

Haiku Contest 2020: Selections by Susan Antolin

First Place

Fallen leaves dancing blown by the wind, kids jumping up and down
—Risa Yamada, 1st year, Medicine

The images in this haiku are clear and evocative. The middle line acts as a pivot between the first and last lines, unifying the whole. The fallen leaves as well as the kids are blown by the wind, causing one to dance and the other to jump up and down. A traditional haiku that fits with the autumn season. Well done!

Second Place (tie)

Winter has come / I'll take a walk / with the stars
—Fuuka Kuwamura, 2nd year, Engineering and Design

autumn night take a walk with the moon
—Atsutaka Mochizuki, 1st year, Medicine

These two haiku were so similar, I couldn't select one without the other. In each poem the season is named in the first line, and then a wonderful contemplative mood is established in the following lines. These haiku capture a lovely feeling of wanting to walk alone while not feeling entirely alone. The moon and the stars are always there, reliable companions in a world where friends we can count on may at times be scarce.

Third Place

Autumn leaves, take a picture, in my heart
—Ami Otani, 2nd year, Clinical Psychology

In the era of ubiquitous cell phones, how often do we see something beautiful and take note of it only in our heart without pulling out our phone to record the moment? This haiku reminds us that we can take a picture figuratively and appreciate the beauty of autumn leaves without taking a literal photograph. A wonderful sentiment in a time when taking photos has become a habit rather than something we carefully consider. It makes one wonder whether we might appreciate the moment even more if we commit it to memory rather than store it in our phone.

Honorable Mention: Selections by Susan Antolin and Ian Willey

sluggish paper wasp looking for day's eye
—Hiroko Ota, 1st year, Economics

This is a mysterious haiku, and the mystery adds to its appeal. The word “sluggish” is a great choice of words to describe a wasp that is perhaps nearing the end of its life. The wasp may be struggling as it looks for an escape from its current situation or a way to remain alive. The mystery comes in the last two words and causes the reader to wonder whether a day has an eye, and if so, what is it? Is the eye of a day some sort of way out for the wasp? This one leaves us with questions and requires us to use a bit of imagination to find meaning, which is exactly the sort of haiku that pulls the reader back for further thought.

The sun that illuminates the sunflowers is a memory of summer
—Yuma Nagao, 2nd year, Economics

While in general, haiku in English tend not to consist of a complete sentence or statement, this one does. This haiku begins with a capital letter, and if we were to add a period at the end, it would be a complete sentence that ostensibly states a simple fact. And yet, there is something surreal in this haiku. Is the sun described in this haiku real, or is it just a memory? At the beginning, the poem describes the sun in a very concrete way. It is not just any sun; it is the sun that illuminates the sunflowers, which feels very real and immediate. And yet the haiku ends by saying the sun is a memory of summer, which makes one wonder if it wasn't a real sun after all. The overall effect is somewhat magical.

kiwi birds—singing a song post lockdown
—Ukyo Nasu, 4th year, Education

The best haiku often contain an element of ambiguity. In this poem, who is doing the singing? The kiwi birds, or people in New Zealand emerging from their homes after several weeks of lockdown? (Do kiwi birds even sing?) Does the author have friends in New Zealand from a previous study abroad experience, and heard the singing on Zoom? However this haiku came to be and whoever is singing, the three core elements of the haiku—kiwi birds, the singing, the lockdown—combine to form a powerful image that fills one's heart with hope. Several entries tackled the subject of the pandemic directly, and this one did so with exceptional grace and power, and a bit of fun as well. It's a lovely image!