

Living in harmony with nature

A few facts about Japan and its environment

- ✿ Japan is an Asian country of islands in the Pacific Ocean. It is an archipelago, a group of islands, formed by volcanoes, with many mountains.
- ✿ There are more than 2,000 islands, but most people live on the main four: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu.
- ✿ The weather in Japan can be harsh. Heavy rains and typhoons happen during summer and fall.
- ✿ Japan has a lot of earthquakes. The surface of the earth, called the crust, is not one solid piece. It's more like a puzzle with constantly-moving pieces called tectonic plates. Earthquakes happen when these plates scrape or bump against each other.
- ✿ From ancient times in Japan, living in harmony with nature has centered on the seasons. Japan has four distinct seasons. People take special notice of things like signs of new life in spring and the colorful changes of fall.
- ✿ Nature and its changing seasons are celebrated in art, poetry, food, architecture and gardens. They have festivals to celebrate seasonal changes, like when the cherry trees bloom.



A short history of haiku

- ✿ Hundreds of years ago, the Japanese began to capture the constantly-changing beauty and power of nature in three-line programs called haiku.
- ✿ A poet named Basho, who lived from 1644-1694, took the time to notice little things that happen in each season. He wrote about the flutter of butterflies and the buzz of bees. He wrote about the scent of flowers and lonely trees.
- ✿ In 1689 Basho walked across mountainous northern Japan. He walked from spring until fall, more than five months – 156 days! As he walked, he wrote haiku about nature's gifts that are fleeting, here one moment and then gone the next. Here are four of Basho's haiku, one for each season.

Each time the wind blows
The butterfly finds a new home
On the willow

A bee
Staggers out
Of the peony

On a bare branch
A crow has settled
Autumn nightfall

Will you start the fire?
I'll show you something nice
A bright ball of snow

