

# ART ACROSS THE CURRICULUM | ENGLISH

## SHORT-FORM POETRY WITH KIM HOA TRAM'S *PINE WITH CRANES DANCING IN THE SNOW, DANCE IN MOTION, 2000*

LEVELS 6–9

### OVERVIEW

This resource uses Kim Hoa Tram's *Pine with cranes dancing in the snow, dance in motion, 2000*, as inspiration for learning about and writing poetry. Students will gain an understanding of the nature of poetry, symbolism in poetry and art, and poetry from Asia. They will practise writing poetry in different forms and explore ways to present and share their poetry.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Compare and contrast visual and written texts (poetry and painting).
- Analyse and interpret the imagery and symbolism in Kim Hoa Tram's *Pine with cranes dancing in the snow, dance in motion, 2000*.
- Practise using metaphors and similes as poetic tools.
- Practise writing poetry in various forms including haiku, tanka, shi and senryu.
- Discuss how the subject matter and techniques used by an artist reflect their culture and beliefs.
- Present and share poetry compositions.

### LINKS TO THE VICTORIAN ENGLISH CURRICULUM

#### Level 6

- Identify the relationship between words, sounds, imagery and language patterns in narratives and poetry, such as ballads, limericks and free verse (VCELT344).
- Investigate how vocabulary choices, including evaluative language can express shades of meaning, feeling and opinion (VCELA352).
- Experiment with text structures and language features and their effects in creating literary texts (VCELT355).

**Level 7**

- Understand, interpret and discuss how language is compressed to produce a dramatic effect in film or drama, and to create layers of meaning in poetry (VCELT375).
- Analyse and explain the ways text structures and language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose (VCELY379).
- Experiment with text structures and language features and their effects in creating literary texts (VCELT385).

**Level 8**

- Investigate how visual and multimodal texts allude to or draw on other texts or images to enhance and layer meaning (VCELA402).
- Explore the ways that ideas and viewpoints in literary texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups (VCELT403).
- Experiment with particular language features drawn from different types of texts, including combinations of language and visual choices to create new texts (VCELT418).
- Create literary texts that draw upon text structures and language features of other texts for particular purposes and effects (VCELT419).

**Level 9**

- Analyse and explain the use of symbols, icons and myth in still and moving images and how these augment meaning (VCELA431).
- Identify how vocabulary choices contribute to specificity, abstraction and stylistic effectiveness (VCELA432).
- Analyse text structures and language features of literary texts and make relevant comparisons with other texts (VCELT439).
- Experiment with the ways that language features, image and sound can be adapted in literary texts (VCELT447).

# ABOUT THE WORK

## 1. KIM HOA TRAM'S *PINE WITH CRANES DANCING IN THE SNOW, DANCE IN MOTION, 2000*



### Kim Hoa Tram

*Pine with cranes dancing in the snow, dance in motion* 2000  
ink and pigments on paper  
137.1 × 69.2 cm (image and sheet)

National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne

Purchased through the NGV  
Foundation with the assistance  
of The Marjory and Alexander  
Lynch Endowment, Governors,  
2001

2001.586

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### 1.1 THE ARTIST

Kim Hoa Tram is a contemporary artist whose paintings reflect his deep involvement with Zen Buddhism and his Chinese heritage; in particular, the traditions of Chinese ink painting and calligraphy.

Kim Hoa Tram was born in Saigon, Vietnam, in 1959. His family originated from Fujian province in China. He immigrated to Australia in 1984. His paintings express the inner experience of Zen, the empty, pure and still state attained by spiritual awakening. Before commencing a painting, Tram engages in meditation to clear his mind:

*In the awakened state of stillness, the mind and body become one. At that moment, the mind is boundless and beyond imagination. Images emerge naturally in spontaneous brushwork.* from 'The art of stillness', *Moon in Reflection, The Art of Kim Hoa Tram* (2000)<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 THE ARTWORK

*Pine with cranes dancing in the snow, dance in motion*, 2000, is a skilful example of the ink brush painting and calligraphy traditionally associated with China. The dramatic contrast between the sturdy pine tree dominating the landscape and the fragile forms of the cranes dancing in the luminous snow characteristically evoke the beauty of nature. Cranes and pines are auspicious symbols in Chinese art and culture. They are best known for representing longevity or long life. The pool of light suggests a spotlight on a stage, but it could also allude to the artist's personal experience of 'inner light' achieved through his Zen practice.

