HaikuQuest

Meet the Cast

Advanced Edition

Spark & Anvil

Copyright & License

This advanced edition collects 5 chapter books from the HaikuQuest cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register. Advanced edition: upper-middle-grade register (Wonder / Hatchet / Holes band) for readers ages 11-14 ready for longer sentences + more nuanced subtext.

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. All apps free forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases.

spark-and-anvil.com

##

For everyone who learns by reading between the lines.

Contents

Introduction

The HaikuQuest cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it.
Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive —
a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing.
Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.
Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever)
where you can practice what they teach.

This is the **Advanced Edition** — written for readers who are ready for longer sentences, layered subtext, and the trust that comes with not having every joke explained. The Standard Edition covers the same characters at a lighter register; pick whichever feels right for the reader at hand.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Lantern and Breeze

The garden surrendered slowly to the deep blue of dusk. Along the winding stone path, a dozen small paper lanterns, meticulously crafted, gave off a warm, unwavering glow. They were **Lantern**'s careful work, her pride, each one a tiny sun against the encroaching night. From the lowest branch of a gnarled cherry tree, a set of bamboo wind chimes hung, waiting for a whisper of air to set them singing. They were Breeze's constant companion, his favorite instrument. Lantern sat perfectly still on a smooth, cool rock, a writing brush held with delicate precision between her fingers. Her gaze was fixed on the lanterns, as if she could draw their quiet light onto the paper.

Breeze, on the other hand, found stillness a challenge. He zipped from the path to the cherry tree and back again, a blur of motion, making the chimes clink softly, a gentle, musical punctuation to the evening. He seemed to carry the very essence of autumn's restless energy.

"We need a poem for tonight," Lantern said, her voice as soft and steady as the light she tended. "An autumn **haiku**."

"I know, I know!" Breeze whispered, rustling the leaves of a small maple tree with an invisible current of air. He bounced on the balls of his feet. "It should be about... *whoosh!* The feeling of the world getting ready to sleep! The shiver of the air right before the first frost!"

Lantern shook her head gently, a movement barely perceptible. "No, a haiku is a picture. It should be about the light. See how it pools on the moss? How it makes the shadows long and peaceful, stretching out like sleepy cats?" She pointed with her chin at one of her lanterns, its paper shell a pale orange against the deepening twilight. "It's a perfect, still moment, captured for all time."

Breeze sighed, a puff of air that made a single, crimson maple leaf detach itself and spin gracefully to the ground. "Still is boring, Lantern. A poem needs to *move*. It needs to have a pulse." They had been at this for nearly an hour, and their inkstone, a smooth, dark slab, remained untouched, its surface gleaming with clean water. The blank paper seemed to mock them.

Lantern decided to show him, rather than argue further. She closed her eyes for a moment, picturing the scene exactly as it was, every detail sharp and clear in her mind. She believed a poem's strength came from capturing a single, perfect image, like a photograph made of words. You had to hold it completely still, she thought, before you could ever hope to share its beauty.

“Okay, listen,” Lantern said calmly, opening her eyes. “Let’s just focus on the picture first. The feeling will follow, I promise.” She looked down the path, at the row of glowing paper shapes, each one a miniature sun. They didn't move. They simply *were*, radiating their quiet warmth. That, she knew, was their particular magic. “How about this for a first line: *Warm paper lanterns…*”

She paused, letting the words hang in the quiet air, a soft invitation. It felt like a good start, she decided. It painted the main subject clearly, and it had exactly five syllables, just as a haiku’s first line should. Anyone hearing that line, she reasoned, could picture it instantly: clear and calm, a small island of light in the growing darkness.

“…glow along the path,” she finished, imagining the rest of the poem unfolding around this central image. It would be about the stillness, about the way the light held back the encroaching night. It would be a poem about peace, about the quiet beauty of observation. She looked over at Breeze, expecting him to finally see the beauty in her vision. But he was just kicking at a loose pebble, his foot tapping an impatient rhythm against the stone.

