

# Haiku

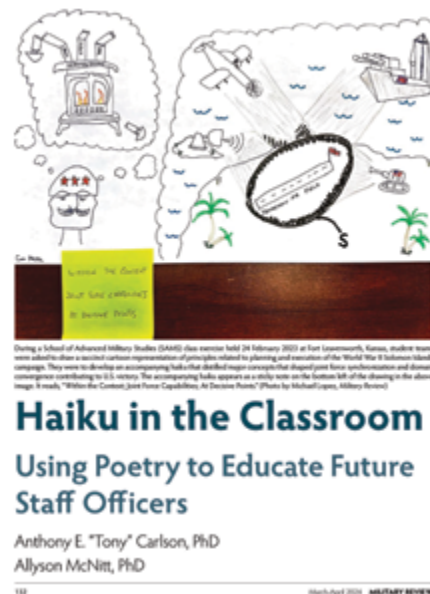
## From High Art to Educational Tool

Allyson McNitt, PhD

In an article published in the March-April 2024 edition of *Military Review*, Dr. Anthony Carlson, a professor at the U.S. Army's School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, described his novel use of haiku poetry as a teaching device to help students identify, parse, and analyze factors impacting military campaigns. In the example campaign analysis featured in the *Military Review* article, the focus of student study centered on the Solomon Islands campaign of World War II in the South Pacific. The purpose was to have students compose short poems that highlight how disparate planning factors relate to each other in a synchronized effort to achieve a common operational/strategic objective.<sup>1</sup>

The haiku writing challenge was designed to force students to mentally draw from a broad range of diverse and multifaceted dynamics in essential campaigns and then transform those dynamics into chains of succinct poetic expressions. Carlson asserted that students who took the challenge seriously helped refine their ability to distinguish the most essential ideas from the less essential ideas in the campaign planning process.<sup>2</sup>

During the spring semester of 2023, professional military education instructors at SAMS incorporated the writing of haiku poetry into the classroom to stimulate learning and to creatively meet lesson-enabling learning objectives. This involved student teams composing haiku poems that highlighted the interrelationship of factors within the multidomain operations concept related to the Solomon Islands campaign. At the same time, they developed simple visual designs that accompanied poems and presented them to their classmates.



To read "Haiku in the Classroom" by Anthony E. Carlson and Allyson McNitt, please visit <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/77/military-review/Archives/English/MA-24/Haiku/Haiku-UA1.pdf>.

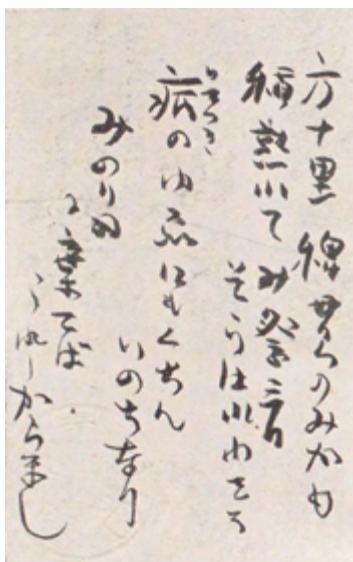
### Why Haiku?

To understand why haiku might be useful as a teaching device, it may be useful to look briefly at the tradition of Japanese poetry and the origin of haiku poetry itself within that tradition. The roots of haiku are found in the poetic expression characteristic of the imperial culture of seventeenth-century Japan. The original canon of classical Japanese poetry characteristically consisted of long, multiversed works that were shaped in content "by imperial anthologies—collections that were commissioned and authorized by the imperial court."<sup>3</sup>

According to Mark Ravina, the *tanka* or the *waka* poem structure was the dominant form in the imperial anthologies, with a 5-7-5-7-7 meter. The classical *tanka* displayed two poetic devices that are distinct to Japanese poetry: pillow words and pivot words.<sup>4</sup> Pillow words are set phrases of one or two words that refer to an earlier poem. This enabled the poetically literate to enjoy a chain of references to previous works in a single work reading. The pivot word is a homophone that changes meaning halfway through the poem enabling the introduction of a new thought or meaning in the evolving chain of poetic expressions.<sup>5</sup>



After deep analysis of the Solomon Islands campaign conducted during World War II, SAMS students (from left) Maj. David Labradorf, U.S. Army; Maj. Dustin Lawrence, U.S. Army; Maj. Cameron Meikle, Canadian Army; and Maj. Crescencio Padillaruberte, U.S. Army, develop individual haiku poems and supporting visual presentations depicting the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for presentation to their class on 24 February 2023. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)

