

Divine Objects: Fold a Haiku-Themed Fortune-Teller

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Education level: Elementary or Middle school

Genre: Poetry

Time frame: One or two 60-minute class periods

Objective: This lesson is designed to allow students to create a book object, inspired by a Poetry Center exhibit, [Book Objects Live!](#), and create multiple haikus on interrelated themes, as well as create a fun reason to read original student poetry aloud to peers.

Prior knowledge and skills: It's helpful if students already know how to fold a [fortune-teller](#) but if not, they are easy to make and teach.

Required materials: A square piece of paper for each student, instruction video for how to fold a fortune-teller, markers and/or colored pencils, a pen or pencil, scratch paper for rough drafts of poems. Optional: [Haikubes](#)

Literary model: [Haikus from 6th Annual Haiku Hike](#)

Sequence of activities:

Note: This activity is inspired by the Poetry Center exhibit [Book Objects Live!](#) and [Haikus from 6th Annual Haiku Hike](#). Images of example haiku fortune tellers can be viewed [at this link](#).

1. Instruct students on how to fold a [fortune teller](#), either by watching the video together or demonstrate it yourself to them. Alternatively, if you think students will unduly struggle with the process, you can prepare the folded fortune tellers in advance; however, I do not advise that, as learning to fold can be helpful for students in developing fine motor skills, and it gives them a sense of ownership and accomplishment. Also, many already know this form as a popular game, and can teach each other.

2. Explain that we are going to use the fortune teller as a surface for creating up to four haiku poems, one under each of the flaps under the folds where, typically, the fortunes would be written in a traditional fortune-teller. On the top of the flaps, instruct students to decide on four different titles for their four haikus. For added interest, you may want to invite students to interrelate their titles/topics by picking something there are four of, such as four seasons, four elements, four of their favorite foods, four planets, four wild animals, or the like.

Examples of flaps with titles:



3. Once they choose their titles/topics, they can begin composing their poems. Some students may want to compose on scratch paper and then transfer finished poems to the fortune-tellers. Others may want to compose directly on the fortune-teller. Either way is okay.

4. Haikus can be created in many different ways. If you have access to classroom funds and want to purchase a set or more of **Haikubes**, this can be a fun, tactile resource to help students compose. You could alternately give more advanced students access to a set of magnetic poetry tiles, which also has the advantage of working with existing words and arranging them. But, most students enjoy using the 5-7-5 syllable format of writing a haiku with their own self-selected words, though some sources suggest that this rigid, syllable-counting formula is not the heart of the form. You can read about other ways of composing [here](#) or [here](#) if that feels relevant to you and your students. I personally like to use the 5-7-5 format for young children because it is good practice for them to think about form as a starting point and helps them to make structured decisions than an open-ended, less numerical approach to creating lines will afford.

5. Once students have composed their haikus – again, four will fit well under the flaps of the fortune-teller – have them write their finished poems under the flaps. They might play with how to orient the poem on the square space under each flap.

The poems under the flaps, two orientations:



6. Then, invite students to illustrate or color their fortune-tellers. They might find it entertaining to create images that intermingle with the words of the poem. Or, they might want to simply color in the existing spaces on the inside and outside flaps of the fortune-teller. Explain that book objects are meant to convey writing like books, but they are also meant to be objects of beauty and visual interest, so invite them to be creative with how to use color and imagery to enhance their fortune-teller book objects.

The outer pockets for the fingers, showing different kinds of patterns and designs:



7. Once students are finished, invite them to play the fortune-teller game with one another. They can use the traditional format of asking a peer to say a number aloud, and then open and close their fingers to make the fortune-teller move as it is designed to do. When they land on one of two poem titles, the querent can select a title from the two, and then the poet can read aloud the chosen poem under the title flap. In this way, you can encourage students to read their writing aloud to one another in a fun way.

Note: Encourage students to create their own variations on the instructions for designing,

writing, and illustrating. Some may not want to write haikus, but still enjoy writing their own forms of poems. There's no need for rigidity about the forms or styles that are created. The students may want to write little poetic fortunes, or tiny stories, or some other type of writing altogether. I always encourage creative variations when I teach, as it gives students the permission they need to break rules in positive ways and access their own inner sense of design and invention.

Note: You also may want to provide visual inspiration or other non-linguistic prompts in the workspace, such as school appropriate oracle or tarot cards, or magazine cut-outs of images that could spark ideas for poem topics/titles. Oracle cards have the added advantage of connecting to the theme of divination and fortune-telling, as well as nature-themed haiku, but depending on your community's norms and values, you may want to select for images and visual resources that are appropriate for your students' cultures or ages. Above all, enjoy the process and have fun!

Note: Depending on the time of year, you may want to have students submit their best 5-7-5 Haikus to a relevant contest, such as Tucson's [Annual Haiku Hike](#).