

## The Thirty-Six Immortal Poets of Japan

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty-six\\_Immortals\\_of\\_Poetry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty-six_Immortals_of_Poetry)

The **Thirty-six Immortals of Poetry** (三十六歌仙 *Sanjūrokkasen*?) are a group of Japanese poets of the **Nara**, **Asuka** and **Heian periods** (7th – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries) selected by **Fujiwara no Kintō** as exemplars of **Japanese poetic ability**. There are five female poets among them. Sets of portraits (essentially imaginary) of the group were popular in **Japanese painting** and later **woodblock prints**, and often hung in temples. The thirty-six poets were favorite subjects of artists into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The above web site has links to each individual with at least one portrait of the poet. Many links, such as for Awariwara no Narihira and Ono no Komachi have extensive information and a number of artworks.

### Poem Scroll of Thirty-six Immortal Poets

Helen's favorite poems:

Is there no moon?  
And is this springtime not the spring  
Of times gone by?  
Myself alone remaining  
Still the self it was before?   **Ariwara no Narihira**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariwara\\_no\\_Narihira](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariwara_no_Narihira)

While I've been waiting  
For the moon to rise toward dawn  
And shed its light,  
The night wherein I pass my days  
Has reached an hour sorely late.   **Fujiwara no Nakafumi**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fujiwara\\_no\\_Nakafumi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fujiwara_no_Nakafumi)

Who now remains  
For me to claim as one I know?  
For the ancient pine  
Of Takasago was not, alas,  
Among my childhood friends.   **Fujiwara no Okikaze**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fujiwara\\_no\\_Okikaze](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fujiwara_no_Okikaze)

In the world below  
Where it seems a hard day's work  
To get through our lives,  
How one envies the cool moon  
Dwelling so pure in the sky!   **Fujiwara no Takamitsu**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fujiwara\\_no\\_Takamitsu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fujiwara_no_Takamitsu)

How shall I wait  
Long enough to see him come  
To Miwa Mountain?  
I know well the years will pass  
And there will be no visitor. **Lady Ise**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lady\\_Ise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lady_Ise)

I could not go on,  
I spent all day in the mountains,  
Hoping against hope  
To hear at least once more  
The cuckoo calling. **Minamoto no Kintada no Ason**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minamoto\\_no\\_Kintada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minamoto_no_Kintada)

On this precious night  
How I wish that I could show,  
If I'm to view them,  
To someone who knows what it is to feel,  
These blossoms and this moon! **Minamoto no Saneakira no Ason**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minamoto\\_no\\_Saneakira](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minamoto_no_Saneakira)

Whose bloom will fade,  
And yet the color does not show,  
Is this alone:  
In the world of love the flower  
That opens in the human heart. **Ono no Komachi (woman)**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ono\\_no\\_Komachi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ono_no_Komachi)

Dreams that come in sleep  
Bring a time for forgetting  
Ills that are real -  
But how brief is this moment  
When our longing can find peace. **Princess Kishi**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kishi\\_Jo%C5%8D](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kishi_Jo%C5%8D)

Lost in the mountains,  
Not a hint on any side  
Whither I should turn,  
How uncertain sounds the call  
Of the calling bird to me. **Sarumaru Dayu**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarumaru\\_Day%C5%AB](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarumaru_Day%C5%AB)

Brief was your message;  
"I shall come anon." You said;  
And for those few words  
I've waited through this long October night  
The late rising of the waning moon. **Sosei Hoshi**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sosei>

The other poems:

Faintly with the dawn  
That glimmers on Akashi Bay  
In the morning mist  
A boat goes hidden by the isle -  
And my thoughts go after it. **Kakinomoto no Hitomaro**

The warm light of spring  
Floods the country all around -  
The land is bright;  
But far on fair Yoshino's mountains  
The snow still is coming down. **Oshikochi no Mitsune**

When I see the white  
Of hoarfrost along the bridge  
The magpies spread  
Wing to wing in the night sky.  
I know how late the hour. **Chunagon Yakamochi**

Across Mika fields  
Flows the river Izumi,  
Cutting through the plain;  
Plain would it be had I seen her,  
The reason for this yearning. **Chunagon Kanesuke**

