

# Japanese Poetry

The story of Japanese poetry begins with the *tanka*. The *tanka* is a 5 line poem wherein the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lines have 5 syllables and the other lines 7 syllables each thus creating a poem with 31 total syllables. We will talk about *tankas* as well as analyze examples in class.

The poem that famously grew from the *tanka* was the *haiku*. In effect, the *haiku* shortens the already short *Tanka* to just three lines of 5, 7, 5 syllables. In class we will learn how to analyze a *haiku* and recognize its two most famous writers. To prepare, read through and study the eight *haiku* provided (4 for each author). It may even be helpful to memorize the examples which will provide you a modal to recognize unknown *haikus* you will encounter.

## Basho (1644 – 1694)

On a withered branch  
A crow has settled –  
Autumn nightfall.

Many, many things  
they bring to mind –  
cherry-blossoms.

Old pond:  
Frog jump in –  
Water sound.

The Summer grasses grow  
Mighty warriors' splendid dreams–  
The afterglow.

## Buson (1715 – 1783)

Spring rain! And as yet  
The little froglets' bellies  
Haven't got wet!

No poem you send  
in answer – O, young lady!  
Spring is at its end!

Blossoms on a pear;  
and a woman in the moonlight  
Reads a letter there...

What piercing cold I feel!  
My dead wife's comb, in our bedroom,  
under my heel...