

## Math in Seventeen Syllables: A Folder of Mathematical Haiku

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# Math in Seventeen Syllables



## A Folder of Mathematical Haiku

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In our July 2017 issue, we issued an open call for mathematical haiku, which we defined to be a three-line poem in the “5-7-5” syllabic form that expressed a mathematical idea or experience, and hopefully connected it to the human condition.<sup>1</sup> In deference to traditional Japanese haiku, we encouraged poets to consider using allusions to nature or the seasons in their work, and / or what is known as a caesura or kire represented by punctuations, space, line-break, or other grammatical break that is intended to compare two images implicitly.

At the time we wrote:

hopefully poems  
will arrive like a river—  
math made tangible

And indeed they did! We received haiku on an amazing variety of themes and subjects, from many different authors.

This poetry folder contains an eclectic selection of mathematical haiku, representing the diversity of mathematical ideas and experiences. We are able to publish only a fraction of the poems we received; we were surprised and (slightly but very much delightedly) overwhelmed by the interest our call sparked. We expect that there will be other similarly inspired poetry folders in the future issues of the *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*; stay tuned!

We decided to print the contributions of each individual on a different page to let each author’s individual style shine through, with the exception being a few pages which contain poems created by multiple authors. The authors are presented alphabetically by last name.

We hope you will enjoy this poetry folder of mathematical haiku.

EDITORS OF THE *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*

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<sup>1</sup>See Huber, M. and Karaali, G. “Math in Seventeen Syllables: An Open Call for Mathematical Haiku,” *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, Volume 7 Issue 2 (July 2017), pages 435–436 (available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/jhm/vol7/iss2/31>).

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Dor Abrahamson  
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BASE EIGHT IN THE SPRING

I wrote a poem with  
Seventeen syllables  
Did I count right?

---

Francesca Arici  
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#### INDEX THEORY

a Dirac operator  
recovers the manifold's topology  
via its fredholm index

#### MONSTROUS MOONSHINE

unexpected connections.  
symmetries and monstrous representations  
are one under the moonshine

#### HEISENBERG'S RELATIONS

position and momentum  
possess a non trivial commutator.  
uncertainty relations

---

Anna Bardone-Cone  
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Meteor shower,  
Vectors flying through the sky,  
Soft axis landing.

Oak tree, solid trunk —  
Base times height, the mass stretched out,  
Vibrant life inside.

Fool-proof but messy,  
The quadratic formula,  
Pick zeroes like fruit.

---

Debra Borkovitz  
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## WHY FRACTIONS ARE HARD

Two variables —  
not one. A relationship —  
hence difficulty.

---

Ryan Brown  
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TO TEACH, TO LEARN, MATHEMATICS

Students enduring—  
Brightening, discovering.  
I see the joy, too.

---

Jason Callahan  
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Axiom of Choice,  
Well-Ordering Principle,  
and... what's Zorn's Lemma?



---

Christina Carroll  
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Without any doubt  
every mighty redwood tree  
was once just my height.

There's not enough room  
in seventeen syllables  
to contain infin—

Branching forever  
my favorite tree grows down,  
lone root to the sun.

---

Samuel N. Cohen  
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THE DYNAMIC PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLE

Searching forwards for  
control is peering through fog —  
do it in reverse

---

Radu V. Craiu  
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The Universe is  
Chaos distilled to challenge  
Till patterns emerge.

Primeval silence  
Broken, then pieced together  
By a new language.

---

Kevin Farey  
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Surface seeming flat,  
at moon's eclipse its shadow  
argues otherwise.

*Cosecant*, you say,  
by the dawn's earliest light,  
*is one over sine*.

Suppose humankind  
knew neither of pi's value  
nor of winter's end.

---

Benjamin Gaines  
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FRACTALS

Fractal Images  
Reduced and Replicated  
Forever the Same

THE RIVER

Flowing Downriver  
Water Traces Gradients  
Calculus Revealed

FIBONNACCI

All Throughout Nature  
The Fibonacci Sequence  
Spiraling Outward

---

Whitney George and William Yenter  
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X, Y, and now Z  
Now I know my A, B, C's  
JK it's 3D

---

Paul Glendinning  
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On the pond surface  
reflected dragonflies clash.  
Mirror symmetry.

Algebra's nightmare:  
a new finite simple group.  
Black ink on fresh snow.

Wind-swirled mist rises.  
A glimpse of distant mountains.  
A theorem is born.