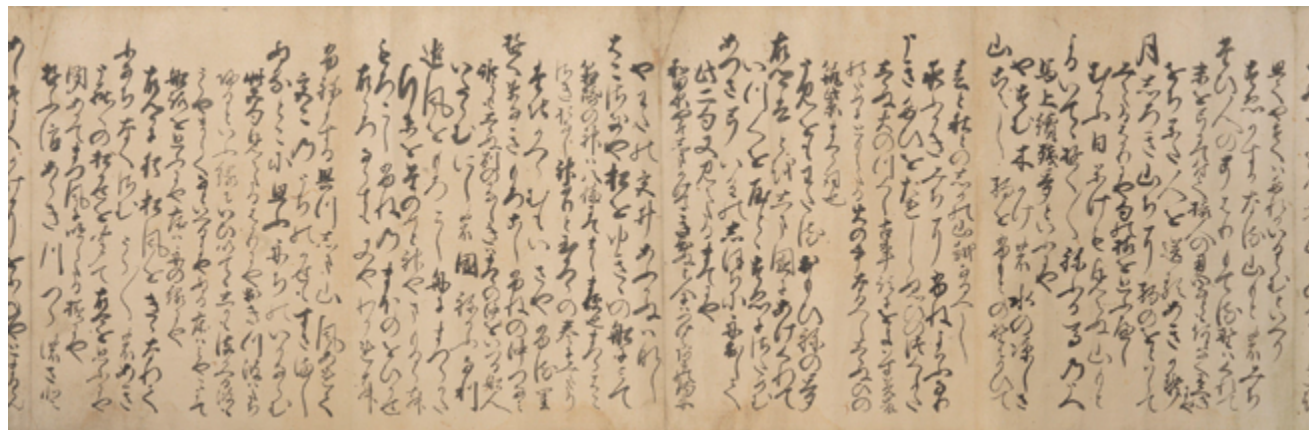


Two tanka poems written on 19 September 1933 by Japanese poet Miyazawa Kenji before his death. The poems read:  
 "On the third day of the rice-ripening festival, Hojuri Hidenuki's rice is ripe, and the sky spreads out."  
 "Even in the midst of my illness, I will be happy if I give up on Minori." (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Over time, the initial traditions of Japanese poetry transmuted in practice. One outgrowth of that evolution was the rise of a new poetic form that became prominent in the late classical era called *renga*. This form not only breaks the standard 5-7-5-7-7 meter into several parts, but it also involves several poets. The first poet writes a 5-7-5 poem as a starter poetic fragment, the second poet finishes the poem with a 7-7 couplet, the third poet writes the

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Compiled by Sōgi (1421-1502), this scroll of calligraphy by Ryūkō comprises the "Travel" (Tabi) section of the "Aged Leaves" (Wakuraba) poetry anthology in the Linked Verse (Renga) Collection. (Photo by Alamy Stock Photo)

next 5-7-5, and so forth.<sup>6</sup> To qualify it as high art, the proper *renga* form developed obligatory conventions, such as mentioning the moon in certain stanzas and flowers in other stanzas. Convention also mandated that *renga* be one hundred stanzas in length.

However, in the late 1400s, poets began to relax the rules of *renga* and to experiment with derivative conventions of poetic expression in shorter forms. In addition to relaxing the *renga* rules, poets began "to compose one-person *renga* so that it was no longer necessary to have a poetry circle."<sup>7</sup> In the process, the Japanese literati began to recognize the first three lines of *renga*, the 5-7-5, as its own form of short poetry. And thus, in time, this short poem version came to be recognized as the haiku and its own independent poetic genre.

Additionally, the distinctive challenge and purpose of haiku poetry came to be seen as the ability to render in sublime—even esoteric—multifaceted meaning within short poems of tightly regimented form and meter. The classical form of haiku that thus evolved uses only seventeen syllables divided into three lines of 5-7-5 and includes a seasonal referent (*kigo*) and a *kireji*, often translated as "cutting word," which is kind of a spoken punctuation that divides the poem into two sections.<sup>8</sup>

Setting aside its imperial court origins, and because of the discipline required to create meaningful poetry in such compressed form, the haiku style has attracted a wide interest from educators and from social researchers. The unique haiku renders pithy and memorable bites of thought that provoke highly

intellectual, aesthetic, and therapeutic focus on discrete ideas. This may have meaning on many levels and transcend many disciplines.



