

Sijo: Korean Poetry Form

Rationale:

This unit will introduce students to the sijo, a Korean poetic form, that predates the haiku. This popular poetic form has been written in Korea since the Choson dynasty (1392-1910). The three line poem is part of Korea's rich cultural and literary heritage.

Common Core English Language Art Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6

Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.10

By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Common Core Standards:

L 3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts.
L 5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in meaning.

English Language Arts Standards » Standard 10: Range, Quality, & Complexity » Range of Text Types for 6-12

Students in grades 6-12 apply the Reading standards to the following range of text types, with texts selected from a broad range of cultures and periods. In poetry: Includes the subgenres of narrative poems, lyrical poems, free verse poems, sonnets, odes, ballads, and epics.

Grades: 9

Subject Areas: English/Language Arts

Materials:

Student handout 1: Welcome to Sijo

http://www.sijopoetry.com/resources/sijoforum/sijo_primer01.html

Student handout 2: Sijo Poets: A Sampling

Student handout 3: Sijo: Poetic Form

Prof. David McCann's lecture on History of the Sijo:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frUUtsQyVRA&feature=youtu.be&list=PLvYl_VXpuU708H8ILXrKDRpS_73FrR8iw (5:32)

Prof. Mark Peterson's lecture on mimicry: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D435tY-zRQ&feature=youtu.be&list=PLvYl_VXpuU71fPzO1TtY3WrbUaT_ZBWqN (4:31)

Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the historical importance of the sijo
- Identify the basic structure and parts of the sijo
- Analyze "Song of My Five Friends" by Korean poet, Yun Son-do (1587 -1671)
- Write a sijo parody of Yun Son-do's "Song of My Five Friends" or another sijo poet of their choice from student handout 2
- Write a sijo based on their own unique voice and style

Day I: Sijo Introduction

Essential Question: What is the historical significance of the sijo?

Lesson Activities:

1. Teacher challenges the class to list as many poetic forms as possible in one minute.
2. After the one minute is over, have students share their responses. Write responses on the board. Possible answers include: haiku, ode, sonnet, villanelle and more. Did anyone come up with the sijo?
3. On overhead projector, display this site:
http://sejongculturalsociety.org/writing/current/resources/sijo_guide.php.
4. As a class, read each paragraph and discuss.

5. Check for understanding and ask the following questions:
 - * What is a sijo?
 - * What is written on the first line? The second line? The third line
6. Read “Song of My Five Friends” and analyze the poem as a class. Have students identify the theme, the development of the them, the counter-theme and conclusion.
7. Watch Prof. David McCann’s lecture on History of the Sijo:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frUUsQyVRA&feature=youtu.be&list=PLvYI_VXpuU708H8ILXrKDRpS_73FrR8iw (5:32)
8. Discuss the video and have student answer the essential question. Did students understand that prior to the sijo, historical documents were written using Chinese characters? It was only with the sijo that the Korean language was used and it’s a crucial part of Korea’s cultural identity.
9. Pass out student handout 1: Welcome to Sijo. Have students read independently for 15 minutes and annotate the passages. If time permits, students will share what they found interesting in the article.

Assessment: Have student answer the essential question on the back of the student 1 handout. Collect the handout as an exit ticket.

Day 2: Sijo Writing Workshop: A Sijo Parody

Essential Question: What is a parody?

Lesson Activities:

1. Teacher review the basic structure and parts of the sijo.
2. Teacher asks the question: What is a parody?
3. As a class, watch Prof. Mark Peterson’s lecture on mimicry:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D435tY-zRQ&feature=youtu.be&list=PLvYI_VXpuU71fPzO1TtY3WrbUaT_ZBWqN (4:31)
4. Have a class discuss about the video and students answer: What is a parody?
5. Pass out student handout 2 with a sampling of five poems by Korean poets.
6. Give students the remainder of the class time. Have them select one sijo and write a sijo parody based on that sijo.

Assessment:

Ask student to read their parody poems aloud to the class. Collect the sijo parody.

Day 3: Sijo Writing Workshop: In Your Own Style

Lesson Activities:

1. Warm-up on board: What is a sijo?
2. Student share responses.
3. Teacher briefly review the sijo and pass out student handout 3.
4. Teacher selects “Song of My Five Friends” and analyzes poem with the class.
5. Ask the following questions: What is the theme of the poem? What are the poet’s word choices to convey imagery? Why do you think the poet selects those words? What’s the counter-theme and conclusion?
6. Inform the students that they will write their own sijo today.