“But nothing is *happening*!” Breeze burst out, his voice echoing with frustration. He zipped over to the cherry tree, a sudden gust, and gave the branch a little shake. The bamboo chimes knocked against each other, making a hollow, almost lonely sound. *Clonk, clonk-clink.* “A poem isn’t a painting that just sits there on a wall. It’s a feeling that runs through you! Like me!”

He took a deep breath, filling his lungs, and then puffed it out, a cool current of air that swirled through the garden. The lantern flames flickered wildly inside their paper shells, momentarily dancing. The leaves on the cherry tree whispered a brief secret. The wind chimes sang their hollow song again, a short, sharp melody. “That’s the poem!” he declared, his eyes bright with conviction. “The feeling of autumn arriving, a chill in the air.”

“A poem is about what you can *feel*,” Breeze insisted, his energy barely contained. He tried his own first line, his voice full of vibrant motion. “*Cool wind starts to blow…* See? It has action! It has sound! You can feel it on your skin, can’t you?” He spun in a little circle, making a few more leaves detach themselves and dance in his wake. For him, the garden wasn't a still picture to be observed. It was a symphony of movements and sounds, and a poem, he believed, had to capture that vital energy, or it wasn't alive at all.

“It needs a picture, or nobody knows what you’re talking about,” Lantern said, her quiet voice firm, cutting through Breeze’s flurry. “Your line could be happening anywhere. In a wide field, on a lonely mountain peak. My line puts you *right here*, in this garden.”

“And my line makes you *feel* like you’re here!” Breeze retorted, zipping past her ear with a soft *whoosh* that ruffled a few strands of her hair. “Your lanterns just sit there, beautiful but motionless, until I come along and make their little lights dance!” He was right, she realized. As he passed, the flames inside the paper wavered, and the shadows on the ground wiggled and stretched like waking creatures.

Lantern watched the dancing shadows, a small, thoughtful smile touching her lips. “You’re right,” she admitted, her voice barely above a whisper. “They are more interesting when you’re around, when you stir them to life.” She looked up at the cherry tree. In the fading light, the leaves were just dark, indistinct shapes. But when Breeze rustled them, she could suddenly see each one distinctly, shivering, catching the last vestiges of light. “And I suppose you can’t see your leaves rustling unless my light is shining on them, making their movement visible.”

Breeze stopped his perpetual zipping. He hovered near a lantern, watching its steady light and the playful shadow it cast on the mossy ground. He hadn't quite thought of it that way before. His movement, he now understood, needed her light to be seen, to have form. Her light, in turn, needed his movement to truly feel alive, to tell a story. They weren't trying to write two different poems, he realized. They were trying to describe two essential parts of the very same moment, two sides of the same experience.

They sat together on the smooth, flat rock, the inkstone finally between them. This time, they would build it together, each contributing their unique vision.

“You start,” Breeze offered, his voice softer now, a gentle current. “With the picture.”

Lantern dipped her brush in the ink, the black liquid gleaming. She nodded, then wrote the first line carefully on the paper, her hand steady. “*Paper lanterns glow.*” It was a perfect, still image, a quiet moment of visual truth.

Breeze leaned in, his voice a low whisper that seemed to carry the very sound of the rustling leaves with it. “Now for the feeling, the movement,” he said. He thought for a moment, listening to the faint, distant chime of his bamboo. “*A cool wind whispers through leaves.*”

It was perfect. The picture was there, clear and resonant, and now something was happening inside that picture. It felt complete, a moment both observed and experienced. They looked at each other, a shared understanding passing between them, and then down at the two lines. They only needed one more, the final stroke. Together, they looked at the ground, where the steady light from Lantern’s paper globes met the subtle motion from Breeze’s airy current. They saw the answer right there on the moss, the interplay of light and shadow.

