

The Rengay – a Japanese / American poetic form

These are the attributes of the Rengay:

1. A 6-stanza linked poem that follows a theme. Each stanza responds in some way (often by contrast or by association) to the stanza that precedes it.
2. The form acknowledges the *renku* tradition of mingling the stanzas of different authors, with each stanza composed in the form of a 3-line (haiku) verse or a 2-line (haiku-like) verse.
3. **The 2-person form of rengay.** The initial form of rengay was created for 2 collaborating poets. This is the form, with the 2 poets labeled A and B:

A's Haiku.
B's Haiku-like stanza.
A's 2nd Haiku.
B's Haiku.
A's Haiku-like stanza.
B's 2nd Haiku.

If the "traditional" syllable count is used for the haiku, and if the interceding verses are written as 7-syllable lines, then the form is:

5-7-5 syllables	- A's Haiku.
7-7 syllables	- B's Haiku-like stanza.
5-7-5 syllables	- A's 2nd Haiku.
5-7-5 syllables	- B's Haiku.
7-7 syllables	- A's Haiku-like stanza.
5-7-5 syllables	- B's 2nd Haiku.

4. The rengay can be written as a solo rengay, when one poet explores the topic in two independent voices. **This is the style used for a *found rengay*.**
5. Each stanza should stand on its own as a small, understandable poem.
6. The rengay is similar to the Japanese *renku*, from which it was derived. Both “link” between stanzas by:
 - **Association**, where something in the new link shares something (perhaps in appearance, or in use, or in situation) with something in the stanza it follows.
 - **Contrast** of something in the new link (e.g., quickness) with something in the link it follows (e.g., sloth).
 - **Comparison**, which (like the European use of simile and metaphor) causes one thing to bring another subject to mind.

from *The Old Man & the Sea* (Ernest Hemingway)

“As the sun set he remembered, to give himself more confidence, the time in the tavern at Casablanca when he had played the hand game with the great negro from Cienfuegos who was the strongest man on the docks. They had gone one day and one night with their elbows on a chalk line on the table and their forearms straight up and their hands gripped tight. Each one was trying to force the other’s hand down onto the table. There was much betting and people went in and out of the room under the kerosene lights and he had looked at the arm and hand of the negro and at the negro’s face. They changed the referees every four hours after the first eight so that the referees could sleep. Blood came out from under the fingernails of both his and the negro’s hands and they looked each other in the eye and at their hands and forearms and the bettors went in and out of the room and sat on high chairs against the wall and watched. The walls were painted bright blue and were of wood and the lamps threw their shadows against them. The negro’s shadow was huge and it moved on the wall as the breeze moved the lamps.” (69)

Sample Rengay

- 5 As the sun set he
- 7 The strongest man on the docks
- 5 Had played the hand game

- 7 Each one was trying to force
- 7 Both his and the negro’s hands

- 5 One day and one night
- 7 Under the kerosene lights
- 5 The breeze moved the lamps

- 5 There was much betting
- 7 And the lamps threw their shadows
- 5 It moved on the wall

- 7 The walls were painted bright blue.
- 7 The negro’s shadow was huge.

- 5 After the first eight
- 7 Blood came out from under the
- 5 Fingernails of both.