Assessment: Circulate the class and stamp the handout only if they have completed at least line

1. Have students who did not finish the sijo take the handout for homework.

Student Handout 1:

http://www.sijopoetry.com/resources/sijoforum/sijo_primer01.html

WELCOME TO SIJO

SIJOFORUM PRIMER #1 by Larry Gross

An introduction for those new to sijo, a refresher for others.

See the house fall at our feet, faithful timbers come crashing down;
Those with our life in their hands join the termites, gnaw at beams.
Till the dawn, hold me while we sleep -- in the cold, that is enough.

(TOP #14 May 1995; Canadian Writer's Journal, Fall 1995)

It seems to be the nature of mankind continually to try something new. That is just as true in poetry as it is in other areas. During the past forty years or so we have shown increasing interest in Asian verse patterns. The Middle Eastern ghazal has its devoted followers in the West, and Japanese forms like haiku, tanka, renga and haibun are now commonly found in small press and commercial poetry periodicals. Journey through the Internet and you will see these forms blossoming everywhere. We Westerners have fallen in love with Asian patterns, patterns that connect us tenuously with ancient cultures so different from our own.

So it is with the SIJO (see-szo or she-szo, with the J pronounced as the French pronounce Jacques). The roots of this lyrical Korean cousin of haiku and tanka stretch back well over 1000 years. It has been the most popular form of lyric verse in Korea for over 500 years, sung equally by Confucian scholars, members of the royal court and common folk.

I say sung because the sijo is, at heart, a song. It is for the Koreans what the ballad is for Western Europeans. Originally, that word referred only to the music. The lyric was called tan-ga, an ancient verse based on still earlier Chinese patterns which also influenced Japanese poetry. Eventually, the term sijo (which is both singular and plural) came to be applied to both words and music.

Sijo is traditionally composed in three lines of 14-16 syllables each, between 44-46 total. A pause breaks each line approximately in the middle, somewhat like a caesura, as illustrated in this verse by Yun Son-do (1587 - 1671), one of Korea's most revered poets:

You ask how many friends I have? Water and stone, bamboo and pine.
The moon rising over the eastern hill is a joyful comrade.
Besides these five companions, what other pleasure should I ask?

Each half-line contains 6-9 syllables; the last half of the final line may be shorter than the rest, but should contain no fewer than 5 syllables. This

natural mid-line break comes in handy, since printing restrictions often cause Western sijo to be divided and printed in 6 lines rather than 3. Indeed, some translators and poets have adopted this technique in their writing, so most editors accept either format.

The sijo may tell a story (as the ballad does), examine an idea (as the sonnet does), or express an emotion (as the lyric does). Whatever the purpose may be, the structure is the same: line 1 of the 3-line pattern introduces a situation or problem; line 2 develops or "turns" the idea in a different direction; and line 3 provides climax and closure. Think of the traditional 3-part structure of a narrative (conflict, complication, climax) or the 3-part division of the sonnet, and you'll see the same thing happening.

Though the ancients seldom titled their sijo, some modern writers, such as Elizabeth St Jacques in the following verse, frequently do:

EVEN NOW

just us two in the photograph
his arm around my thin shoulder
That strong limb I then leaned against
would break so many falls
We stood like this but only once
but his strength holds me still

[Elizabeth St Jacques, *Around the Tree of Light* (1995)]

To achieve the rolling, musical quality so characteristic of sijo, each half-line is further divided into two parts averaging 3-5 syllables each. Look at Elizabeth's "Even Now." Notice that each line usually divides into 2 phrases or word groups ("just us two / in the photograph"). Some people find parallels between this rhythm and that of Bible verses, and others find a likeness to sprung rhythm popularized by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Regular meter is not vital to sijo, but that musical quality is. Here is Yun Son-do once more, with a verse from his masterpiece, "The Fisherman's Calendar":

When autumn arrives on the river, all the fish grow fatter.
We savor unnumbered hours swept along by gentle currents.
Man's dusty world fades away, doubling my joy with distance.

Like haiku, sijo usually displays a strong foundation in nature, but, unlike that genre, it frequently employs metaphors, puns, allusions and other word play. And it loves to play with sounds. The first word (or two) of the final line is very important. It provides a "twist": a surprise of meaning, sound, tone or other device, much as the beginning of a final sestet does in the sonnet or the final line does in a haiku. That final sijo line is frequently lyrical, subjective or personal, and may very well supply a profound, witty, ironic, humorous or proverbial twist.

