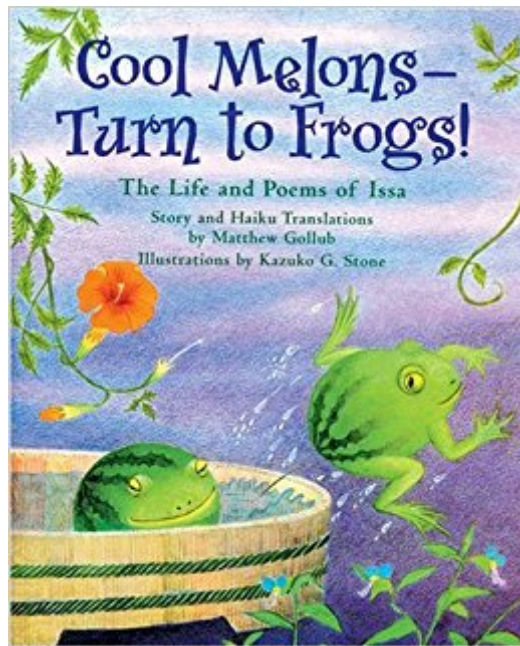


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Cool Melons - Turn To Frogs!: The Life And Poems Of Issa



Synopsis

Born in 1763 on a farm in central Japan, Issa began writing haiku as a young child. Matthew Gollub has integrated the story of Issa's life and selections of his best-known work with Kazuko Stone's visual interpretations in the form of whimsical watercolors. Full color.

Book Information

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Age Range: 6 - 11 years

Grade Level: 1 - 6

Customer Reviews

This superb homage to the 18th-century Japanese haiku master is as elegant and spare as the poet's form. Gollub's (*The Moon Was at a Fiesta*) brief biography introduces Issa's pertinent haiku and tells the story of Issa's transformation from a sad child (his stepmother thwarted his gift) to a recognized, talented poet. Japanese artist Stone (*Dorobo the Dangerous*), who chose the haiku represented here for Gollub's translation, captures the moment described in each poem with exquisite details, imbued with quiet emotion. For example, for the poem "Climb Mount Fuji,/ Snail, but slowly,/ slowly!" Stone puts readers at a vantage point above a snail traversing a tree branch that appears to lead the way up the great mountain's slope. The poem and image come at the point in the biography when Issa is just beginning his studies, in the long journey to master poet. The book's design lends a fluidity to the interlacing elements: within the narrative, a poem appears on each page, coupled with Stone's expressive visual representation, while the haiku in Japanese calligraphy runs down the outer border. For students of haiku, Gollub explains his deviation from the 17-syllable definition (he chose to adhere closely to Issa's words) and gives a brief history of haiku.

Readers would be hard-pressed to find a more eloquent, concise and inspiring approach to understanding (and writing) this deceptively simple art form. Ages 4-up. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Grade 2-5-A successful collaboration of verse and prose that brings a famous 18th-century poet to life. Gollub's original translations of Issa's haiku are interspersed with biographical narrative (slightly fictionalized) so that each one lends context to the other. Each poem is illustrated with a realistic spot or framed watercolor-and-colored-pencil picture, and rendered in Japanese calligraphy in the outer margin. Stone elaborates on her artistic research in endnotes. Gollub explains in detail how he went about his translations so that readers can understand what to look for and what's lost. Although just an introduction, this book explains much about haiku and those who wrote it, information not usually included in titles written for this age level. However, no mention is made of what made Issa so different from his predecessors-his poetry had a casualness and sense of humor that was both criticized and popular. Along with Dawnine Spivak's *Grass Sandals* (Atheneum, 1997), this book works at restoring the historical and literary context to this popular form of poetry as well as at instilling an appreciation for one of its most enjoyable practitioners. Nina Lindsay, Oakland Public Library, CA Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

I got this book at the library to enrich a study on Japan with my 8 year old daughter. I fell in love with the whole book: the story, the writing, the pictures, the extra information in the back. It was a find! So of course, I now have my own copy. My daughter enjoyed it so much she wants to learn Japanese now.