The love that stained me  
All the years of my dyeing  
Bursts forth at last  
In a flowering of the heart  
That flaunts its colors freely. **Chunagon Atsutada**

That autumn has come  
Appears nowhere with clarity  
To the observing eye;

It is a new sound in the wind  
By which we are somehow made aware. **Fujiwara no Toshiyuki no Ason**

Even the enduring  
Verdure of the pine trees,  
Now that spring has come,  
Takes on a green one shade beyond  
The color that was before. **Minamoto no Muneyuki no Ason**

We roped off the fields  
To go out on the Day of the Rat  
For the pine seedlings;  
Should I spare them, let them grow  
To shed shade for a thousand years? **Fujiwara no Kiyotada**

In fair Yoshino  
The white snow on the mountains  
Must be piling deep,  
For in the ancient capital  
The cold grows ever worse. **Sakanoue no Korenori**

The stone bridge contract -  
Things promised to be done at night -  
Will soon be broken,  
And the dawning will be bleak  
For the god of Kazuraki. **Sanjoin no Nyokurodo**

Watchful at the walls,  
Palace guardsmen kindle fires:  
To burn by night,  
To dwindle and go out by day -  
Bound to this round of longing. **Onakatomi no Yoshinobu**

Sombering away,  
Autumn goes; and my keepsake  
Shall be but this -  
The frost now clinging to the cord  
That binds these aged locks. **Taira no Kanemori**

Where white dew spills down  
And the seasonal cold rain

On Moru Mountain  
The underleaves of all the trees  
Have taken color from the fall.     **Ki no Tsurayuki**

Starting tomorrow,  
I was off to pick young herbs,  
And I marked by fields;  
But yesterday and now today  
Those fields have filled with falling snow.     **Yamabe no Akahito**

Dew on the treetops,  
Drippings on the forest floor -  
In the midst of life  
These are emblems of the span  
Between the first and last to go.     **Sojo Henjo**

Down to Azuma  
Through Saya and by Middlemount -  
What was I about,  
To start off on a middle path  
Neither in nor out of love?     **Ki no Tomonori**

Of ten thousand years  
May today be the beginning -  
Such is my prayer;  
The deity alone can count  
From now to where we go.     **Chunagon Asatada**

That spring has risen  
Is no sooner said, it seems,  
Than fair Yoshino  
Stands this morning to the view  
With a mist on its mountains.     **Mibu no Tadamine**

Here you have a cane  
With a thousand years stored up  
Between each node;  
Tap it as you will, the tap  
Pours out endless life for you.     **Onakatomi no Yorimoto**

Tsukuba Mountain,  
Outer mountain, wooded mountain -  
Thick the woods may be,  
But would a thousand peering eyes  
Keep off my love from you? **Minamoto no Shigeyuki**

Waves on the water,  
Ripples of the shining moon,  
Wrinkles of time:  
Count them up and we arrive  
Today at a midmost autumn. **Minamoto no Shitagau**

Such an oath we swore  
(Even as we wrung our sleeves  
Before each other);  
That for us no waves would spill  
Across Pine Mountain in Sue... **Kiyohara no Motosuke**

Now we say farewell  
To another gem-bright year,  
But in falling snow  
There seems not a touch of spring  
To be glimpsed in the sky today. **Fujiwara no Motozane**

They need not burn it -  
Grass will smolder by itself  
Into new growth;  
Kasuga's burgeoning fields  
May be left to the spring day's fire. **Mibu no Tadami**

The autumnal wind  
Blows but brings me no message -  
Yet that listless breeze,  
Where I a beckoning reed, would whisper  
In the rustling of my leaves. **Nakatukasa**

Source for all thirty-six poems: <http://www.iamas.ac.jp/koetsu/36kasen-E.html>  
Accessed December 5, 2014. A project of multimedia installation of Hon'ami Koetsu.  
This was for an exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2000. More information at  
[http://www.iamas.ac.jp/koetsu/about\\_project-E.html](http://www.iamas.ac.jp/koetsu/about_project-E.html)  
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