

**Review of *The Little Book of Neuroscience
Haikus***

By Eric H. Chudler

NY: Norton. 231 pages. \$16.95.

ISBN: 978-0-393-70832-5.

Reviewed by David Ryback

Author Note:

David Ryback writes:

*Reviews like this,
and some books
But poems are most fun*

This small book carries a lot of punch. Eric Chudler, a University of Washington neuroscientist and award-winner for his site, Neuroscience for Kids, has taken on the whimsical task of describing various aspects of neuroscience via the classical Japanese poetry of haiku. “Each poem of three lines,” the author tells us, contains “five syllables, seven syllables, and five syllables.”

An endorsement, by University of Minnesota neuroscience professor, Janet Dubinsky, says it well:

*Short little poems
Neuroscience ideas
Tied together here*

Each of Chudler’s poems is followed by an explanation—from a paragraph or two to a full page and a half—about the neuroscience involved, with occasional drawings. Here are two examples of Chudler’s haikus:

*Who, what, when, where, why
Electrochemical signs
Three pounds of tissue*

*Spiders, snakes, oh my
Almond-shaped amygdala
Interpreting fear*

So, how does this relate to the PCA? Well, Chudler has one for empathic listening:

*Temporal lobe role
Hearing, memory, language
I can hear you now.*

Chudler explains that the temporal lobe is instrumental to empathy in that it involves hearing, memory of our own events that are similar to the client, and the language necessary to communicate

emotions. In a similar vein, he explains that the wonderful feeling of being heard in times of stress is made possible by endorphins.

*Sweet, gracious relief
Natural response to pain
Endorphin rescue.*

*Anger, happiness
Fear, sadness, joy, and despair
Limbic structures link.*

All those negative, scary feelings are engendered in the limbic system, our “old, emotional brain,” including the threat-vigilant amygdala, the good and bad memories stored in the hippocampus, and the decision-making cingulate gyrus. No wonder we get headaches, trying to solve our problems without outside help.

Chudler even has a haiku about those brain connections that Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2004, pp. 102-104) call “limbic tango,” where two individuals are really communicating remarkably well at the deepest emotional levels:

*Brains are quite polite
Say hello to each other
With friendly brain waves.*

Now, pulled to the challenge, here is my own 17-syllable reviewer’s opinion of the book:

*Haiku poems abound
‘Bout brain parts that amaze us
Read, smile, even chuckle*

Finally, I cannot resist the ultimate temptation, bringing Carl Rogers into play:

116 Ryback

What might Rogers say?

“So brain parts make the feelings?

Yes, I understand!”

References

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. & McKee, A. (2004). *Primal Leadership*.
Boston, MA: HBS Press.