Review of *The Little Book of Neuroscience Haikus*

By Eric H. Chudler

NY: Norton. 231 pages. $16.95.

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 a 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:

_The Person-Centered Journal_, Vol. 20, No. 1-2, 2013
What might Rogers say?
“So brain parts make the feelings?
Yes, I understand!”
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References