They said the last line at the same time, their voices blending: “*Shadows start to dance.*”

Lantern wrote it down, completing the small poem. They read their haiku aloud in the quiet garden, the words echoing softly. The lanterns glowed, unwavering. The wind whispered, a fleeting presence. The poem was finished, a perfect balance.

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:

https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/haikuquest/lantern-breeze

Count

Cherry met Count *in the woodland grove on a spring morning,* when the cherry-blossoms were *just beginning to open.*

Cherry had been *traveling through the grove* — Cherry travels through the grove every spring, every summer, every autumn, every winter; she carries her poetry-coach role with her through the seasons — and she had been *trying to write a haiku.* She had been carrying *a small bamboo brush* and *a small folded piece of rice-paper.* She had been *muttering syllables to herself* as she walked. She had been on syllable seven of line two and had been *unable to settle* on the next-counted syllable. She had been frustrated.

(Cherry, for context, is *a cherry-blossom-pink figure* in a *plain blue traveling tunic.* She has been the HaikuQuest academy's *traveling poetry coach* for many years. She also carries, as part of her work, *the cultural-tradition responsibility* — the Japanese poetic tradition that gave the world haiku and tanka is *not Cherry's tradition by birth,* but Cherry *honors* it carefully. She teaches the forms *attributed to the Japanese tradition* and she names the technical terms — *kireji, kigo, on — in their original language* with proper attribution. She does not claim the tradition as her own. She *visits* it, carefully, every spring.)

Count had been *perched on a low branch* watching Cherry walk. He was a *magpie-tween* — black-and-white plumage, alert dark eyes, a *long pointed beak* that he held *slightly forward* as if always ready to *count something.* He had been watching Cherry mutter for several minutes. Then he had said: *"You are on syllable seven."*

Cherry had looked up. She had said: *"Yes. How did you know?"*

Count had said: *"I have been counting your syllables. You said *the morning mist rolls in across the field of* — seven syllables in *the morning mist rolls in*, and then *across the field of* — four more. You need three more to complete the seven of line two. Then you will need five more for line three."*

Cherry had been *stunned.* She had not realized the magpie had been counting. She had said: *"You count syllables?"*

Count had said, in his clear precise magpie-voice: *"I count everything. It is what magpies do. I count *steps, leaves, drops of water, bird-calls, syllables.* My beak taps. The tapping marks the count. Watch."*

He had then *tapped his beak — quickly and rhythmically — five times.* Then *seven times.* Then *five times again. Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap. Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap-tap-tap. Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap.* He had said: *"That is the haiku rhythm. Five. Seven. Five. The pattern is countable. Most countable forms have this kind of rhythm. The rhythm is *the form.*"*

Cherry had felt — *for the first time* in her haiku-coaching life — that *counting could be aural rather than only mental.* She had been counting in her head. Count was *counting with his beak.* The aural counting was *more reliable.* The beak-tap *marked* each syllable as it occurred. The pattern *became audible* rather than only abstract.

Cherry had asked Count to *travel with her.* She had said: *"I coach children in haiku and tanka and other counted forms. I think you could help them. I think they need to hear the count, not just think it."*

Count had accepted. He has traveled with Cherry for many years now — *across the spring, summer, autumn, and winter visits* — and he has been *the academy's primary count-discipline coach* throughout. He sits on a branch or a windowsill or a small wooden perch Cherry has carried in her pack. He counts. He taps. He marks the rhythm.