Japanese poet Bashō meets two farmers celebrating the mid-autumn moon festival in an 1891 print from Tsukioka Yoshitoshi's *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon*. The haiku reads: "Since the crescent moon, I have been waiting for tonight." (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Interest in the process of writing haiku has expanded widely across institutions of learning and across all grade levels. One result has been that many students of all ages in our society have had at some point the opportunity to try their hand at formulating haiku poems, which has been widely “used as creative and narrative writing for therapeutic engagement, for facilitating reflective learning and teaching, and for fostering empathy and transformation in education.”<sup>9</sup>

Many assert that employing haiku for adult learning has proven to be a successful strategy. Such success is attributed to the assumption that the adult learner is characteristically a rich resource



SAMS student U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Josh Chambers develops an individual haiku poem and supporting visual aid to depict the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II for a class presentation during the spring of 2023. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)



SAMS student U.S. Army Maj. Josh Schatzman uses his haiku poem and accompanying visual aid to brief his classmates during the spring semester of 2023 on his analysis of the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)





SAMS student U.S. Air Force Maj. Michael "Comodo" Bates participates in a vigorous class discussion in the spring of 2023 after receiving a briefing from a classmate who provided an analysis of the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II using haiku poetry and a supporting visual aid. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)

for learning because the "mature individual is a veritable storehouse of codified experiences which are the essence of his central identity."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, learning strategies in which adult learners channel their potential for input into a creative endeavor, as opposed to didactic strategies, seem to be especially effective.

Haiku expands beyond its function as artistic expression and tool for education, and many social researchers have also recognized the revealing insight into human psychology and the underlying dynamics of social interactions. Therefore, the process of writing haiku has been employed as a research tool to help "maximize participation and participative writing in aesthetic ways" that "evokes the possibilities of the relational, ambiguous, and mysterious presence of a phenomenon."<sup>11</sup> In this vein, as one observer noted, haiku have been used aesthetically in social and human research as a means of translating and analyzing data so as to capture the "depth and intensity of emotions, engagement, and experiences of participants."<sup>12</sup>

## Use of Haiku Writing in SAMS

SAMS features an Advanced Military Studies Program that provides a second year of intensive, graduate-level education for selected graduates of the Command and General Staff College. SAMS students are those who have been selected for participating in advanced military education beyond the normal one year of the Command and General Staff College that most midgrade commissioned officers attend. The curriculum consists of intensive, advanced graduate-level education. Upon graduation, SAMS graduates spend a year as planners at the division, corps, or Army Service component command levels.

Consequently, among the overall education objectives of the SAMS course is to produce graduates who have enhanced capabilities to (1) analyze and assess complex, ambiguous operational environments; (2) teach, coach, and mentor; (3) understand and adapt to emerging missions; (4) engage senior leaders to enable decision making

and their ability to visualize, describe, and direct; and (5) be skilled practitioners in doctrine and operational art.<sup>13</sup>

As part of this advanced training, great emphasis is placed on in-depth student interactions and discussions on diverse topics. Consequently, part of the overall teaching SAMS methodology is to provide opportunities to stimulate discourse and debate among students. “Discourse” in this context means “the special way in which natural language, spoken and written, is used in particular disciplines or by particular communities of practice.”<sup>14</sup>

Haiku represents a compact vehicle for communicating a direct experience or “an instantaneous reflective moment without explication through words.”<sup>15</sup> While

not expected to perform at the level of trained and polished haiku poets, SAMS students are tasked with attempting to use the haiku form to paint a reflective, vivid picture of combat in poetic shorthand, which, in the spirit of classic haiku, leaves it up to the reader to derive his or her own meaning from the poems presented. To that end, the use of haiku in the SAMS classroom invites students to use language as not simply a system for conveying information but as a means of acting socially.

Examples of haiku and affiliated schematics produced during the spring 2023 case study of the Solomon Islands Campaign and a sampling of images of students building and briefing them to their classmates are showcased in the appendix. ■

## Notes

1. Anthony Carlson and Allyson McNitt, “Haiku in the Classroom: Using Poetry to Educate Future Officers,” *Military Review* 104, no. 2 (March-April 2024): 132–38, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/March-April-2024/Haiku/>.

2. Ibid.

3. Mark J. Ravina, *Understanding Japan: A Cultural History* (Chantilly, VA: The Teaching Company, 2015), 102.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 103.

6. Ibid., 104.

7. Dawn G. Blasko and Dennis W. Merski, “Haiku Poetry and Metaphorical Thought: An Invitation to Interdisciplinary Study,” *Creativity Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (1998): 39, [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1101\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1101_5).

8. Hong-Nguyen Nguyen and Wolff-Michael Roth, “An Analysis of Haiku Teaching Discourse: From Talking About to Doing Haiku,”

*Journal of Pedagogical Research* 3, no. 3 (2019): 113, <https://doi.org/10.33902/jpr.v3i3.93>.

