

# WHOO-KU HAIKU: Writing Haiku

What's a haiku (heye-coo)? In simplest terms, it's a kind of Japanese poem that usually describes something from nature using a pattern of syllables. In English, we write it as a three-line poem:

*The first line has five syllables.*

*Line two has seven syllables.*

*Line three has five syllables.*

Here's an example from **Whoo-Ku Haiku**, (G.P. Putnam's Sons) about a great horned owl laying eggs:

*Mama lays an egg*

*In the starlight it glistens*

*A moon of its own.*

A haiku poem captures a moment—it could be something ordinary, like laying an egg, but by combining disparate things, like an egg and the moon, a haiku can shine.

## Here's how to get started:

- 1) Pick a subject, preferably something you love, or that you're curious about
- 2) Brainstorm a list of 10-20 words that describe your subject, using all of your senses (ideally a few for each sense—sight, smell, sound, touch and taste—if possible)
- 3) Be as concrete and specific as possible with your images
- 4) Write a few sentences and experiment with ways of combining these images. As you write, think about the mood you'd like to convey: Funny? Happy? Thoughtful? Capturing emotion as well as sensory details will make for a more powerful haiku. Here's another example from **Whoo-Ku Haiku** where the mood is one of danger:  
  
*Owlets raise their wings*  
*Shadow covers; hawk hovers*  
*Screech! Hiss! Hawk is gone.*
- 5) Read through your lines. Do you see any surprising or unique connections? Write another line that expresses the surprise.
- 6) Now, re-write your lines using the 5-7-5 structure. As you write, read aloud, counting your syllables on your fingers. I like to use a table, banging them out to hear the beat. Using your fingers helps you to find the rhythm. Using present tense also helps to maintain a sense of immediacy. Traditional haiku are about nature, or the natural world, but you can write about anything! But most of all, have fun!



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**WHOO-KU HAIKU**  
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# WHOO-KU HAIKU: Woodland Haiku

The Great Horned Owls are not the only animals in **WHOO-KU HAIKU: A Great Horned Owl Story** (G.P. Putnam's Sons). What other creatures play a role in this woodland story? Which animals contributed to the hatching and growing of the owlets? What creatures would have taken the owlets for their own growth and survival?

- 1) Use the library and/or online wildlife resources to learn more about the:
  - a) displaced squirrel,
  - b) dive-bombing crows,
  - c) captured snake,
  - d) lucky raccoon,
  - e) unlucky skunk,
  - f) circling hawk,
  - g) crouching fox,
  - h) or other creatures likely to be in this Great Horned Owl habitat.
- 2) Consider the role your chosen animal plays in the story.
- 3) Use author Maria Gianferrari's suggested method of Writing Haikus to write a haiku that places your animal in the owlets' story.
- 4) Work with other haiku writers in your group to create a Reader's Theater performance of **WHOO-KU HAIKU: A Great Horned Owl Story**. Insert your haikus into the "script" of the Reader's Theater so your haikus become part of the action and our interwoven into the haikus written by author Maria Gianferrari.
- 5) What have you learned about the Great Horned Owls' habitat and the larger ecosystem?
- 6) With a teacher or caregiver's permission (and your privacy protected), share your haiku with author Maria Gianferrari and others using the hashtag #WhooKuHaiku.

Created for the picture book **WHOO-KU HAIKU: A Great Horned Owl Story** by Maria Gianferrari & illustrated by Jonathan Voss (G.P. Putnam's Sons).



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