



HaikuQuest

Meet the Cast

Standard Edition

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 4 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

The Haikuquest cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 4 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.

Cherry met Count one bright spring morning. The air smelled fresh and green. She was in the woodland grove. Cherry blossoms were just starting to open.

Cherry wore a plain blue tunic. Her skin was the color of cherry blossoms. She always traveled through the grove. She went in spring, summer, autumn, and winter. She was a poetry coach for HaikuQuest academy. She carried her job with her, like a favorite backpack. This morning, she was trying to write a brand new haiku. She had a small bamboo brush. She also had a folded piece of rice paper. Cherry muttered syllables to herself as she walked. Her lips moved silently, then she mumbled a few words aloud. She tried different sounds. She was on the second line. She had seven syllables already. But she could not find the next one. She felt very frustrated.

Count sat on a low branch. He watched Cherry walk by. Count was a magpie-tween. He had black and white feathers. His dark eyes were very alert. His long, pointed beak stuck out a little, like a tiny pointer. It looked like he was always ready to count something important. He had watched Cherry mutter for minutes. Then he spoke. "You are on syllable seven."

Cherry looked up. "Yes," she said. "How did you know?"

Count answered. "I have been counting your syllables." He tilted his shiny black head. "You said, 'the morning mist rolls in across the field of,'" he

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.

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 was teaching about *kigo*. That's a season-word. It was hard to teach. Her students did not get it. Why did season-words matter? They said, "It's just a word. For a season. Who cares?"

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."

The chipmunk said, "My lantern says you teach *kigo* today."

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*.

Cherry asked Lantern to *show* his lantern to her students. He could show them how it changed color. Lantern said yes. They walked back to the middle of the grove.

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.

He talked about autumn next. The lantern turned russet. Autumn words were *maple-leaf, cricket, harvest moon, persimmon, scarecrow*. Then came winter. The lantern turned pale blue-white. Winter words were *snow, ice, frost, plum-tree-bare, hibernation*.

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.

Sometimes students ask, "Is *kigo* hard?" Cherry shakes her head. She uses Lantern's words. "It's not hard," she says. "It's about *anchoring*." She tells them how. "Pick a season. Choose a word from that season. A word that means something special. Your mind will see the colors. The poem will feel real. It will have a place."

Cherry always adds one more thing. "We get the word *kigo* from Japan," she says. "We always give credit where it's due."

Voice register

Guidance (Lantern): Warm, lantern-tender, fond of seasonal observation. Chipmunk-tween carrying the family wooden lantern. Friends with Cherry.

Sample lines (Lantern):

- "Anchor to a season. The lantern colors the poem."
- "Spring is pale green. Summer is warm gold. Autumn is russet. Winter is pale blue-white."
- "Cherry-blossom, frog, cicada, firefly, maple-leaf, cricket, snow, frost — each one summons a whole season into the poem."
- "The lantern was my great-great-grandmother's. It has been in my family for many generations."

Arc across kits

- **Kit 1-2** — Cameo.
- **Kit 3** — **Anchor character**. Full chapter feature.
- **Kit 4-7** — Recurring (kigo identification; season-word selection for original haiku).
- **Kit 8-10** — Cameo (kigo in tanka and other Japanese-derived forms).
- **Kit 11-12** — Fading.
- **Kit 13-16** — Off-page.

Relationships

- **Alliance:** Cherry.
- **Tension:** None.

Cultural-context note

The grove-center autumn setting and the family-heirloom lantern detail are deliberate gentle pastoral framings. The cultural-tradition framing is load-bearing: *kigo* is attributed to the Japanese tradition; Lantern is not named after the Japanese term; Cherry visits-and-honors rather than owns the tradition. The "gentle woodcraft enchantress" great-great-grandmother is a kid-friendly fantasy framing without specific cultural attribution. R0 sensitivity-reviewer signoff is the preferred path per `.claude/rules/distributed-narrative.md` § cultural-sensitivity gates.

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 by the marsh. It was late spring. Snowy egrets fished in the shallow water.

Cherry was trying to teach something tricky. It was called *kireji*. She was at the woodland-grove academy again. This was her second spring visit. She always came when the cherry blossoms bloomed. She stayed until early summer. Then she went back home for the rest of the year.

This time, Cherry worked with a small group. She wanted to explain the haiku's *cut*. It was a moment of pause. This pause separated two images. It made the space between them useful.

The students looked confused. Their eyebrows scrunched up. One student chewed on her pencil. Another just stared at the wall.

Cherry tried to explain. "The cut is a space," she said. "It sits between two pictures in a poem." She paused. "In Japan, they call it *kireji*." She tapped the whiteboard. "In English haiku, it's often a dash. Or maybe a line-break."

She drew a dash. "It's not just empty space," Cherry told them. "It's a busy space. The two pictures talk to each other there. They connect in your mind."

The students still looked puzzled. "But how do we know?" a boy asked. "Where do we put the cut?"

Cherry didn't have a good answer. She knew the cut when she felt it. But she couldn't show anyone else. The lesson ended quietly. Cherry felt a little sad. She walked to the marsh as the sun went down. The sky turned orange and pink.

The marsh was very quiet. Only the gentle lapping of water could be heard. Snowy egrets fished nearby. They had a special way of doing it. Each egret stood on one leg. The other leg was lifted high. They waited in the shallow water. They waited for a tiny fish. When a fish swam close, *WHAM!* They struck fast.

