

A Thousand Peaks

A Teachers' Guide

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Introduction

When the Chinese settled near the Yellow River over 5 thousand years ago, they developed a unique language and culture. Their method of writing, social system, and philosophies influenced many surrounding countries. In the 13th Century, Marco Polo amazed his native Venetians with tales of his travels in China.

Writing a *shi* poem was once a requirement for entering public service in ancient China. Chinese enjoyed writing couplets, creating riddle poems, and participating in poetry contests. In the first section of this guide, your students will discover that writing a *shi* poem in English is not difficult if they carefully observe the world around them. You might want to begin with the translation exercise, so your students can fully absorb the style, before they compose original *shi* poems or attempt the other writing activities.

The Chinese language uses a completely different writing system from English. It doesn't have an alphabet, but uses characters that evolved through the years from pictures. However, both languages create new words based on existing root words. Homonyms are often the seeds of jokes, comical verses and stories. In the second section of this guide, your students will learn about how languages develop as they play with words.

Fonts and writing styles can convey mood and personality in any language. In the third section of this guide, your students will learn ways of presenting their writings artistically.

Your students will explore Chinese history and some of the ideas it generated as they work through the exercises and debates in the fourth section of this study guide. The ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, and later on the Greeks and Romans, shaped Western culture. This culture seems, on the surface, completely different from its oriental counterpart, but nowadays the distance between East and West has been greatly shortened. Westerners who study the ancient Chinese philosophies, especially Daoism, find them remarkably fresh. Long before Europeans developed civil service exams, the Chinese, inspired by Confucian philosophy, invented the *jin shi* (advanced scholar) exam system to select public officials. Debating how to use the best of what the Chinese created, your students will reflect on ways they want their own society to evolve.

In China, as in many other countries, rulers censored ideas that threatened their power. During many periods of its long history, Chinese society suffered from this oppression. Today, people in countries without political freedoms are fighting for democracy, and those in democratic societies still struggle to safeguard their rights. Women throughout the ancient world had a low social status. Their status has improved, in China as well as in many other countries, but even the most liberated women still work to redress inequities. In the debates on women and censorship, students will confront the oppressive ideas that prevent even modern societies from empowering all their people.

Writing *Shi*

Skill Areas: writing

Age Level: middle-high school

Activity: writing original *shi*-style poems

Share your favorite *shi* poems from the book *A Thousand Peaks* with your students. Also read the information from the introduction on page 5. Two typical *shi* are *Cloud*, on page 12, and *Willow Song*, on page 40. Study the translations of these poems and their literal transcriptions with your students. You may also wish to share with them poems other students their age have written.

Give your students at least 15 minutes in class to write a poem. Stress that they don't have to imitate the rhythm or rhyme scheme in Chinese, because English is such a different language, but you would like them to try to follow the typical structure, as much as possible: image, change of angle on the subject, and thoughts and/or feelings. It is perfectly acceptable to write a *shi* with more than four lines, but if the poems have unnecessary words that muffle their impact, you could suggest deletions to sharpen them.

Once they are done, ask them to share their poems aloud. Group critiquing would also be helpful. Ask students to trade papers and make suggestions (in pencil) on each other's work.

Choose age-appropriate examples for your classes from the poems written by students in various workshops we conducted. You may notice that some of these poems rhyme and others don't. Some use the typical *shi* formula and others don't. A strict formula is not the key. More important is the freshness of perception and feelings. You may wish to write along with your students, as these teachers did:

Ladybug

On the dark, glimmering petal
 glides the crimson lady.
 An aromatic breeze flows by
 and my luck flutters away.

- Donna O'Connell (5th gr. teacher)

Peach

Sweet juice dribbles down your chin
 with each mouthful of yellow flesh.
 You reach the corrugated stone
 and all that's left is a lingering fragrance.

-Joyce Cini (8th gr. teacher)

Writing *Shi*



Shi is the Chinese word for poetry, but it also refers to a particular style of Chinese poetry. The simplest *shi* have five or seven characters per line and four or eight lines. Poems that once rhymed now may not, because of changes in the way words are pronounced over the centuries. The Chinese language is a tonal one, and the play of tones (rising, falling, or level) is one characteristic of the *shi* that English cannot replicate. In a typical four-line *shi*, the first two lines paint a clear picture for the reader, the third gives a twist, a new point of view on the subject, and the last line expresses the poet's thoughts and/or feelings.

The poems *Clouds* and *Willow Song* in *A Thousand Peaks* are both seven-character-per-line *shi*. Since each Chinese character is one syllable, these poems have identical rhythmic structures. They also follow the typical format very closely. Did you notice the twist in the third lines and the poets' thoughts in the last lines?

Study these poems; then try to write an original *shi* in English. You don't have to rhyme or count syllables, but make your English verses rhythmic. Chinese grammar is very different from English. It has no articles, plurals, or inflected tenses. You will usually need more than five or seven syllables per line to write a *shi* in English. The most important factor in writing a *shi* is to offer an idea/feeling based on close observation, as in these student poems:

Puddle

Nice and roundly shaped,
it turns the color of the ground.
When I spash my boot in it,
it jumps up as if surprised.

-Caitlin Bennett (gr. 5)

Saturn

A ball the color of fire
with rings of ice
suddenly turns flat on a page.
But I picture it spinning, still.

-Laurie Muller (gr. 6)

Silk Wood

Wood like silk, softened and smooth,
curving gracefully, a sinuous body.
I strum the six steel strings
and from its mouth flows a song.