On the left-hand side of the painting, the title is inscribed in calligraphy, which is a major art form in Chinese culture. The two red seals represent inner joy and good wishes. The seal in the lower right-hand corner reads *le zai qizhong* (happiness within). The seal in the upper right-hand corner reads *meiyi yannian* (may beautiful thoughts last the entire year).

## 1.3 CULTURAL CONTEXT

Traditionally, the Chinese revered nature and believed that people and the natural world were one. A person's hair could be likened to grass, and the blood coursing through their veins was reminiscent of the rivers and streams in the landscape. Scholars used landscape paintings to meditate on the beauty of nature and find calm and peace.

Following traditional Chinese methods, *Pine with cranes dancing in the snow, dance in motion* was painted from memory and experience rather than copying directly from nature. The painting highlights the differences between Eastern and Western cultures, in terms of both philosophy of life and artistic style. Dr Mae Anna Pang, former Senior Curator, Asian Art, National Gallery of Victoria, discusses the contrast between cultures in *An Album of Chinese Art* (1983). She writes:

*The Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) who reached China in 1582 commented that Chinese paintings 'look dead and have no life at all' because of the absence of linear perspective and illusionistic modelling. The Chinese were in turn astonished by the European paintings brought to China by the Jesuits because the objects were like 'images reflected in a mirror' but they considered them 'unworthy of the name of painting because they were totally devoid of brushwork'.*

This view of European painting was expressed by Zou Yigui (1686–1772), a leading flower painter.<sup>2</sup>

# WARM UP

## 2. READING THE PAINTING

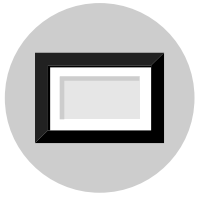


IN SCHOOL

Working individually or in pairs, consider the following questions and note down your thoughts.

<b>First reaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What word would you use to describe your first reaction to <i>Pine with cranes dancing in the snow, dance in motion</i>?</li><li>• What is the focal point in the painting? The artist leads our eyes to a certain point – why might he want to do this?</li><li>• What words describe the mood of this painting? What aspects of the painting make you think this?</li></ul>
<b>Descriptive words</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Write down three adverbs that express how the cranes are dancing.</li><li>• Think of some unusual ways of describing the greys, blacks and whites in the painting.</li><li>• Aside from the pine tree and the cranes, what else can you see? Find at least two things and describe them with two interesting adjectives and one simile.</li></ul>
<b>Opposites</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Great art and literature often contain starkly opposite concepts that create dynamism and tension to captivate the viewer or reader. What opposites can you identify in the painting?</li><li>• Construct two descriptive phrases that explore two of the opposite concepts that you have identified in the painting. These phrases should show the contrast between the items in the pair.</li></ul>
<b>Weather</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find descriptive words to describe the weather in the painting. Now imagine you are a weather reporter on TV. Write a couple of sentences about the conditions using the specific language of weather reports.</li></ul>
<b>Sound</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe the sounds you would hear if you were inside the scene.</li><li>• What piece or type of music or song would best evoke the mood and special qualities of the painting? Explain your reasons for choosing the music.</li></ul>
<b>Naming the painting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Imagine you are the artist. What would you call the painting?</li></ul>
<b>The artist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What evidence is there in the painting that might suggest the artist has a Chinese background?</li><li>• What qualities in the painting suggest that the artist has achieved Zen – an empty, pure and still state believed to be attained by spiritual awakening?</li></ul>

# ACTIVITY



## IN THE GALLERY

### 3. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN POETRY AND ART

Look at the image of *Pine with cranes dancing in the snow, dance in motion* alongside the poem, 'Japanese cranes' by Judith Beveridge.

#### JAPANESE CRANES

Their frames—  
an architecture of paper,  
lightweight beams

A low sun  
huddles into firtrees, ponds—  
trims the landscape

Only the small,  
or poised, will survive:  
these birds'

light breakable beauty  
Mating—they are  
the original origami:

one unritualised peck  
could chip them  
Such a skilled brittle

elegance Earth can crack  
its icy ceramic:  
so their dance is brief,

a perfect choreography  
Their cries—  
the rattle of teasetts

kept intact  
by ceremony  
And when they lift—

they could be glass  
blown from a white  
clear flame

Judith Beveridge,  
*The Domesticity of Giraffe* (1987)<sup>3</sup>

1. Writers paint pictures with words. They use simile and metaphor to make comparisons between objects and ideas, and to create a richer image. Find where Judith Beveridge uses simile and metaphor in 'Japanese cranes'.
2. What does she compare the cranes to? What other comparisons does she make?  
*Suggested answers: architecture, blown glass, origami, delicate ceramics.*
3. What qualities do these things share? What qualities are similar in the poem and in the painting?