Remember the three characteristics that make the sijo unique -- its basic structure, musical/rhythmic elements, and the twist. It is shorter and more lyrical than the ghazal. It is more roomy than the haiku, and it welcomes feelings and emotions which haiku either discourage or disguise. It should please lovers of ballads, sonnets and lyrics, and the downplay of regular

meter and rhyme should appeal to writers of free verse. In short, it's a fascinating challenge. Let us see your latest one.

Carefully I lifted it from the branch, an empty cocoon,
took it home and mounted it center stage on the mantel.
Hear it speak? What does it say of living, what of the dead?

(Parnassus, Winter 1996)

Text and adaptations by Larry Gross unless noted otherwise.

Student Handout 2:

"Song of a Loyal Heart" by CHŎNG MONGJU (1337-1392)

Though this body die and die,
 it may die a hundred times,
my white bones become but dust,
 what's called soul exist or not:
for my lord, no part of this red heart
 would ever change. How could it?

Hwang Jini (1506-1544)

Jade Green Stream, Don't boast so proud
 of your easy passing through these blue hills.
Once you have reached the broad sea,
 to return again will be hard.
While the Bright Moon fills these empty hills,
 why not pause? Then go on, if you will.

CHŎNG CHŎL (1536-1593)

A shadow strikes the water below:
 a monk passes by on the bridge,
"Stay awhile, reverend sir,
 let me ask you where you go."
He just points his staff at the white clouds
 and keeps on his way without turning.

YI SUNSHIN (1545-1599)

By moonlight I sit all alone
 in the lookout on Hansan isle.
My sword is on my thigh,
 I am submerged in deep despair.
From somewhere the shrill note of a pipe...
 will it sever my heartstrings?

"Song of my five friends" by Yun Seondo (1587-1671)

You ask how many friends I have? Water and stone, bamboo and pine.
The moon rising over the eastern hill is a joyful comrade.
Besides these five companions, what other pleasure should I ask?

Student Handout 3

Sijo: Poetic Form

Name:

Did you know that the sijo (pronounced SHEE-jo) poetic form is older than the haiku? The sijo is only three lines long averaging 14-16 syllables per line and are meant to be songs. The total syllables for the poem ranges from 44-46 syllables.

Here's a quick overview:

- **Line 1** introduces the situation or theme of the poem.
- **Line 2** Elaborates on the theme in the first line
- **Line 3** Consists of two sections. The first presents a "twist" followed by a conclusion.

Here's an example from the Korean poet, Yun Seondo: (1587 - 1671).

Example: excerpt from "Song of my five friends" Yun Seondo (1587-1671)

[You ask] [how many friends I have]? [Water and stone], [bamboo and pine]. **(2-6-4-4)**

[The moon] [rising over] [the eastern hill] [is a joyful comrade]. **(2-4-4-6)**

[Besides] [these five companions], [what other pleasure] [should I ask]? **(2-5, 5-3)**

His syllabic breakdown are 2,6,4,4; 2,4,4,6; and 2,5,5,3. Another recommended syllabic grouping pattern is the following:

Line 1: 3-4-4-4

Line 2: 3-4-4-4 (similar to the first)

Line 3: 3-5 in the first part for the counter theme followed by the conclusion of 4-3.

Now it's your turn to write a sijo! Think of a **theme** and introduce it in the first line and elaborate on the theme in the second line. The third line should be a shift or change from the first two lines. Use the syllables at the bottom of each line to help you write.

(title)

Line 1: Introduces the situation or theme of the poem.

3-4-4-4

Line 2 Elaborates on the theme in the first line

3-4-4-4

Line 3 Consists of two sections. The first presents a “twist” followed by a conclusion.

3-5-4-3

Write your final draft here:

Works Cited

- Brewer, Robert L. "Sijo: Poetic Form | Korean Poetic Form." *Writer's Digest*, F+W Media, 8 Feb. 2019, www.writersdigest.com/whats-new/sijo-poetic-form. Accessed 25 May 2019.
- "Sijo." *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/sijo. Accessed 25 May 2019.
- "Teaching Sijo." *Teaching Sijo | Sejong Writing Competition*, Sejong Cultural Society, sejongculturalsociety.org/writing/current/teach.php. Accessed 14 May 2019.