In Cherry's introductory haiku lesson, she gestures at Count — who is, as always, *perched alertly with his beak slightly forward* — and says: *"This is Count. He counts syllables. Watch him tap. Five-Seven-Five is the haiku rhythm. The count is the form's underpinning. Hear it; you can write to it."*

Count taps. *Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap. Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap-tap-tap. Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap.* The students always — *always* — sit a little straighter when the magpie taps. The rhythm is *immediately audible.* The form *becomes hearable.*

Cherry teaches the haiku form, the tanka form (5-7-5-7-7), the cinquain (2-4-6-8-2), and others — each with Count's beak-tap marking the rhythm. The Japanese forms — haiku, tanka — are *attributed* explicitly to the Japanese tradition (Cherry names *Bashō, Buson, Issa, and Shiki* as historical practitioners in her kit-framing remarks; the cast does *not* include any character named after these poets or after Japanese technical terms — per the cultural sensitivity documented in `labsmith/Docs/HANDOFF_FROM_LABSMITH_DISTRIBUTED_NARRATIVE_RETROFIT.md`).

When students ask Cherry whether counting syllables is hard, Cherry says — quoting Count — *"It is not hard. It is *tapping.* Each syllable is a tap. The form has a count-pattern. Tap the pattern; you can hear the form. Once you can hear it, you can write to it."*

Cherry sometimes adds, gently: *"And we name the form's tradition. Haiku and tanka came from the Japanese poetic tradition. We honor that. We learn the forms with attribution."*

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:

https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/haikuquest/count

Lantern

Cherry sat on a mossy log, watching the autumn light filter through the trees. She felt a familiar sigh building in her chest. The grove, usually a place of quiet peace, now echoed with her frustration. She had come to its center, as she did every season, to teach **kigo**—the Japanese term for a season-word. But today, the lesson felt stubbornly stuck.

The cherry trees stood bare, their blossoms long gone. Now, the grove blazed with autumn's fire. Maples, birches, and small ash trees painted the air in shades of red and russet. It was a perfect autumn day, yet her students just weren't getting it.

"It's just a word for a season," one student had declared, shrugging. "So what?"

Cherry had tried to explain. She'd said the season-word anchored a haiku to a specific time and place. It grounded the reader's senses. A poem without a season-word, she'd insisted, just floated. A poem with one was rooted, alive. The students had nodded, polite but clearly unconvinced. Their eyes had glazed over. She could almost see their minds drifting off to lunch.

She was still pondering how to make the abstract idea concrete when a small chipmunk-tween approached. He walked with a quiet purpose, carrying a small wooden lantern. The lantern wasn't lit, but it glowed with a soft, russet color, like a captured ember.

"Hello," Cherry said, surprised.

The chipmunk stopped a few feet away. "My lantern says you are teaching kigo today." His voice was soft, but clear.

Cherry blinked. "Your lantern says that?"

"It's russet," the chipmunk explained, holding the lantern up slightly. "That's the autumn color. This lantern shifts with the season. In spring, it's pale green. In summer, it turns warm gold. In winter, it's a pale blue-white. The lantern *knows the season.*" He paused, then added, "And when someone teaches about season-anchoring nearby, it brightens a little. I came to find the teacher."

Cherry felt a thrill of delight. Her mind raced. This was it. This was the concrete example she needed. "Tell me about the lantern," she urged, leaning forward.

The chipmunk, whose name was Lantern (his given name, he clarified, unchanged), explained its history. His family had carved the lantern generations ago. His great-great-grandmother, a gentle woodcraft enchantress, had enchanted it. The color-shift was their family heirloom, passed down through the ages. The lantern had traveled the grove for centuries, always carried by one chipmunk-tween from the family. That chipmunk, Lantern said, embodied the season-knowing.

Cherry asked Lantern if he would show the lantern's magic to her students. He agreed without hesitation. Together, they walked back to the grove's center where the students still slumped, looking bored.

Lantern stood before them, holding his wooden lantern steady. Its russet glow pulsed softly. He began to speak, his voice quiet but confident. "In spring," he said, "the lantern is pale green." As he spoke, the russet faded, replaced by a soft, fresh green. The students gasped, sitting up straighter. "Cherry-blossoms are blooming. The grass sprouts green. Frog-song fills the air. *Cherry-blossom, frog, plum-blossom, swallow, fawn* — these are spring kigo. The lantern turns pale-green when one of them appears in a haiku."

