



# HaikuQuest

*Meet the Cast*

STANDARD EDITION

# Spark & Anvil

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This book 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.

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*For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.*

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# Introduction

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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.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

# Count

*SYLLABLE COUNT — the rhythmic underpinning of every counted poetic form. Haiku is 5-7-5. Tanka is 5-7-5-7-7. Cinquain is 2-4-6-8-2. Limerick has a specific metric pattern.*



- TAP
  - Tap
  - count
  - COUNT
  - 1, 2, 3



- "5-7-5-7-7"  
gate-allow-text-pattern: '^([0-9]+([\s-]+[0-9]+)\*\$|^[A-Za-z]+\$'

## Chapter 1 — Count and the Beak-Tap of Five-Seven-Five



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.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



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

# Lantern and Breeze

seasonal-marker pair — Lantern carries the season's image (light, festival); Breeze carries the season's movement (wind, change). Together they show that haiku has both a still picture and a moving feeling.



The garden was sinking into the deep blue of dusk. Along the stone path, a dozen small paper lanterns gave off a warm, steady glow. They were Lantern's pride and joy. From the branch of a cherry tree, a set of bamboo wind chimes waited for a push. They were Breeze's favorite toy. Lantern sat perfectly still on a smooth, flat rock, a writing brush held carefully in her fingers. Breeze, on the other hand, couldn't stay still. He zipped from the path to the cherry tree and back again, making the chimes clink softly.

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

"I know, I know!" Breeze whispered, rustling the leaves of a small maple tree. "It should be about... whoosh! The feeling of the world getting ready to sleep! The shiver of the air!"

Lantern shook her head gently. "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?" She pointed with her chin at one of her lanterns. "It's a perfect, still moment."

Breeze sighed, a puff of air that made a single red leaf spin to the ground. "Still is boring. A poem needs to *move*." They had been at this for an hour, and their inkstone was still clean.



Lantern decided to show him. She closed her eyes for a moment, picturing the scene exactly as it was. The purpose of a poem, she believed, was to capture a single, perfect image, like a photograph made of words. You had to hold it completely still in your mind before you could share it.

"Okay, listen," Lantern said calmly. "Let's just focus on the picture. The feeling will follow." She looked down the path, at the row of glowing paper shapes. They didn't move. They simply *were*. That was their magic. "How about this for a first line: *Warm paper lanterns...*"

She paused, letting the words hang in the quiet air. It was a good start. It painted the main subject. It had five syllables. Anyone hearing that line could picture it instantly. It was clear and calm, a small island of light in the growing darkness.

"...glow along the path," she finished, imagining the rest of the poem. It would be about the stillness, about the way the light held back the night. It would be a poem about peace. She looked over at Breeze, expecting him to see the beauty in it. But he was just kicking at a pebble, looking impatient.



"But nothing is *happening!*" Breeze burst out. He zipped over to the cherry tree and gave the branch a little shake. The bamboo chimes knocked against each other, making a hollow, lonely sound. *Clonk, clonk-clink.* "A poem isn't a painting that just sits there. It's a feeling that runs through you! Like me!"

He took a deep breath and then puffed it out, a cool current of air that swirled through the garden. The lantern flames flickered inside their paper shells. The leaves on the cherry tree whispered. The wind chimes sang their hollow song again. "That's the poem!" he declared. "The feeling of autumn arriving."

"A poem is about what you can *feel,*" Breeze insisted. He tried his own first line, his voice full of energy. "*Cool wind starts to blow... See? It has action! It has sound! You can feel it on your skin.*" He spun in a little circle, making a few more leaves dance. For him, the garden wasn't a still picture. It was a collection of movements and sounds, and a poem had to capture that 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. "Your line could be happening anywhere. In a field, on a mountain. My line puts you *right here*."

"And my line makes you feel like you're here!" Breeze retorted, zipping past her ear with a soft *whoosh*. "Your lanterns just sit there until I come along and make their little lights dance!" He was right. As he passed, the flames inside the paper wavered, and the shadows on the ground wiggled and stretched.

Lantern watched the dancing shadows. A small smile touched her lips. "You're right," she admitted. "They are more interesting when you're around." She looked up at the cherry tree. In the fading light, the leaves were just dark shapes. But when Breeze rustled them, she could suddenly see each one distinctly as they shivered. "And I suppose you can't see your leaves rustling unless my light is shining on them."