9. Eunice Shaed Newton, “Andragogy: Understanding the Adult as a Learner,” *Journal of Reading* 20, no. 5 (1977): 362, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40032981>.

10. Nguyen and Roth, “An Analysis of Haiku Teaching Discourse,” 113.

11. Ibid., 114.

12. Ibid.

13. The expected outcomes for Advanced Military Studies Program students were directly taken from welcoming packets recently distributed to incoming students for the 2024 academic year.

14. Nguyen and Roth, “An Analysis of Haiku Teaching Discourse,” 114.

15. Ibid., 115.

# Appendix



SAMS professor Dr. Anthony "Tony" Carlson briefs the haiku exercise to SAMS students on 24 February 2023 in Muir Hall, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. (Photo by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)





SAMS student U.S. Air Force Maj. Michael "Comodo" Bates develops an individual haiku poem and supporting visual aid depicting the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II for a class presentation in the spring of 2023. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)

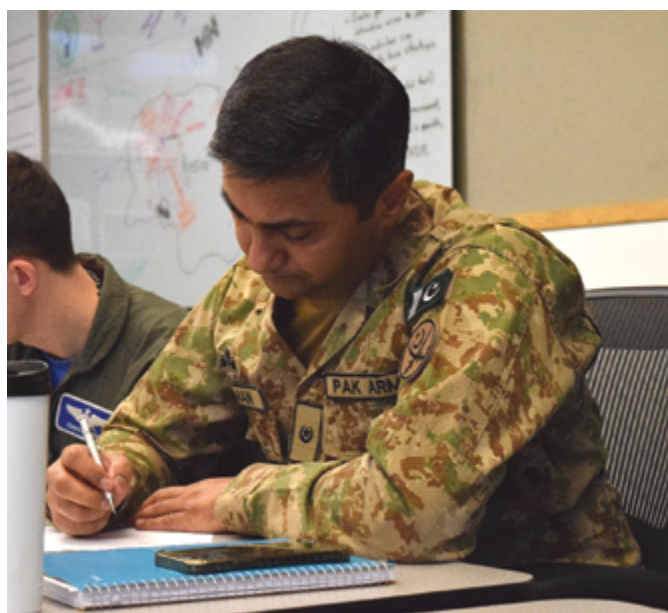


SAMS student U.S. Marine Maj. Josh Chambers develops an individual haiku poem and supporting visual aid depicting the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II for a class presentation in the spring of 2023. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)