The lantern brightened, a vibrant, hopeful green.

Lantern continued. "In summer, the lantern is warm gold." The green melted away, shifting to a rich, sun-drenched gold. "Cicadas are singing. Fireflies dance. The streams feel warm. *Cicada, firefly, cool stream, sweat, fan* — these are summer kigo. The lantern turns warm-gold when one of them appears."

The golden light intensified, radiating warmth.

He moved through autumn, the lantern shifting back to its deep russet. "Maple-leaf, cricket, harvest moon, persimmon, scarecrow," he listed, and the students could almost feel the crisp air. Finally, he spoke of winter, and the lantern turned a pale blue-white, like fresh snow. "Snow, ice, frost, plum-tree-bare, hibernation." The students shivered, despite the mild autumn day.

The students were utterly transfixed. Their earlier boredom had vanished, replaced by wide-eyed wonder. They had not understood that a season-word didn't just name a time of year. It activated a whole cluster of sensory associations in their minds. Lantern's color-shift made the principle immediately visible. When a poem named *cicada*, their minds colored gold, filled with the hum of summer. When a poem named *frost*, their minds colored pale-blue-white, feeling the bite of winter. The poem's entire sensory atmosphere was instantly summoned by that single word. It was like magic.

Ever since that autumn meeting, Cherry has invited Lantern to travel with her to the grove each season. Lantern, by his lantern's testimony, is always in the right place at the right time. He has become the academy's season-word demonstrator for many years.

Now, in Cherry's classroom, she gestures to Lantern. He stands quietly at the front, holding the small wooden lantern. "This is Lantern," she says, her voice calm and clear. "His lantern shifts color with the season. When a haiku names a season-word, the lantern colors. The reader's mind colors the same way. The season-word anchors the poem. Watch."

Cherry then reads a haiku that contains a kigo. As she speaks the season-word, Lantern's lantern shifts color, a silent, vivid demonstration. The students see it happen, and the principle becomes visible, undeniable.

When students ask Cherry if kigo is hard to learn, she always quotes Lantern. "It is not hard," she tells them. "It is *anchoring.* Pick a season. Use a word that names something specific to that season. The reader's mind colors. The poem grounds itself in sense and place."

Cherry adds, as she always does, "And we attribute the technical term *kigo* to the Japanese tradition. We learn with proper attribution."

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:

https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/haikuquest/lantern

Pause

Cherry met Pause *at the marsh-edge in late spring,* when the snowy egrets were *fishing in the shallows.*

Cherry had been *trying to teach kireji.* She had been on her second cherry-blossom-season visit to the woodland-grove academy (Cherry visits each spring; she stays through the cherry-blossom-bloom and into early summer; she returns to her own dwelling for the rest of the year). She had been working with a small group of students. She had been trying to explain *the haiku's cut* — the moment of pause that separates two images and *makes the space between them productive.*

The students had been *confused.* Cherry had said: *"The cut is the space between two images. In Japanese the marker is *kireji.* In English haiku the cut is usually marked by a dash or a line-break. The cut is *not the absence of writing.* The cut is *the active space* where the two images interact in the reader's mind."*

The students had said: *"How do we know where to put the cut?"*

Cherry had not been able to answer this clearly. She had known the cut when she felt it. She could not yet *teach* it. She had been quiet at lesson's end. She had walked, at sunset, to the marsh.

The marsh-edge had been *quiet.* The snowy egrets had been *fishing in their characteristic style — holding one leg lifted* while *standing on the other leg* in shallow water, *waiting* for a small fish to swim within striking distance, then *striking.* The egrets had been *patient* and *deliberately mid-step.* The pose was *the fishing-pose.* It was *also*, Cherry had realized as she watched, *a perfect physical kireji.*

One egret in particular — a *small egret-tween* with *unusually-white plumage* — had been *fishing* directly in front of Cherry. The tween's name, Cherry would learn later, was *Pause.* He had been *mid-step — one snowy leg lifted in front, one snowy leg planted behind* — for *easily four minutes* by Cherry's count, watching the water. He had not moved. The lifted leg had not come down. The planted leg had not stepped forward. He had been *between steps.* The *between* had been *the entire pose.*

Cherry had watched. And then she had understood.