*Suggested answers:*

*Both capture a brief moment in time.*

*Both capture the delicate dance of the cranes.*

*Both evoke the sound of the cranes.*

*Both capture the appearance of the cranes.*

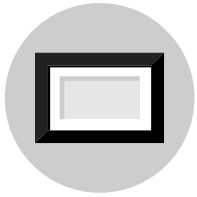
*Both describe a landscape.*

4. Kim Hoa Tram uses symbolism in his painting, as cranes and pines are auspicious symbols in Chinese art and culture. Where does Judith Beveridge use symbolism? Which words or imagery hint at other meanings or might represent something else?

# ACTIVITY

## 4. SHORT-FORM POETRY

The following activities explore simple formulas for writing a poem to increase students' confidence in writing. They can be used as individual activities or completed sequentially to produce an album of poetry. These poetry formulas can be applied to other works in the NGV Collection, either online or during a visit to the Gallery.



IN THE GALLERY



IN SCHOOL

### 4.1 WHEN, WHERE AND WHAT POEM

Ask when, where and what to stimulate ideas and structure for a poem. It demonstrates the condensed nature of poetry, and how an idea can be communicated simply and beautifully in just a few words.

Picture a scene or special memory and use the *When*, *where* and *what* formula to write a poem about it.

SECTION	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Line 1	<u>When</u> it happened	<i>Windy days—</i>
Line 2	<u>Where</u> it happened	<i>Leaves in the park</i>
Line 3	<u>What</u> it happened	<i>Flicker and fall</i>

### 4.2 HAIKU

Haiku is a highly structured traditional style of Japanese poetry, which evolved from a more complex form called *waka* that was written and performed in the Japanese court during the Heian period (AD 794–1192). Traditionally, haiku express the beauty of the natural world and capture a brief moment in nature as it passes. In Japanese culture, nature is celebrated and often used to symbolise other ideas. For example, the delicate clouds of pink cherry blossoms, which appear briefly in spring symbolise the fragility and impermanence of life.

The haiku form has a strict structure that relies on understanding syllables.

- Line 1 has five syllables
- Line 2 has seven syllables
- Line 3 has five syllables



Matsuo Bashō is a famous Japanese poet and scholar from the seventeenth century who wrote vivid haiku poems, composed as he wandered around different landscapes observing nature. The 5-7-5 syllable structure is lost in translation from Japanese, but the meaning remains the same.

Bushclover flowers—  
They sway but do not drop  
Their beads of dew

David Cobb, *The British Museum Haiku* (2002)<sup>4</sup>

1. What might the elements of Bashō's poem – the flowers, the dew drops, the swaying and not dropping – symbolise? Does it impart any wisdom or meaning?
2. Write a list of natural elements that might be used to represent or symbolise something else. For example, a rose might symbolise passion, a flame might symbolise spirit, and a skull might symbolise death.
3. Using *Pine with cranes dancing in the snow, dance in motion* as inspiration to write a haiku.

## TOP TIPS FOR WRITING A HAIKU

- Capture the essence of a passing moment in nature, such as a butterfly fluttering past, a leaf floating to the ground, a lion pouncing on prey, a dewdrop on a petal, or a flock of cranes in flight.
- Express the heart of your subject – haiku are so short that you need to make sure you get straight to the core of your topic, using only the best words.
- Use verbs in the present tense – this allows the reader to experience the moment as if it is happening now.
- Use simple language and avoid rhyme.
- You could make use of contrast by comparing two opposing concepts. For example, the haiku below encourages the reader to appreciate the featherweight beauty of a petal compared with the dark solidity of a canyon.

Autumn afternoon  
Tossing a petal  
Into a mighty canyon

## 4.3 TANKA

Tanka is one of the oldest types of Japanese poetry and was the preferred verse form in the imperial court of Japan. Traditionally, when a member of the Japanese court wrote a haiku to a friend, the recipient of the poem would add two lines with seven syllables each and then return it. The whole poem consists of five lines with a total of thirty-one syllables. Here is an example of tanka poetry, inspired by the season of spring:

SECTION	LINE	SYLLABLES	EXAMPLE
Haiku	Line 1	Five	Fluttering softly
	Line 2	Seven	In the warm afternoon light
	Line 3	Five	A spring dragonfly
Additional Lines	Line 4	<u>Seven</u>	If we were all so gentle
	Line 5	<u>Seven</u>	The world could breathe once again

Share the haiku you wrote in the previous exercise with a partner. Ask them to write two more lines of seven syllables each for your poem in response to your lines.