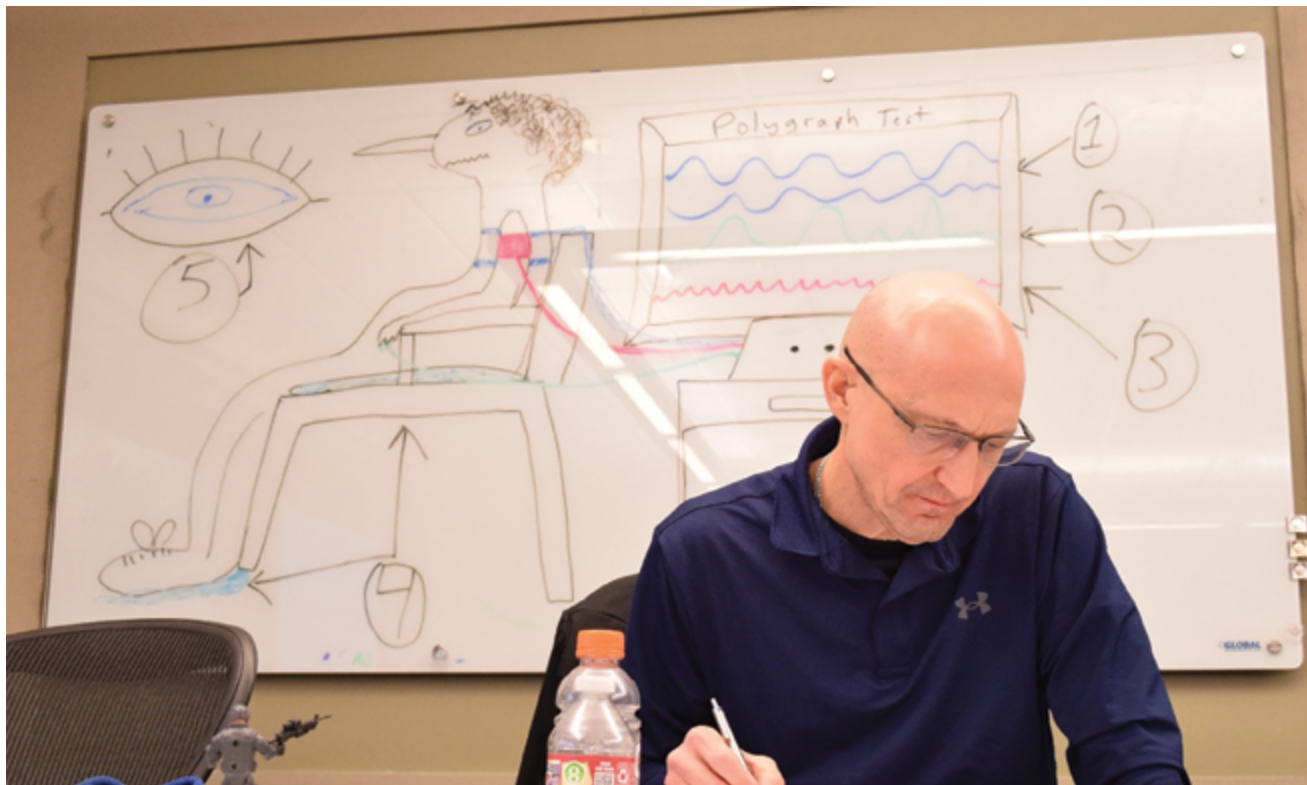




U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Shane Kraft uses his haiku poem and accompanying visual aid to brief his classmates on his analysis of the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)



Pakistani Army Maj. Usman Mahmood develops an individual haiku poem and supporting visual aid depicting the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II for a class presentation in the spring of 2023. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)



SAMS interagency student Joe Seaton develops an individual haiku poem and supporting visual aid depicting the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II for a class presentation in the spring of 2023. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)



British Army Maj. Sam Patterson participates in a vigorous class discussion after receiving a briefing from a classmate who provided an analysis of the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II using haiku poetry and a supporting visual aid. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)

