syllables)
(7 syllables)
(5 syllables)
Snow yet remaining
The mountain slopes are misty -
An evening in spring.

Second Stanza (7)
(7)
Far away the water flows
Past the plum-scented village.

Third Stanza (5)
(7)
(5)
In the river breeze
The willow trees are clustered
Spring is appearing.

Fourth Stanza (7)
(7)
The sound of a boat being poled
Clear in the morning light.

Fifth Stanza (5)
(7)
(5)
The moon! does it still
Over fog-enshrouded fields
Linger in the sky?

Last Stanza (7)
(7)
Meadows carpeted in frost -
Autumn has drawn to a close.

Portrait of the famous renga poet Sōgi.
Try This

Write your own haiku poem about a certain subject. Then have your friends take turns with you finishing the poem and turning it into a renga. Remember the pattern of the renga poem. Use the example on the first page for reference.

The first stanza is your haiku. It has three lines, the first is 5 syllables, the second is 7 and the third is 5. The next stanza is two lines with 7 syllables each. Repeat this pattern for the entire poem, ending with a two line stanza.