PJCA's First International English Haiku Contest 2026

in collaboration with the

Embassy of Japan in Pakistan

Haiku & Senryu Contest

Autumn 2026

Initiated, hosted and published by

Pakistan Japan Cultural Association Islamabad

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PJCA's First International English Haiku Contest: Digital (PDF), November 2026

Free download available from the PJCA Islamabad website: https://pjca-isb.org

Participating Countries (58)

1. Algeria	**21.** Jordan	**41.** Russia
2. Australia	**22.** Malawi	**42.** Scotland
3. Austria	**23.** Malaysia	**43.** Serbia
4. Bangladesh	**24.** Malta	**44.** Singapore
5. Belgium	**25.** Mauritius	**45.** Slovakia
6. Brazil	**26.** Mexico	**46.** South Africa
7. Bulgaria	**27.** Moldova	**47.** Spain
8. Canada	**28.** Montenegro	**48.** Sri Lanka
9. Chile	**29.** Nepal	**49.** Suriname
10. Croatia	**30.** Netherlands	**50.** Switzerland
11. Czech Republic	**31.** New Zealand	**51.** Turkey
12. England	**32.** Nigeria	**52.** Ukraine
13. France	**33.** North Macedonia	**53.** United Arab Emirates
14. Germany	**34.** Northern Ireland	**54.** United Kingdom
15. Hungary	**35.** Norway	**55.** United States
16. India	**36.** Pakistan	**56.** Uzbekistan
17. Iran	**37.** Philippines	**57.** Vietnam
18. Ireland	**38.** Poland	**58.** Wales
19. Italy	**39.** Portugal	
20. Japan	**40.** Romania	

Acknowledgements

We, the core team of the Pakistan Japan Cultural Association (PJCA), Islamabad, are delighted to have received 671 haiku and senryu submissions from 58 countries around the world, with the highest numbers of entries coming from Pakistan, India, and the USA. This remarkable international response reflects the growing global appreciation of these beautiful Japanese poetic forms and highlights the power of poetry to connect people across cultures and borders.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to H.E. Mr. Akamatsu Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan and Patron-in-Chief of PJCA, Islamabad, for his gracious patronage, encouragement, and confidence in this endeavour. We are deeply honoured by his personal involvement in this historic initiative, further exemplified by his gracious signing of the digital certificates, which added distinction, prestige, and special significance to the contest.

Our special thanks go to Vanessa Proctor, the distinguished lead judge, who generously undertook the judging process anonymously. She selected the top three winning entries for First, Second, and Third Place and shortlisted outstanding haiku for consideration for the Honourable Mention Awards. Her dedication, expertise, and invaluable contribution helped make this contest truly remarkable.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Public Affairs Section of the Embassy of Japan in Pakistan for this initiative. Our special thanks go to Ms. Takako Sato of the Embassy for selecting the Honourable Mentions from the shortlisted haiku and senryu entries.

We also sincerely appreciate the contribution of our team member, Hifsa Ashraf, who took part in the judging of the Honourable Mentions while also playing an active role in organizing PJCA's First International English Haiku Contest 2026.

Our sincere congratulations to all the winners and recipients of Honourable Mentions for sharing outstanding poems that uphold the art of haiku and reflect its true spirit. As a token of appreciation for their valuable contributions, digital certificates, duly signed by H.E. Mr. Akamatsu Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan and Patron-in-Chief of PJCA, Islamabad, and Mr. Jamal Shah, President of PJCA, Islamabad, have been awarded to the lead judge, winners, and recipients of Honourable Mentions in recognition of their participation and poetic excellence.

We also extend our gratitude to all participants who shared their creativity, perspectives, and poetic expressions with us, making this inaugural international contest a truly memorable experience.

Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the success of this historic initiative. As the first contest of its kind in Pakistan, this endeavour marks a significant milestone in promoting haiku and senryu poetry and strengthening cultural ties between Pakistan, Japan, and the wider international community.

Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to making this historic initiative a great success!

