



Teachers' Guide for
Won Ton: A Cat Tale Told in Haiku
by Lee Wardlaw
Illustrated by Eugene Yelchin
Henry Holt and Company Books for Young Readers
Ages 6 and up

About the Author

Lee Wardlaw's first spoken word was "kitty." Since then, she's owned more than two dozen cats (not all at the same time!) and published more than two dozen award-winning books for young readers, including *101 Ways to Bug Your Parents* and *101 Ways to Bug Your Teacher*. She lives in Santa Barbara, California with her husband, teenage son, and (of course) three cats.

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About the Illustrator

Eugene Yelchin is a Russian-born artist. He illustrated *Who Ate All the Cookie Dough?* by Karen Beaumont and *The Cobbler's Holiday or Why Ants Don't Wear Shoes* by Musharraf Ali Farooqi. With his wife, Mary Kuryla, he co-wrote *Heart of a Snowman* and *Ghost Files: The Haunting Truth*, which he also illustrated. He lives with his family in Topanga, California.

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Reviews

"Wardlaw has a fine understanding of the feline mind, and each poem packs a big impact...a surprisingly powerful story in verse."

– Publisher's Weekly

“Wardlaw’s terse, traditional verse captures catness from every angle, while Yelchin’s...illustrations telegraph cat-itude with every stretch and sinuous slink. Perfect pussycat poetry for anyone who has ever loved a shelter cat.” – Kirkus, starred review

“Both the tightly constructed lines and elegant, playful illustrations unerringly imagine a cat’s world...[Wardlaw] creates a lovable, believable character in this wry, heartwarming title that’s sure to find wide acceptance in the classroom and beyond.

– Booklist, starred review

“Text and illustrations work together to craft an unforgettable character in a shelter cat whose veneer of cynical toughness masks his vulnerability...Won Ton’s sweetly humorous story will steal the hearts of readers young and old. – School Library Journal, starred review

“...[a] funny and touching celebration of the joys of adopting a shelter cat.” – Hornbook



Author Interview

1. How did you get the idea for this book?

*“When one of our two beloved cats passed away, my young son and I went to a local animal shelter to pick out a new kitten. We interviewed several of them, and it was like something out of ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’: This one is too shy, this one too skittery, that one bites, that one is napping in his litter box (ew!)...but this one is **just right**. So Won Ton’s story is based on the journey we took with our new family member, from the ‘choosing’ to the car ride home, to the ‘naming’, to the first snubbed meal – and beyond.”*

2. Haiku is deceptively simple. What advice do you have for writers of the form?

“Writing haiku is like cupping a moth between your hands. You are capturing a moment, stilling its wings to better see it, observe it, appreciate it. So haiku is all about noticing – with eyes and ears wide open – what is happening before you right here, right now. That takes patience and practice – but it’s worth it!”

*“For teachers wanting to introduce haiku to their students, I highly recommend Patricia Donegan’s book **Haiku** (Tuttle Publishing). In her book, Donegan talks about the **Seven Keys to Writing Haiku: Form, Image, Kigo, Here and Now, Feeling, Surprise and Compassion**. I’ll discuss these keys in more detail later in this Guide.”*

3. Who are some of your favorite poets? What have you learned from them?

*“I enjoy Valerie Worth, Ellen Kelley, Thalia Chaltas, Kristine O’Connell George, Lee Bennett Hopkins, Joan Bransfield Graham, Rebecca Kai Dotlich, April Halprin Wayland, Shel Silverstein, Tracie Vaughn Zimmer...the list is endless! As for what I’ve learned from them? Observe! Notice! And **play!**”*

4. What can your fans look forward to next?

101 Ways to Bug Your Friends and Enemies (ages 10-14) is scheduled for publication September, 2011; I also have a rhyming picture book for toddlers and preschoolers due out in the spring of 2012. It’s called **Red, White and Boom!** and it’s about the many ways families across the U.S.A. celebrate the 4th of July.



Pre-reading

What is haiku? Do you think it is easy or hard to write? Why?