Breeze stopped his zipping. He hovered near a lantern, watching its light and shadow play on the mossy ground. He hadn't thought of it that way. His movement needed her light to be seen. Her light needed his movement to feel alive. They weren't writing two different poems. They were trying to describe two parts of the very same moment.



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

"You start," Breeze offered. "With the picture."

Lantern dipped her brush in the ink and nodded. She wrote the first line carefully on the paper. "*Paper lanterns glow.*" It was a perfect, still image.

Breeze leaned in, his voice a low whisper that seemed to carry the sound of the leaves with it. "Now for the feeling, the movement," he said. He thought for a moment, listening to his chimes. "*A cool wind whispers through leaves.*"

It was perfect. The picture was there, and now something was happening inside the picture. It felt complete. They looked at each other, and then down at the two lines. They only needed one more. Together, they looked at the ground, where the light from Lantern's paper globes met the motion from Breeze's airy current. They saw the answer right there on the moss.

They said the last line at the same time: "*Shadows start to dance.*"

Lantern wrote it down. They read their haiku aloud in the quiet garden. The lanterns glowed. The wind whispered. The poem was finished.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



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

# Lantern

*KIGO — the season-word that anchors a haiku to a specific season and grounds the poem's imagery. Cherry-blossom = spring. Cicada = summer. Maple-leaf = autumn. Snow = winter.*



- "W"

gate-allow-text-pattern: "^(?:[0-9]+(-[0-9]+)\*|[A-Za-z])\$"

## Chapter 3 — Lantern and the Wooden Lantern That Knew the Season

Cherry met Lantern. It was autumn. They met in the middle of the grove. She had visited this grove for years. Every spring, she came here. But now the cherry trees were not blooming. The grove was red and russet. Maple leaves turned red. Birch trees were yellow. Small ash trees showed orange. Autumn colors were everywhere.



Cherry tried to explain. She was very patient. A season-word *anchored* a poem. It tied the poem to a time and place. It helped readers *feel* the poem. Without a season-word, a poem just floated. It felt like nothing. With a season-word, the poem had roots. It felt real. The students still looked confused. They were polite, but they didn't get it.

Cherry sat on a log. It had fallen long ago. She thought about how to teach better. Then a chipmunk walked up. He was small, like a tween. He carried a little wooden lantern. The lantern was not lit. But it glowed. It was a soft russet color.

Cherry said, "Hello."



Cherry blinked. "Your lantern says that?"

The chipmunk held up the lantern. "It's *russet*," he said. "That's the autumn color." He explained more. "The lantern changes color with the seasons. In spring, it's pale green. In summer, it's warm gold. In autumn, it's russet. In winter, it's pale blue-white." He tapped the wood. "This lantern *knows the season*." He paused. "And when someone teaches about *season-anchoring* nearby, it glows brighter. So I came to find you."

Cherry's eyes lit up. She was so happy. "Tell me about the lantern!" she said.

The chipmunk's name was Lantern. He told Cherry his story. His family made the lantern a long, long time ago. Many generations back. His great-great-grandmother enchanted it. She was a kind woodcraft enchantress. The lantern's color-change was a family treasure. It had been in the grove for hundreds of years. Always carried by a chipmunk-tween. Someone from his family. That chipmunk always *knew the season*.



Lantern stood before the students. The lantern changed color slowly. Lantern talked about each season. "In spring," he said, "the lantern is pale green. Cherry blossoms bloom then. Grass starts to grow. Frogs begin to sing." He listed words. "*Cherry-blossom, frog, plum-blossom, swallow, fawn* — these are spring *kigo*." He held up the lantern. "The lantern turns pale green when one of these words is in a poem."

The lantern glowed pale green.

Lantern kept going. "In summer, the lantern is warm gold. Cicadas sing loudly. Fireflies dance at night. Streams feel warm." He named more words. "*Cicada, firefly, cool stream, sweat, fan* — these are summer *kigo*." The lantern glowed warm gold when these words were in a poem.

The lantern glowed warm gold.



The students watched, amazed. Their eyes were wide. Before, they didn't get it. They didn't know a season-word could do so much. It made you *feel* things. It brought up pictures in your mind. Lantern's lantern showed them. It made the idea clear. When a poem said *cicada*, your mind saw summer. It felt warm and golden. When a poem said *frost*, your mind saw winter. It felt cold and pale blue-white. The season-word put the feeling right into the poem.