---

Laura Kline  
laurakline@me.com

Topsy turvy tricks  
Like negative exponents —  
Duck heads under lakes

Sudden rain shower,  
The debris rushing downhill,  
Tangential rivers

Peaceful living and  
Nicely balanced equations  
How we long for both



---

Larry Lesser  
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3/14/15

In America,  
Pi Day of the Century  
was transcendental!

17

Wallpaper patterns;  
9-by-9 Sudoku clues;  
what teenage Gauss made.

TRANSFORMED

Think of earthquake strength,  
Musical notes and loudness,  
And brightness of stars.

---

Rachel Levy  
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PAST

Viscous fluid film  
Tiny layer changing depth  
Shoved by surfactant

PRESENT

Scholarship. Teaching.  
Tugs on time and brain and heart.  
Delicious when one.

FUTURE

Math continuum  
Modeling in work and life  
From cradle to grave

---

Hannah Lewis  
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BUT, WHY?

x equals y, but—  
why? dig deeper and all your  
answers will unearth.

SYSTEMATIC

formulas help to  
create a world of magic  
called mathematics.

OCEANIC ARITHMETIC

math is water for  
some. allows us to explore  
depths not seen before.

---

Dan McQuillan  
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TOPOLOGICAL GRAPH THEORY APPLIED TO MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

Count the edge crossings.  
They must stay on the surface.  
Blocked by a membrane.

THE MEDIAN VERSUS THE MEAN ON THE PUTNAM MATHEMATICAL COMPETITION

Most scores are zero.  
A few get almost perfect.  
Average score?—Ok.

THE VALUE OF AN EDUCATION

Exponential growth  
Starting from almost nothing  
We can save the world.

---

Eric Newman  
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More things than places  
The pigeonhole principle  
One must share its spot

Halfway there each step  
You'll get to the goal someday  
But you will die first

She'd divorce for him  
A stable marriage exists  
He prefers his wife

---

Lora Newman  
lora237@yahoo.com

No vacancy at  
Hilbert's hotel—There are rooms  
Left for all of us!

It is shorter to  
Walk straight there—The Triangle  
Inequality

A bird cannot dive  
Into the sea without first  
Touching its surface.

---

Mason A. Porter  
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MIXED DYNAMICS

Am I chaotic?  
Or perhaps periodic?  
I am divided.

COMPLEXITY

A complex system  
But does it mean anything?  
It's complicated.

---

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams  
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filling one bushel—  
forty pounds of ripe apples  
for us to carry

square the radius  
and then multiply by pi—  
full moon in autumn

angles and straight lines—  
the Bermuda Triangle's  
mysteries abound



---

Blaine Schmidt  
math\_haiku@extemporaneous.org

Nature creates math  
In each snowflake, river, tree...  
Fractalization

Nature's tapestry  
Warp, weft, plus form, and function...  
Woven within math

A squared plus B squared  
Results in C squared each time...  
Pythagorean

---

Jennifer Schmidt  
jschmidt@extemporaneous.org

Are snowflakes alike?  
Probability theory  
Says they are unique

Patterns in nature:  
Ratio, symmetry, fractal—  
Where is the chaos?

---

Victoria Schmidt  
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numbers swimming in  
add, subtract, solve the problem  
math grasps the answer

as my pencil fades—  
the answer is on my sheet  
clearer with my math

fragments and pieces—  
searching through forests of math  
finished my homework!

---

Manya Sundstrom  
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A line meets a curve  
Asymptotic, she thought first—  
No, osculating.

The idea reveals  
herself like a lover does  
naked in the light.

I started to count  
But I found you were beyond  
The continuum.

---

Alexander van Duin

Exponentially,  
The numbers grow or decay,  
Falling or rising.

---

Benjamin van Duin

Pi

Infinite digits  
Pi is never repeating—  
And inedible

---

Greg Warrington  
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Forty-two students  
compare i.i.d. birthdays.  
Surprise! No two share.

The Fruit Ninja eyes  
bread and ham arcing above —  
Lunch, bifurcated.

Fibonacci's law  
feeds sequential offspring from  
two horny rabbits.

---

Maggie Weber  
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math passes through minds  
prism-like, casting color,  
splitting rationed rays

translate, rotate, scale;  
shapes dance in shifting grids as  
axes pirouette

thoughts tense and tremble  
her breath catches, theorems  
strain under pressure



---

Jay Yellen  
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No? Then adding one  
to the product of all primes  
gets you a new one!