Discussion Guide

- What does the shelter have? What does it NOT have? What does our cat hero mean when he says, “or so I’ve been told.”
- How are the cats alone but together in the shelter? Describe what feelings you think Won Ton has.
- What’s special about visiting hours?
- Explain why the cat thinks there is “no contest” with dogs. Do you agree? Make a pros and cons list for each pet.
- Do all the children during visiting hours treat the cats kindly? How do you know?
- How hard is it to name a pet? How do you decide? What name does the boy choose? Do you think it’s a good name or not?
- How does Won Ton feel about the new place? What details prove this? Have you ever been nervous or afraid to try something new? Why?
- What does it mean to “snub” something? What foods do you snub?
- What habits does Won Ton have that you like or dislike? Would you like him to live with you? Why or why not?
- Where is Won Ton’s favorite place to sleep? Where is yours?
- What happens when the boy’s sister plays with Won Ton? Do cats usually like little children or not? Why?
- What does your “nose know?” What are good snacks for cats? Which ones are disappointing? What’s your favorite snack?
- Describe the types of things that the boy and Won Ton like to do together. How do cats get the attention of their owners? How do you get the attention of your parents?

- What is the best part of owning a pet? What can be difficult?
- In the end, what does Won Ton tell the boy that's important?



Reading

All stories (even ones written in haiku!) have three parts to them: a beginning, a middle, and an end. As you re-read the story, fill out the following graphic organizer on the most important things to remember about Won Ton's story.

In the beginning...	In the middle....	In the end...



Writing

Try writing your own haiku or senryu poem. Tell the story of your own pet (or dream pet) in a series of at least five poems. Read the author's note at the opening of the book for more information about this form of poetry.



Math

Solve these word problems:

1. If Won Ton, Pumpkin and Gypsy each eat a cup of food a day, and they spend two weeks at the shelter before they're adopted, how many cups will they eat in total?
2. If Gypsy spends an extra week at the shelter (she has a cold, poor baby), how many more cups of food will you need?
3. Imagine you received \$75 for your birthday to pay for adopting a cat. If the adoption fee is \$35.00, and it costs \$15.00 to have her spayed and \$20.00 for her first shots, do you have enough to adopt?
4. If a cat sleeps 18 hours a day, how many hours are left to play?



Art

Inspired by the sharp angles and lines of Eugene Yelchin's illustrations, create a portrait of your own pet (or dream pet) on the flat surface of a paper plate. Paint or color the ruffled edges to look like a wooden frame. Hang your favorite haiku/senryu beneath it for a hallway display.



Community Service Project

Host a bake sale, carwash or other fundraiser to benefit a local pet shelter or Humane Society. Be sure to call the shelter and ask what type of donations they need. Care packs for newly adopted pets are often welcome.



Science

Both poetry and science rely on close observation. As you work on creating a haiku or senryu, use the following chart to make direct observations of your pet or topic:

Sense:	What you notice about your topic:
Details you can SEE (color, shape, size, movement)	
Details you can HEAR (volume, repetition, tone)	
Details you can SMELL (strong, pleasant, sharp, warm, etc.)	
Details you can TASTE (sweet, sour, tangy, bitter)	
Details you can TOUCH (scratchy, silky fuzzy, soft)	



Seven Keys to Writing Haiku

Adapted by Lee Wardlaw from *Haiku: Asian Arts & Crafts for Creative Kids*, written by Patricia Donegan, Tuttle Publishing, 2003



Form

A haiku poem should consist of three lines. Although many haiku have a total count of seventeen syllables (five in the first line, seven in the second, five again in the third), your poem may sound clunky or overlong if you try to stick to this 'rule'. Instead, make your poem no longer than a single breath.



Image

A haiku poem should feature a strong image. To accomplish this, try to use *specific* descriptive words. For example: instead of 'a cat', write 'a black cat in the grass.'



Kigo

A *kigo* or 'season' word refers to nature in some way, hinting at the day's season (summer, winter, buds, etc.) and/or weather (sunny, mist, icicle, etc.).



Here and Now

Write haiku from a real observation – an experience or a memory of an experience – instead of from your imagination. Remember: you are noticing – and writing about noticing – a present moment.



Feeling

Show, don't tell. You want to move your reader to feel an emotion, but that emotion must be *shown* through your image rather than described or explained. For example: in *Won Ton*, the cat is excited about his adoption, but he is also nervous about leaving the shelter for a new home. Instead of saying: 'I am excited and nervous', the poem reads:

*Latch squeaks. Door swings wide.
Free! Free at last! Yet, one claw
snags, clings to what's known.*



Surprise

A haiku should offer a moment of 'ahhh' or 'a-ha!' to awaken the reader, help him see the world – or that moment – in a fresh, new way.



Compassion

Haiku expresses love, respect and caring for all living things. It also helps to remind us that all of life – from the tiniest ant to the largest, lumbering elephant – is interconnected.



This guide was created by [Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](#), a reading specialist and children's author. To learn more about Tracie and her books, visit tracievaughnzimmer.com. For hundreds of other guides Tracie has created, visit: wildgeeseguides.blogspot.com/