

# Teaching Sijo

**Grades:** 7-12

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**Subject:** History, social studies, creative writing, English

**Time Required:** One class period (50 minutes)

## **Objectives:**

1. To understand the historical development of sijo.
2. To identify the important components of writing sijo, including themes, formatting, and flow.
3. To analyze the significance of sijo on the human character.
4. To analyze historic and modern sijo poetry and put it into context, both literary and historically.
5. To demonstrate an understanding of sijo by writing a poem.

## **Materials Required/Recommended:**

- *Tap Dancing on the Roof* by Linda Sue Park
- Power point presentation
- Sijo handout from *Tap Dancing on the Roof*
- Computers/Paper for brainstorming

## **Background:**

The historic development of sijo is uncertain, although some sijo-like poems were written as early as the sixth century B.C. Sijo originally were songs sung with accompanying instruments, specifically the flute and the drum. As a result, sijo is quite lyrical in its approach. Early sijo were often about the beauty of nature, but sijo themes are quite broad. From the metaphysical to the profound, or even witty to personal, sijo themes vary widely (Linda Sue Park).

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, King Sejong commissioned his Confucian scholars to create a Korean alphabet (Hangul) specific to the Korean spoken language. Subsequently more sijo were written down, and the poetic format grew in popularity.

While not as commonly known as its Japanese counterpart haiku, sijo can easily be taught as it is more flexible in its rules, format, and themes. I personally think sijo is more fun to write than haiku as the potential for themes and content is quite broad.

The original intent of this lesson was to have students write a sijo that was acceptable for submission to the Sejong Cultural Society's sijo competition while also learning about the historical context of the poetry. Having taught this lesson several years now, my original intent has broadened to also teach an appreciation for sijo.

**Procedure:**

1. Read several sijo to the students from Linda Sue Park's book *Tap Dancing on the Roof*. Choose 4-5 poems from the book to read out loud to the students, or alternatively, project the sijo on the board via a document camera and have students read aloud. This introduces modern sijo in a fun, engaging manner.

2. Using the power point presentation from Lucy Park (edits by Deb Holland), go through the basic information of sijo. This includes history, format, and examples, both historic and modern. I also play a sijo chang from youtube (link included). [The power point includes sijo from D'Evelyn High School winners as this is my high school; feel free to add/adjust sijo.]

Side note for history: Take some time to read and discuss the historic sijo in the power point for its historic references yet still modern themes. I pay particular attention to *Hwang Chin-I's* sijo: read out of context, the sijo is about nature; read with a historical lens it references society, relationships, and human emotion. Put in historical context, the sijo is surprisingly complex, and students appreciate the "twist" that comes when they learn the sijo is about people.

3. Highlight the format of sijo, with either 3 or 6 lines, and the surprise twist in the last line.

4. Have students begin brainstorming ideas for their own sijo. Students can use computers or paper, their preference.

5. Have students complete and refine their sijo at home.

**Evaluation:**

1. Have students write a sijo for evaluation. A teachers' individual evaluation can be based on completion, syllable count, its uniqueness, or even the cleverness of the twist.

2. If a student wants to enter the sijo competition through the Sejong Cultural Society, I take a closer look at the syllable count, cadence, and flow. I encourage all of my students to treat the assignment as if they were going to submit their sijo to the competition.

**Resources/References:**

Park, Linda Sue. *Tap Dancing on the Roof*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007.

Park, C. Lucy, M.D. *Sijo: Korean Poetry, Structure and Samples. Power Point Presentation*. KAFE Teacher Seminar. Los Angeles, July 2014.

Sejong Cultural Society website. [www.sejongculturalsociety.org](http://www.sejongculturalsociety.org) 2017.

Gross, Larry. *Sijo Primer*. [www.egroups.com/message/sijoforum](http://www.egroups.com/message/sijoforum)