



Exploring two mathematical poems by Carmela A. Martino

Key topics: Mathematics · Syllables · Class poem · Individual writing

Resource written by Rachel Piercey

Getting to know the poems

Display 'Formula for Fun' (see below), making sure the explanatory note is not visible, and read it aloud. Explain to your class that it is a syllable square poem. Can they guess what this might mean? Together, count the number of syllables in each line and the number of lines – there are 5 of each. How many syllables does the title have? Can they point out the alliteration and rhyme in the poem?

Remind them what a haiku is. "A haiku is a brief Japanese form that has been adapted into English in various ways. Its usual definition is that it is a three-line poem, consisting of seventeen syllables split 5-7-5." (The Poetry Archive, <https://poetryarchive.org/glossary/haiku/>).

Go over the concept of π (pi). In any and every circle, the circumference divided by the diameter will equal π , approximately 3.14. But in actual fact, the numbers after the dot in π go on forever! The first ten are: 3.1415926535... There is a fun and informative video about π here: <https://thekidshouldseethis.com/post/the-infinite-life-of-pi-ted-ed>

With this in mind, what do they think a 'pi-ku' might be? Read the poem 'Pi-ku Rule' together and count the syllables. Did they notice the near-rhyme of "long" and "on"? The poem sounds good even though it does not follow a set rhyme and rhythm.

Squares and circles

Of course, you can write about anything you want in a syllable square poem or pi-ku. But for this resource, let's use the theme to echo the form, and focus on squares and circles.

On the board, make a list of square (or square-ish!) things, for example a window, a chess board, a slice of bread, an ice cube, a cushion, a dice, a Rubiks cube...

Then make a list of round things: the Sun, the Moon, the planets, a star, a clock, a coin, a football, a globe, a drum, an apple, a sunflower...

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Class poem

First, write a syllable square poem together as a class. Choose one of the square shape-objects and then decide your number of syllables. It doesn't have to be 5 lines of 5 syllables, it can be any matching number. For example, if you have 6 tables, ask each table to come up with a 6-syllable line about your chosen object.

Assign each table a different characteristic of the object – for example, what it's used for, how it looks, how it feels to touch, how it moves, how it sounds, how it makes you feel emotionally, what it would say if it could speak...

Share the lines together and write them on the board. What order will you choose for them? Will you make any last tweaks to the word choice? Write up your final syllable square poem and read it aloud together.

Next, choose a round object for your pi-ku. Write the first three lines (3 syllables, 1 syllable, 4 syllables) using ideas from the class. Think about how you can make it sound satisfying, as Carmela does with “long” and “on”. Then read it aloud together.

Individual writing

Invite the children to write their own poems, inspired by Carmela's poems and your class poems. They can choose a syllable square or a pi-ku, and an object from the board or one they have thought of themselves.

Encourage them to redraft, scribble out and change things – poets almost never get their poem right first time and their notebooks tend to be very messy! When they're ready to write it up neatly, you may like to use the print-out template below. What will they choose as their title?

Explain that if you have written a poem inspired by someone else, it's important to acknowledge them – and the easiest way to do this is with a short line underneath the title (see below).

We would love to see what your pupils come up with! Tag us on Twitter @tygertygermag with a picture or email us on tygertygermagazine@gmail.com for some personalised feedback.



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after a mathematical poem by Carmela A. Martino

by



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Formula for Fun

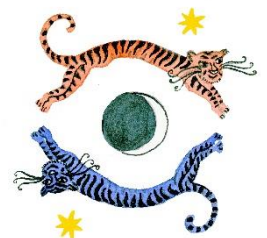
Poetry plus math
yields countless forms, from
syllable squares and
three-line haiku to
infinite pi-ku.

Note: this is a syllable square poem – the number of lines in the poem equals the number of syllables in each line. In this case, that number is five, which is also the number of syllables in the title.

Pi-ku Rule

A pi-ku
can
be three lines long,
like
a haiku, or it
can be like pi, and go on and on
and on
and on and on and on...

Note: a basic pi-ku is three lines long, with syllables per line equalling 3, 1, 4 – the first three digits of π . In an eight-line pi-ku like this one, the syllables per line equal the first eight digits of π : 3.1415926.



by Carmela A. Martino