Wonderful imagery & poetry & based on historical character! Love it. Simple, yet profound. I liked it as well as my 5 1/2 year old grandson.

Magical picture book biography of a famous haiku writer in Japanese history. A boy from a middle class farmer is dedicated to his education and writing of haiku. When his mother dies and the father remarries, the mother forces the boy to care for the children she has by his father and bullies him to give up schooling and farm alongside his father. The father doesn't want the boy to give up his education and sends him away fearing that the stepmother might ruin the boy's chances at life. As he grows into a man, he learns haiku from a master teacher and eventually runs the school. Feeling

constrained by the school's feeling of propriety and how to write haiku. He gives up on the school and goes back home to take charge of his inheritance. He marries and has children but they don't survive, causing him grief. He uses haiku to channel his grief and becomes one of the greatest haiku writers. His name - Brother Issa. The illustrations are just as great as the writing. Wonderful book!

This is a beautiful book, even for children who aren't fond of poetry. Matthew Gollub tells the story of the haiku master Issa, interweaving translations of 33 haiku. The narrative creates a framework for understanding, especially the plaintive poems written when Issa keenly felt the loss of his mother. "Motherless sparrow,/ come play/ with me." Kazuko G. Stone's lovely illustrations complement the haiku but also can stand on their own. I found myself turning back to three illustrations in particular: a kitten playing in bright red autumn leaves, three children catching snowflakes in their mouths, and a beautifully detailed dragonfly. Stone's artwork helps interpret the haiku. For example, the titular poem didn't make much sense to me when I read it years ago, but the illustration of small green melons trembling in a water basin as a sandal-clad foot steps into view makes it clear: If the melons transform, they can escape the fate of being eaten! In addition to the child-friendly main narrative, Gollub includes an author's note section on the selection of the poems, details about particular poems, and explanation of haiku in general. These are very helpful for teachers or parents who would like to have more background to share with children. Between the story-style and the illustrations, this is a wonderful book for storytime. I can see it becoming a favorite that children revisit.

The best introduction to haiku, by way of the life of Issa, that I have read thus far in my study of haiku. This is an illustrated picture book aimed at children, but it captures the essence of the haiku moment beautifully, and for the beginner, the illustrations open up the words and provide an image -- one way to appreciate the connection between the words and the experiential moment. The translations are fresh and not syllable-bound, thankfully, with an added bonus of the haiku in Japanese cursive along the sides of the pages. This book is a perfect combination of concept, design, and execution, with engaging text and tender, whimsical, and astonishingly apt illustrations. The pictures of the Buddhas at New Years was startling, and the one of the dove and the owl was emotionally piercing. No flaws, nothing could be improved in this fine book.

Recommended to me by a school librarian, this book was a sweet delight which I read to my child

thinking to encourage her to enjoy poetry. We both enjoyed this book and its wonderful illustrations of Japanese life, learning about the sad life of Issa and what is behind some of his poems, especially as haiku are not as simple as they appear on the surface. While the story may be a bit intense for very young children, the book accomplishes its intention of providing an interesting and eye-catching introduction to haiku and the sensitivity to feeling and experience that helps create the art of poetry. It also carries an underlying message of how one can not only persevere through mistreatment and adversity but keep a caring and uplifted spirit. LOVED the author's informational notes at the end. Also see *Grass Sandals : The Travels of Basho*

The impressive quality of the illustrations and translations presented in this children's book makes it a cherished Haiku collector's item. What can haiku (or this book) do for our children? If the child is scientist-oriented, he/she will have fun see the world through insects' perspectives and experience the transforming power of imagination turning cool melons into frogs. If the child loves drawing, the book will enrich their interests with Eastern style paintings where Japanese character itself is a fascinating art. If the child has a writer in them, this book will share the strength of ISSA who first found comfort and hope in writing haiku after losing his mother at a very young age, had then emerged, through persistence and faith, to be the Japanese cultural icon whose name we equates with HAIKU today. *The Spring of My Life: And Selected Haiku*

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