## 4.4 SENRYU – WE ARE ALL HUMAN!

Senryu is a traditional Japanese form of poetry that has the same structure as haiku. While haiku takes inspiration from the natural world, senryu focuses on aspects of human nature. Whereas haiku tends to be serious, the last line in senryu is always surprising, amusing or unexpected. Consider the three examples of senryu below:

Nothing I can do  
Like a wave it sweeps through me  
Need chocolate now!

Like flowing lava  
The heat sweeps through my body  
Don't stare at me please!

Humans love nature?  
Plastic bottles litter grass  
More rubbish bins please!

Write a senryu poem that captures a fleeting image or scene representing a shortcoming or an eccentricity of human nature.

## 4.5 SHI

Chinese shi poems were popular during the Tang period (AD 618–907). They had the following structure:

- Five or seven syllables per line.
- Usually four lines per poem but can increase to a maximum of eight.
- Lines 2 and 4 rhyme.

The first two lines set the scene, the third line provides a twist or surprise, and the last line is the poet's advice to the reader or their thoughts about the situation described. Here is an example of a shi poem that uses this format.

SECTION	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Line 1	Sets the scene	A knobbly old log
Line 2	Sets the scene	Drifting through the Nile
Line 3	A twist or surprise	Its jaws open – snap!
Line 4	The poet's thoughts or advice to the reader.	Beware – Crocodile!

Look at *Frogs and orchids*, 1977, where artist Ding Yanyong has painted frogs tumbling from orchid leaves. Write a shi poem inspired by the painting.



**Ding Yanyong**  
*Frogs and orchids* 1977  
(青蛙芝蘭图)  
ink on paper  
139.0 x 69.4 cm (image and sheet)  
National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne  
Purchased with funds donated  
by Jason Yeap, 2009  
2009.445  
© Estate of Ding Yanyong

## 4.6 WILDLIFE IN WORDS – RHYMING POETRY

Many poets take inspiration from nature. Frederic Ogden Nash was an American poet famous for his humorous verse. His poems 'The grackle' and 'The fly', below, describe the characteristics of creatures with rhyming lines and a humorous twist.

### THE GRACKLE

The grackle's voice is less than mellow,  
His heart is black, his eye is yellow,  
He bullies more attractive birds  
With hoodlum deeds and vulgar words,  
And should a human interfere,  
Attacks that human in the rear.  
I cannot help but deem the grackle  
An ornithological debacle.

Ogden Nash<sup>5</sup>

### THE FLY

God in his wisdom made the fly  
And then forgot to tell us why.

Ogden Nash<sup>6</sup>

Choose an animal and write a humorous rhyming poem that describes its appearance and character.

# PROJECT

## 5. POETIC STORIES



IN SCHOOL

The following tasks are designed to practise poetry forms and push students a little further by introducing a broad narrative arc to their poetry.

### 5.1 A HAIKU FOR EACH SEASON

Write a haiku for each season: spring, summer, autumn and winter. Capture the essence of each season, describing a scene or detail that epitomises the season for you. Illustrate each haiku with a suitable drawing, painting or photograph (preferably one you have taken yourself).

### 5.2 A TALE IN FOUR TANKAS

Write a story through four tankas. Each tanka should capture a different chapter from your tale with a title that captures its essence. The response lines (lines 4 and 5, with five to seven syllables each) could take the form of a narrator's voice commenting on events or a reader asking questions about what has unfolded.

1. Tanka one: The beginning of the story
2. Tanka two: What happens, the story unfolds
3. Tanka three: How it ends
4. Tanka four: Epilogue wrapping up or explaining the moral of the story

### 5.3 PRESENT YOUR WORK

Plan and create a presentation of your work. It could be a performance, an animated presentation, a series of artworks or illustrations, a book, or set your poems to music!

# NOTES

1. Excerpt from 'The art of stillness', *Moon in Reflection, The Art of Kim Hoa Tram*, DVD, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2000.
2. Dr Mae Anne Pang with Judith Ryan, *An Album of Chinese Art*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1983.
3. 'Japanese cranes', in Judith Beveridge, *The Domesticity of Giraffes*, Black Lightning, Pennsylvania State University, 1987, p. 39.
4. David Cobb, in *The British Museum Haiku*, The British Museum Press, 2002.
5. Ogden Nash, *Ogden Nash's Zoo*, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, New York, 1987, p. 51.
6. *ibid.* p. 38.

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