The egrets were so patient. They stayed perfectly still. They were always halfway through a step. This was their fishing pose. Cherry watched them. She suddenly understood something big. This pose was just like the *kireji!* It was a perfect, real-life cut.

One egret stood right in front of Cherry. He was a small egret-tween. His feathers were extra white. Cherry would later learn his name was Pause.

Pause was mid-step. One snowy leg was lifted high. The other snowy leg was planted behind him. He watched the water. Cherry counted the minutes. He stayed like that for four minutes. He did not move at all. His lifted leg did not come down. His planted leg did not step forward. He was stuck between steps. That "between" was his whole pose.

Cherry watched him. Then she finally understood everything.

Pause's body *is* the *kireji*. He was mid-step. He wasn't standing still. He was about to step. He wasn't walking either. He was about to put his foot down. He held the space between two moves. That space was busy. It was where the fishing happened.

The egret's strike came. It shot out from that held space. If he hadn't held still, it would just be a quick move. But because he paused, the strike meant something more. It came from waiting.

Cherry whispered to herself. "The cut," she said, "is what makes the strike work." She said it loud enough for Pause to hear.

Pause turned his head a tiny bit. He spoke in a small, careful egret voice. "That's our family motto," he said. "It has been for a long, long time."

Cherry jumped. She hadn't known egrets could talk! "Excuse me?" she asked.

Pause looked at her. "Egrets fish by holding still," he explained. "That stillness helps us catch fish. We are a family of mid-step holders." He puffed out his chest a little. "Our motto is: *the cut is what makes the strike work*. I learned it when I was a tiny egret-chick."

Cherry just stared at him. "I'm trying to teach haiku," she said. "I'm trying to teach the *cut* — *kireji*." She sighed. "I haven't been able to explain it. But I think you just did." Her eyes lit up. "Can I introduce you to my students?"

Pause nodded his snowy head. He agreed to help. He traveled with Cherry that season. He came back every spring after that. He became the haiku-cut helper. Pause is *always* mid-step. His body *is* the *kireji*. Students see it right away. The idea becomes real.

In Cherry's class, she teaches about *kireji*. She points to Pause. He stands there, one leg up, one leg down. Just like always.

"This is Pause," Cherry says. "His body *is* the haiku's cut. Mid-step. Held space. The strike comes from that holding. The cut is what makes the strike work."

Then she shows a haiku. It has a dash to mark the cut:

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

Cherry points to the dash. It's after the first line. "This is the cut," she says. "Two pictures sit on each side. The mist rolling. The heron lifting its leg." She taps the dash. "The space between them is the *kireji*."

"Your mind connects those two pictures," she explains. "It jumps across that space. That connection is the poem's real meaning. Without the cut, they're just words. With the cut, they become a poem."

Pause doesn't move. He stays mid-step. He whispers, very softly, "The cut is what makes the strike work."

Students often ask Cherry. "Is *kireji* hard to learn?" they ask.

Cherry smiles. She uses Pause's words. "It's not hard," she tells them. "It's about *holding the space*." She pauses. "Put two pictures on each side

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.

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.

One line went: "*The morning mist is rolling slowly in.*" It had ten syllables. That was a haiku line. But it had too many words. *Slowly* and *in* were just extra words. They were padding. "*Morning mist rolls in*" was five syllables. But a haiku line needs seven. Students added words to fill the count. The poems felt padded.

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?"

The squirrel was Trim. That was his real name. "I'm *trimming* this branch," he said. "Most fallen branches have extra twigs. You can snip them off. The branch stays strong. It gets *smaller and stronger*. It's better for nests. I do this every autumn. It's my job."

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
The day is starting now with much to do."*

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!"

Trim nodded. "Most poems can lose twenty or thirty percent," he said. "The smaller version is almost always stronger. *Saying less* is the haiku secret. Students get stuck *padding* to fill the syllable count. The way out? You just have to *trim*."

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."

Cherry sometimes adds softly: "This way of being short is a gift. It comes from haiku. Japanese writers worked on it for hundreds of years. We learn from them. We always remember where it came from."

Voice register

Guidance (Trim): Brisk, snipping, fond of finding the smaller-stronger version. Red-squirrel-tween with leather apron and brass scissors. Friends with Cherry.

Sample lines (Trim):

- "*Snip the redundant. The smaller version is the stronger version.*"
- "*Most drafts can be trimmed by twenty or thirty percent.*"
- "*Is rolling* becomes rolls. Slowly is implied. Cut the padding.*"*
- **"Replace abstractions with specific images. Much to do is vague. A heron lifts one leg is concrete."**

Arc across kits

- **Kit 1-3** — Cameo.
- **Kit 4** — **Anchor character**. Full chapter feature.
- **Kit 5-8** — Recurring (brevity practice; trimming drafts).
- **Kit 9-12** — Fading (per Pattern-B fade).
- **Kit 13-16** — Off-page.

Relationships

- **Alliance:** Cherry.
- **Tension:** None.

Cultural-context note

The red-squirrel-autumn-foraging setting is a deliberate gentle pastoral framing. Trim is rendered as an anthropomorphic red-squirrel-tween in the chunky-cartoon visual register. The brass-scissors-in-leather-apron detail is consistent with the hands-on register. The cultural-tradition framing is maintained: Cherry attributes the brevity-discipline to the Japanese tradition; Trim is not named after a Japanese term; the tradition is visited-and-honored rather than owned.

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- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **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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