Since that autumn day, Cherry always asked Lantern to come along. She invited him to the grove every season. His lantern always told him where to be. It told him when to be there. He was always in the right spot. He showed the academy students about season-words. He has done it for many years.

Now, in Cherry's class, she teaches about *kigo*. Lantern stands at the front. He holds his small wooden lantern. Cherry points to him. "This is Lantern," she says. "His lantern changes color with the season. When a poem uses a season-word, the lantern changes. Your mind changes too. The season-word *anchors* the poem. Watch this."

Cherry reads a haiku. It has a *kigo* in it. Lantern's lantern shifts color. The students see it happen. The idea is clear to everyone.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



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

# Pause

\*KIREJI — the haiku "cut": a moment of pause or break that *juxtaposes* two images, generating meaning from the space between them. In English haiku, often marked by a dash or a line-break.\*



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 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*.



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."*



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."*



*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.\*

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



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

# Trim

*BREVITY — the discipline of cutting redundant words to find the smaller-stronger version. A 5-7-5 haiku demands compression; most drafts can be trimmed by 20-30% to find the better version.*



## Chapter 4 — Trim and the Brass Scissors

Cherry met Trim in the woods. It was late autumn. Red squirrels were everywhere. They gathered nuts for winter. Cherry was on her autumn visit. She worked with some students. They were writing haiku. But their poems were too long.

Their poems had seventeen syllables. That's the right number for haiku. But they used too many words. The students were *padding* their lines. They just wanted to hit the syllable count.



Cherry didn't know how to help them. How could they find a seven-syllable line? One that wasn't padded? She didn't quite get it herself. Not yet, anyway. She could spot padding. But she couldn't show students how to stop.

Cherry was thinking hard. Then a red squirrel hopped down. It wore a small leather apron. Tiny brass scissors stuck out of a pocket. The squirrel was busy. He was *trimming* small twigs. They came from a fallen branch. His scissors went *snick-snick*. He hummed a little tune.

Cherry asked, "What are you doing?"



Cherry stared. "My students have the same problem," she said. "With their haiku."

Trim stopped snipping. "Show me," he said.

Cherry pulled a student poem from her bag. She read it aloud:

*"The morning mist is rolling slowly in  
Across the field, the dewy grass is wet"*



Trim snipped his scissors twice. "First line," he said. "*Is rolling?* Change it to *rolls*. That's shorter and stronger. And *slowly?* Mist is always slow. Cut it. *In?* Cut that too. *Mist rolls* is enough." He snipped again. "So it's: *The morning mist rolls* —. Five syllables. Shorter. Stronger."

He snipped again. "Second line," Trim said. "*The field* is in there twice. See? *Across the field, the dewy grass*. That *the* is extra. And *dewy* and *wet* mean the same thing. Dewy grass is always wet." He snipped. "Trimmed: *Across the dewy grass* —. Six syllables. Almost perfect."

He snipped a third time. "Third line," he said. "*Much to do?* That's just vague words. It doesn't show anything. Replace it with something real. Like: *The day begins*. Three syllables. Or: *A heron lifts one leg*. Five syllables. The heron one is better. It's a clear picture."

Cherry was stunned. "You just made a real haiku!" she cried. "From a padded one! In thirty seconds!"



Cherry asked Trim to come with her. To the grove, every autumn. Then, over the years, he visited in all seasons. Trim became the academy's *brevity coach*. He's been doing it for years. He always carries his brass scissors. He snips. He shows students the *smaller-stronger version*. He cuts extra words right off their papers. Students love watching him snip. It feels good. They watch the words *fall away*.

In her lesson, Cherry points to Trim. He's always snipping something. Maybe a twig. Or a leaf. Or an extra word. "This is Trim," Cherry says. "He cuts out extra stuff. Most poems can lose twenty or thirty percent. The smaller version is almost always stronger. *Snip the padding*."

Trim nods. He snips his scissors twice. His squirrel voice is brisk. "Snip the extra words," he says. "The smaller version is stronger."

Students ask Cherry if *trimming* is hard. Cherry quotes Trim. "It's not hard," she says. "It's just *snipping*. For every line, ask: Can I say this in fewer words? If yes, snip. The poem gets better when it's short. Readers like clear pictures. Less is often more."

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



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

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- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

## Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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