Pause's body — *mid-step — was the kireji.* He was *neither standing still* (he had been about to step) *nor walking* (he had been about to plant a foot). He was *holding the space between two motions.* The space between was *active.* It was the space in which *the fishing happened.* The egret's *strike* — when it finally came — *emerged from* the held space. Without the held space, the strike would have been *just a movement.* With the held space, the strike was *the consequence of pause.*

Cherry had said — to herself, but loud enough for Pause to hear — *"The cut is what makes the strike work."*

Pause had turned his head slightly. He had said — in his small careful egret-voice — *"That has been the family motto for many generations."*

Cherry had been *startled* (she had not, at that moment, realized the egret could speak). She had said: *"Excuse me?"*

Pause had said: *"The egrets fish by holding still. The holding-still is what makes the catch possible. We are a family of mid-step holders. The motto is: *the cut is what makes the strike work.* I have heard it since I was a small egret-chick."*

Cherry had stared. She had said: *"I am trying to teach haiku-craft. I have been trying to teach *the cut* — *kireji.* I have been unable to explain it. I think you have just explained it. May I introduce you to my students?"*

Pause had agreed. He had traveled with Cherry — for that season and every season since — *as the haiku-cut demonstrator.* Pause is *always* mid-step. His body *is* the kireji. The students see it. The principle becomes physical.

In Cherry's lesson on kireji, she gestures at Pause — who is, as always, *one leg lifted, one leg planted* — and says: *"This is Pause. His body is the haiku's cut. Mid-step. Held space. The strike comes from the holding. The cut is what makes the strike work."*

She then shows a haiku with the cut marked by a dash:

The morning mist rolls —
A heron lifts one slow leg.
The day has begun.

She points at the dash after the first line. She says: *"This is the cut. The two images — *morning mist rolling* and *heron lifting a leg* — sit on either side of the dash. The space between them is *the kireji.* The reader's mind *connects* the two images across the space. The connection is *the haiku's deep meaning.* Without the cut, the images would just be a list. With the cut, the images become a poem."*

Pause does not move. He is, as always, mid-step. He says — very quietly — *"The cut is what makes the strike work."*

When students ask Cherry whether kireji is hard to learn, Cherry says — quoting Pause — *"It is not hard. It is *holding the space.* Put two images on either side of a small pause. Let the space between them be active. The cut is where the poem's deep meaning happens. Hold the space."*

Cherry adds, as she always does: *"And we attribute the technical term *kireji* to the Japanese tradition that gave us haiku. We learn the form with proper attribution."*

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:

https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/haikuquest/pause

Trim

Cherry met Trim *in the woodland grove in late autumn,* when the red squirrels were *busy foraging and storing nuts for winter.* Cherry had been *on her autumn visit.* She had been working with a small group of students who were *over-writing their haiku.* Their drafts were *seventeen syllables wide — technically correct for a haiku —* but *full of redundant words.* The students had been *padding* their lines to make the syllable count. *"The morning mist is rolling slowly in"* (ten syllables). The line was *technically a haiku-line.* But it had *too many words. Slowly* and *in* were *padding. "Morning mist rolls in"* would have been five syllables — *but the form needed seven.* The students had been *adding words to fill the count.* The poems had been *padded.*

Cherry had not known how to teach them to *find the seven-syllable line that was not padded.* She had not — at that point in her teaching career — *fully understood* the principle herself. She had been able to *recognize* padding when she saw it. She had not been able to *guide* students to *avoid* it.