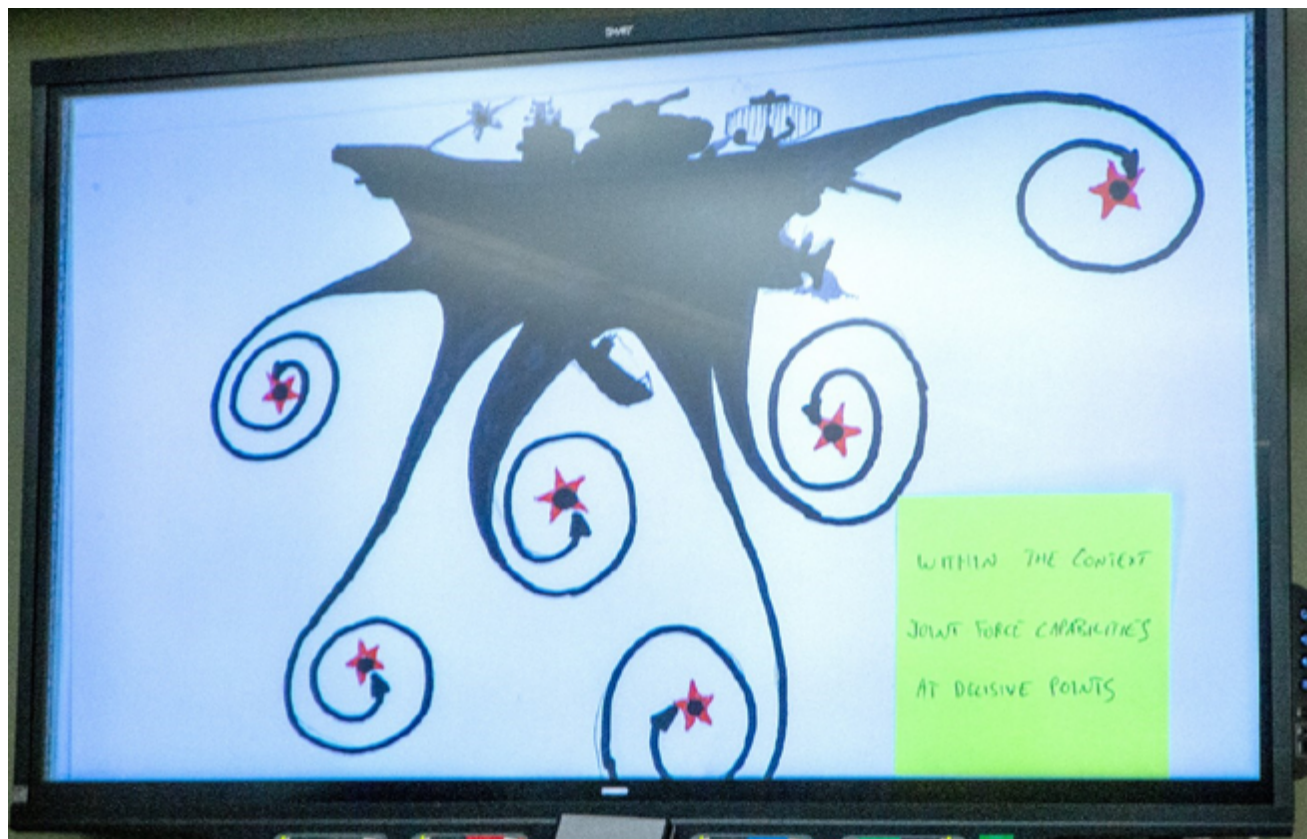




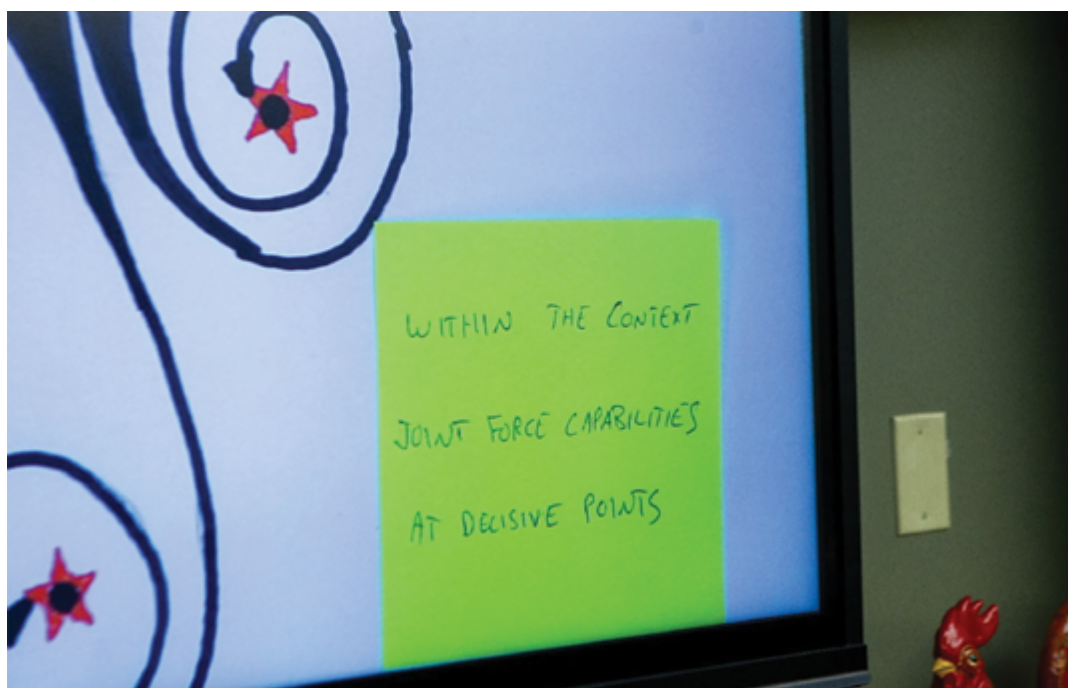
U.S. Army Maj. Ryan Orsini uses his haiku poem and accompanying visual aid to brief his classmates during the spring 2023 semester on his analysis of the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II. (Photo by Charlotte Richter, *Military Review*)



SAMS student U.S. Army Maj. Crescencio Padillaruberte deliberates on his analysis of the essential operational concepts underlining campaign planning for operations in the Solomon Islands during World War II in the development of a presentation to his SAMS class in the spring of 2023 using a haiku poem and a supporting visual aid. (Photo by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)