Organizing Team and Judging Panel

PJCA Organizing Team

Jamal Shah	President, PJCA Islamabad
Mushtaq Moeeni	Secretary General, PJCA Islamabad
Hifsa Ashraf	Member, PJCA Islamabad

Judging Panel

All poems were evaluated anonymously, ensuring that the judging process was fair and impartial, without revealing the identities of the poets.

Vanessa Proctor	Selecting the top three winners in haiku and senryu, with brief comments and shortlisting poems for Honourable Mentions in both categories.
Takako Sato	Selecting the Honourable Mentions from the shortlisted haiku and senryu, with brief comments.
Hifsa Ashraf	Selecting the Honourable Mentions from the shortlisted haiku and senryu, with brief comments.

HAIKU

First Place

> *a thousand miles*
> *the hoopoe's shadow resting*
> *on the ancient wall*
>
> **— Eduard TARA, Romania**

The winning haiku stands out because of the skilful way that it resonates across time and space. Hoopoes are distinctive birds, both males and females sporting fan-shaped crests. Widespread across Asia, Africa and Europe they are mostly migratory and fly alone or in pairs, travelling vast distances across continents in search of warmth and food. In this haiku there is a single hoopoe who is resting during or near the end of its long journey. It's interesting that the shadow with its distinctive shaped crest is represented in this poem rather than the actual bird. This adds an element of mystery to the haiku, suggesting the fragility of nature but also its endurance. The human element is represented by the ancient wall which is stable and solid, juxtaposed against the fleeting shadow of the bird. The wall has endured through time and has become part of the landscape, just as the habits of migrating hoopoes have endured. The wall built by human hands many generations ago offers a resting place for the hoopoe so that it can continue its journey to secure its own future and that of future generations.

Second Place

> *rice planting song –*
> *the crow's beak holds*
> *a mud snail*
>
> **— Neena Singh, India**

The first line of this fine haiku refers to the ancient tradition of planting rice, a crop which sustains millions of people across many cultures. The act of planting rice is backbreaking, but necessary work, and the community comes together in song which helps to make the work easier, adding rhythm to this taxing physical labour. In this haiku, a crow, a ubiquitous bird, also benefits from the rice planting by finding its own food in the mud that has been formed by humans in preparation for the rice planting. The visual image of the mud snail in the crow's beak is juxtaposed against the harmonious nature of the song. The crow holds food in its mouth while the rice planters sing and plant the rice which will sustain them in the fullness of time. The snail's shell is a spiral, hinting at the cyclical nature of the seasons and the co-existence of humankind and the natural world.

Third Place

> *dusty noon*
> *a boy measures the goalpost*
> *with his feet*
>
> **— Ibrahim Nureni, Nigeria**

The seasonal word in this engaging haiku ‘dusty noon’ implies the heat of summer and the lack of rain. The boy is outside in the hottest part of the day measuring the goalpost with his feet, suggesting that there is no goalpost, yet with some ingenuity, he and his friends can still play. It may be lunchtime, so they want to play together during their lunchbreak. There is an air of expectation as he prepares for the game. Does the boy wear shoes? Possibly not. Despite the harsh conditions, the children still plan to come together to play sport. What kind of game are they about to play? It is likely to be football, the world game, although there are other possibilities. This haiku implies determination and a sense of community. Haiku can suggest so much with very few words.

SENRYU

First Place

> *the gentle lift*
> *of sheer curtains*
> *bicycle bell*
>
> **— John Pappas, USA**

The winning senryu combines two actions beautifully, the lifting of light curtains and the sound of a bicycle bell, to create a moving moment suggestive of reunion. The use of 'gentle' for the action of lifting the curtains and the fact that the curtains are 'sheer', showing only impressions of what is outside, creates a tender tone. We don't know who is looking out of the window or who is arriving on the bicycle. Are they about to be reunited? The use of 'gentle' does not suggest a nosy neighbour. We imagine the excitement of the moment of the person's arrival as they ring the bell to indicate that they are outside. This senryu expresses a universal experience. Who hasn't waited for a friend or family member to arrive and felt their spirits lift once they have appeared? The images work hard to paint a picture for us, so that we can bring our own experiences to the poem. The perspective is dual; the moment could be observed both inside and out. There is a powerful juxtaposition of the indoor world of stasis and the outdoor world of movement which is about to enter someone's home and consequently someone's life, deepening human connection.