She had been thinking about this when *a red-squirrel-tween* had hopped down from a tree carrying *a small leather apron* and — in the apron's front pocket — *a pair of small brass scissors.* The squirrel-tween had been *busy*. He had been *trimming small twigs* from a fallen branch. His scissors had been *opening and closing* with a *soft snick-snick* sound. He had been *humming under his breath.*

Cherry had said: *"What are you doing?"*

The squirrel-tween — *Trim* (his given name, unchanged) — had said: *"I am trimming the branch. Most fallen branches have *redundant twigs.* You can take them off without losing the structure. The branch becomes *smaller and stronger.* It is *better for nest-building.* I do this in autumn. It is my work."*

Cherry had stared. She had said: *"I have students with the same problem in their haiku."*

Trim had paused his scissoring. He had said: *"Show me."*

Cherry had taken a student-draft from her bag and read it aloud:

"The morning mist is rolling slowly in
Across the field, the dewy grass is wet
The day is starting now with much to do."

Trim had snipped his scissors twice. He had said: *"The first line has *is rolling — rolls* is shorter and stronger. *Slowly — slowly is implied by mist; cut it. In — cut it; mist rolls is enough.* Trimmed: *The morning mist rolls — . *Five syllables. Shorter. Stronger."*

He had snipped again. *"The second line has *the field* twice (*across the field, the dewy grass* — the *the* is doubled). And *dewy* and *wet* are redundant (dewy grass is wet by definition). Trimmed: *Across the dewy grass* —. Six syllables. Almost there."*

He had snipped a third time. *"The third line has *much to do* — vague filler. The day starting *with much to do* is *abstract.* Replace with something concrete. *The day begins.* Three syllables. Or: *A heron lifts one leg.* Five syllables. The second is stronger because it is *a specific image.*"*

Cherry had been *stunned.* She had said: *"You just turned a padded draft into a real haiku in thirty seconds."*

Trim had said: *"Most drafts can be trimmed by twenty or thirty percent. The smaller version is almost always the stronger version. *Saying less* is the haiku-craft. *Padding to fill the syllable count* is the trap students fall into. The way out is *to trim.*"*

Cherry had invited Trim to *travel with her* to the grove every autumn — and gradually, over years, to *visit in all seasons.* Trim has been the academy's *brevity coach* for many years now. He carries the small brass scissors. He snips. He demonstrates the *smaller-stronger version* by *physically cutting redundant words* from drafts written on slips of paper. The scissoring is *deeply satisfying* to the students. They love watching the words *fall away.*

In Cherry's lesson on brevity, she gestures at Trim — who is, as always, *snipping at something* (a twig, a fallen leaf, a redundant word) — and says: *"This is Trim. He cuts redundancy. Most drafts can be trimmed by twenty or thirty percent. The smaller version is almost always the stronger version. *Snip the padding.*"*

Trim nods. He snips his scissors twice. He says — in his brisk squirrel-voice — *"Snip the redundant. The smaller version is the stronger version."*

When students ask Cherry whether trimming is hard, Cherry says — quoting Trim — *"It is not hard. It is *snipping.* For every line, ask: *can I say this in fewer words?* If yes, snip. The form rewards compression. The reader rewards specificity. Less, more often, is more."*

Cherry sometimes adds, gently: *"This brevity-discipline is the haiku's deepest gift. The Japanese tradition spent centuries refining it. We learn from that tradition with proper attribution."*

Listen along + meet more of the cast at:

https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/haikuquest/trim

About Spark & Anvil

HaikuQuest is one of 140 educational iOS apps from Spark & Anvil — a 501(c)(3) public charity making free, ad-free, tracking-free learning apps for ages 9-14.

Every app uses distributed-narrative methodology: named recurring characters embody curricular concepts. The cast you just met appears in the matching app, in mentor scaffolding, in puzzle solutions, in celebration moments. Reading the chapters first means meeting old friends when you open the app.

Visit **spark-and-anvil.com** to download apps, browse the full portfolio, or donate to support the work.