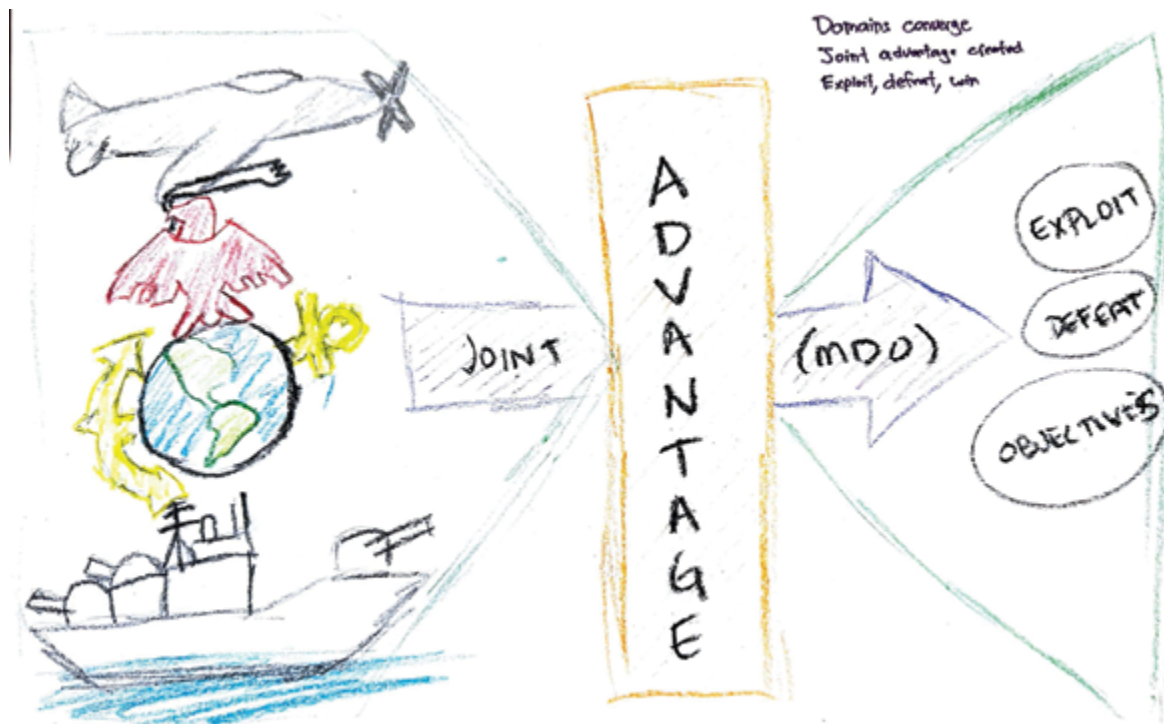


An example of a SAMS haiku poem with a supporting visual aid developed for a class presentation during the spring of 2023. (Photo by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)

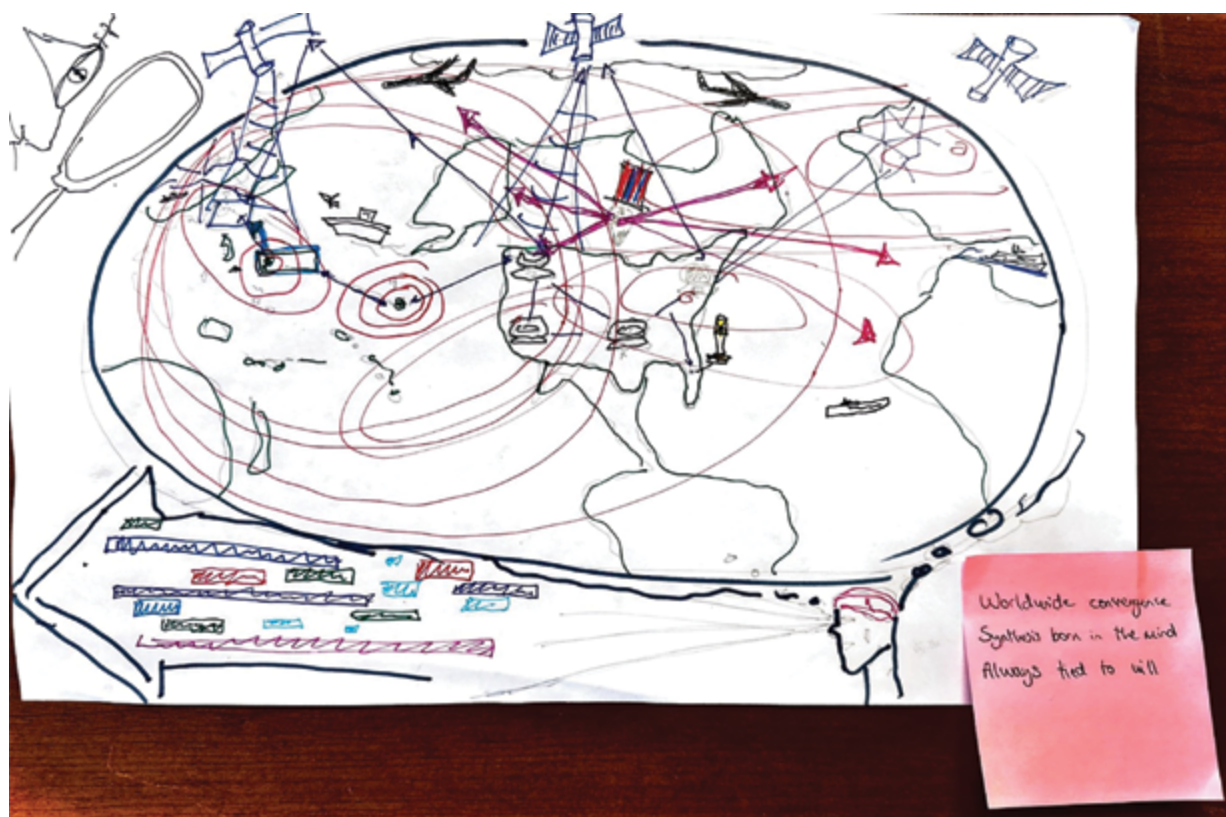


An example of a SAMS haiku poem developed for a class presentation during the spring of 2023. (Photo by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)