Second Place

> *taste of paprika –*
> *my father's voice returns*
> *on videotape*
>
> **— Nicholas Klacsanzky, USA**

This thought-provoking senryu is also sensory, but this poem highlights the sense of taste to evoke a memory. Food is a powerful link to our identity. Paprika can be sweet, smoked or hot, adding layers to this poem. Which type of paprika is it and how does it relate to the father's personality and his voice? Is it mild or does it have a bite? Whatever type of paprika, it is likely to be a vibrant red-orange colour and have an earthy taste, a connection with home and the family. The fact that the father's voice returns on videotape suggests that the father is no longer with the family. What has happened to him? Has he died or left the family? Even though he is no longer physically present, his voice lives on through technology. There is a suggestion that a significant amount of time has passed as videotapes are no longer in general use. Poems of the highest order tend to resonate with us. They leave it to the readers to find answers in our own experience and imagination.

Equal Third Place

> *a warm coin –*
> *the migrant's child picks out*
> *a scoop of ice cream*
>
> **— Silva Trstenjak, Croatia**

This uplifting senryu does have a seasonal word 'ice cream' which indicates summer, but it fits into the category of senryu because it centres on human experience rather than foregrounding the season. Ice cream is generally available all year round. The first image is a coin warmed by body heat in the child's hand or in a pocket. A coin is a small thing, but of great significance to the migrant child. The child's life is defined by their parent's choice, however the coin offers them a treat, a small pleasure, something it is implied that does not happen often because of their circumstances. The coin gives the child agency as they choose not only the experience of eating delicious ice cream, but also their preferred flavour. All of this leads to a feeling of happiness and respite from the difficulty of their daily life. Concise poems such as haiku and senryu often present us with everyday moments that express a much wider significance.

Equal Third Place

> *mourning chants*
> *the crimson rim*
> *of a sama daf*
>
> **— R. SURESH BABU, India**

This moving senryu charts the sadness that accompanies mourning. Ceremony is important in marking a loved one's passing and here the combination of the Sufi spiritual practice of whirling or devotional listening with the rhythmic beats of a traditional Persian drum are intertwined. The drum has a crimson rim which suggests the red rimmed eyes of the mourners. The beat of the drum can indicate both the celebratory pulse of life and the passing of life. This poem uses two complementary images of sound to deepen unspoken emotion.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

(In no particular order)

Picked up by Ms. Takako Sato,
Representative of the Embassy of Japan in Pakistan

Haiku

faraway love
in the mailbox
a butterfly

— Anthony Q. Rabang, Philippines

first homecoming
in a drift of oak leaves
a stranger again

— Chen-ou Liu, Canada

mom's needlepoint
short of stitches
mackerel clouds

— Martina A. Matijević, Croatia

Senryu

silver birch
i ignore his advice
to colour my hair

— Jahnavi Gogoi, Canada

freedom day parade
restricted access
beyond the barricade

— Soumya Mukherjee, USA

condolence card
I practice
my handwriting

— Veronica Tucker, USA

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

(In no particular order)

Picked up by Ms. Hifsa Ashraf,
Pakistan Japan Cultural Association, Islamabad

mantra wind
the crab spider pretends
to be a flower

— Deborah Karl-Brandt, Germany

winter kiln –
the potter's thumbprint
beneath the glaze

— Jacek Margolak, Poland

brush of wind –
red leaves parting
the crane's bill

— Deborah A. Bennett, USA

rising above
the canyon rim
a selfie stick

— Scott Mason, USA

chemo holiday
stone skipping the edge
of an enso

— Lorraine A Padden, USA

hand-me-down clothes
trying to fit in
my sister's reflection

— Wendy Cobourne, US