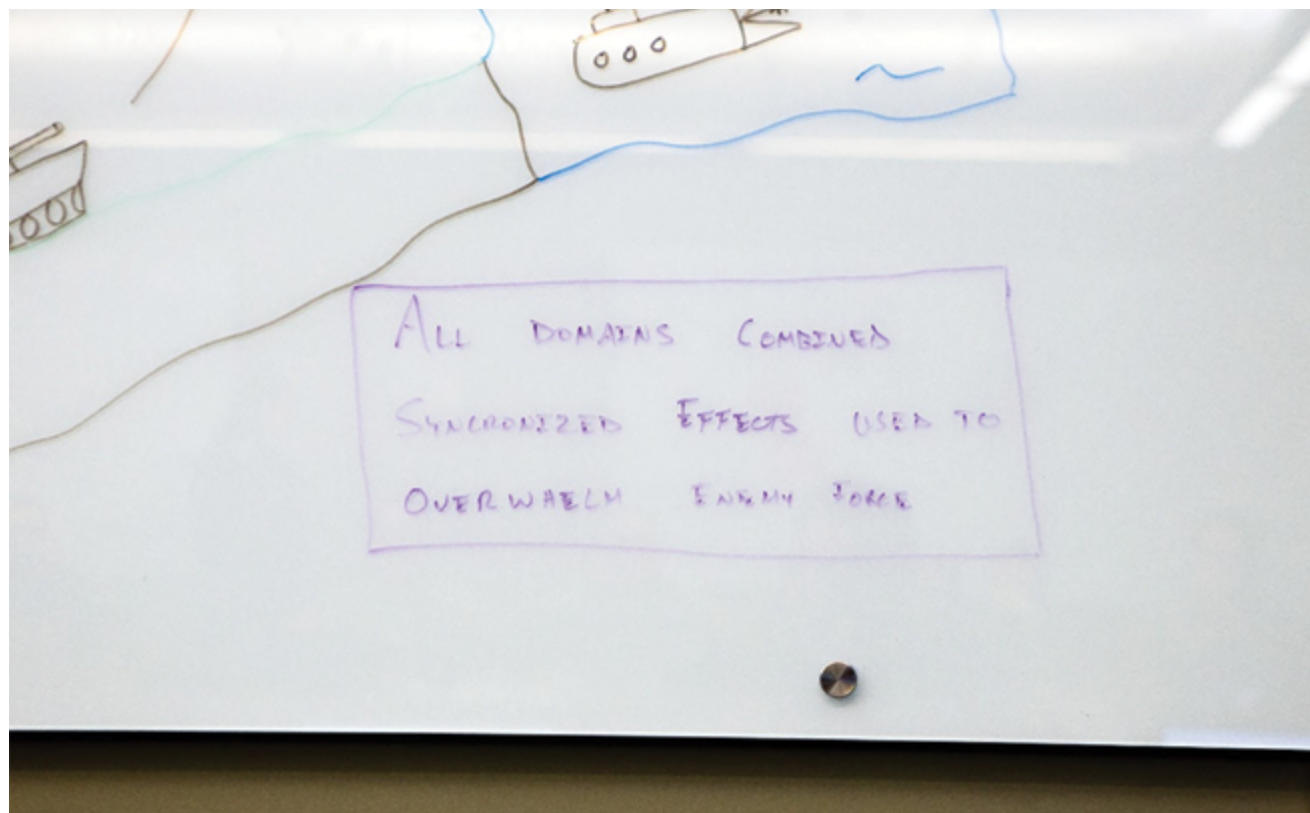
An example of a SAMS haiku poem developed for a class presentation during the spring of 2023. (Photo by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)



An example of a SAMS haiku poem developed for a class presentation during the spring of 2023. (Photo by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)



An example of a SAMS haiku poem with supporting visual depiction developed for a class presentation during the spring of 2023. (Photo by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)



An example of a SAMS haiku poem developed for a class presentation during the spring of 2023. (Photo by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)