-Ashraya Gupta (gr. 9)



Writing *Shi* More Student Poems

Snow

When old mother winter comes
with a flat, clean blanket,
it crumbles as we play.
Where does she get a new one every day?
-David Spencer (gr. 5)

Cherry

A blossoming red
shines in your eye.
Helpless you devour it.
Poor thing, only its heart left behind.
-Peter Le Sueur (gr. 8)

Apple

Apple, high above, not knowing
the burden of its own weight, falls.
From the ground, looking up,
apple can feel the shade.
-Maureen O'Neill (gr. 8)

Gossips

They show tainted eyes and limp walks.
Everyone knows who they are when they talk.
Like weather plunging from their mouths-
Thunder, rain, wind and clouds.
-Trecia Sibley (gr. 9)

Dying Lotus

An ivory blossom brushed with pink
disappears into the harsh wind.
A last petal still clings to the stem,
afraid to feel the rough pavement.
-Kara Waxman (gr. 11)

Writing *Shi*

More Poetry Activities



Skill Areas: writing
Age Level: middle-high school
Activity: writing Chinese-style poems

Poetry Contest

Arrange your students in three or four groups to have a poetry contest. Read the introduction on page 6 of *A Thousand Peaks* for a description of these contests.

Brainstorm for topics (music, snow, mountains, food, etc.) and choose a simple rhyming scheme, such as ABAB. You can start the first line, and each group must, in turn, come up with a line to continue what you have started. The group that can't come up with a reasonable line within 5 minutes will have to give up its turn. In the end, the group that has completed the most lines will be the winner.

Couplet Writing and Hanging Couplets

Hanging lucky couplets is a common amusement for the Chinese New Year, the Spring Festival. Couplets, hung on either side of a doorway, are considered auspicious writings. On top of the door, a key line is hung. This may be a line summarizing the couplets, a title, a wish, or anything one wants to celebrate. Red, considered an auspicious color, is often used to add warmth to the New Year celebration.

When you do this activity with your students, you can improvise using verses of this book, or you can write your own.

For example, take the last two lines from the poem, *Spring Snow* on page 41. On the left side of the entrance, hang *Disliking the delay of spring colors*. On the right side, hang *Like flowers, white snow flies*. On top of the door, add a key line or the title, *Spring Snow*.

Message Poetry

Most Chinese poems were written to offer the reader an opinion, and, many times, this reader was an emperor or high official. Poems could be highly political, sometimes containing hidden meanings. In its most extreme form, some of these poems, read backwards, offered alternate meanings that the poet didn't want everyone to perceive. Ask your students to write a *shi* that gives advice to an elected public official of their choice. The students should use an observation from nature or common events to convince the politician to see things their way.



Found Poetry, A Writing Game

Pretend Translations

Skill Areas: reading, creative writing

Age Level: middle school and up

Activity: creating a “translation” from words dealt by chance

Special Supplies: scissors, glue, index cards

On the opposite page, words from the poems in *A Thousand Peaks* have been printed and their parts of speech indicated. Photocopy them, cut them out, and paste each word on an index card. Keep them in separate piles, all verbs together, all nouns, all adjectives, and all connecting words. For simplicity, conjunctions and prepositions are grouped together in that last category. Students will be creating an original poem by interpreting the meaning of words dealt at random, as if they were translating.

Shuffle and deal the cards out in a pattern of four rows with five cards across each row, in the shape of a twenty-character *shi*, making sure to use all parts of speech once in each line and nouns twice. Avoid putting two nouns side by side. Try using parallelism by having two lines follow the same pattern. Vary the pattern slightly in the last two lines. A suggested order:

Adjective	Noun	Verb	Connecting Word	Noun
Adjective	Noun	Verb	Connecting Word	Noun
Verb	Noun	Connecting Word	Adjective	Noun
Verb	Noun	Connecting Word	Adjective	Noun

Read the found poem aloud and write it on the board. Read it aloud again, but don't interpret it. If it seems impossible to make any sense of it, you may try removing the problem words (up to one permitted in each line) and seeing if you can find another one in the stack that fits better. Each student will write an original four-line *shi* based on his interpretation of this found poem, as if translating it from Chinese.

You may want to read *The Art of Translation* on pages 22-25 of this guide to familiarize students with the translation process. Reassure the students that there are no “wrong” ways to interpret a found poem, since they are not translating from a true original, but they should follow the same methods as they would in making a “true” translation.

Explain that since Chinese has no pronouns or inflected verbs, indicating tense, they can choose whatever tense or voice (*I, you, it, etc.*) they wish. Some words could be changed into nouns or verbs or they might want to use synonyms for others. They can add articles or connecting words as they need them and change the order of the lines and words.

Ask volunteers to read their poems aloud and enjoy the many ways of “translating” the found poem, the freer the better!

NOUNS:

CLOUD	FLY	LAKE	EARTH	LEAF
SHADOW	PEARL	BOAT	RAIN	MOUNTAIN
HORSE	ROOSTER	HEAD	TOWER	WIND
STORM	MOON	SUN	SKY	FEATHER
PATH	DOOR	WINDOW	SHADE	BUTTERFLY
MOTHER	RIVER	PEAK	ORIOLE	EGRET
TIME	SNOW	AUTUMN	VOICE	SONG

ADJECTIVES:

COLD	LATE	CLOSE	FOREIGN	SILVER
FREEZING	ANCIENT	GREEN	FRAGRANT	SUNNY
BLUE	RED	GOLDEN	LONELY	WILD
KIND	LUSH	CARELESS	CLEAR	DYING

VERBS:

KNOW	GUIDE	FLY	GALLOP	BLOOM
PASS	DRINK	WITHER	JUMP	SPLATTER
STIR	SCATTER	MOVE	FLOAT	SING
FIND	ENTER	PRETEND	CARRY	CHASE

CONNECTING WORDS:

WHEN	OUT	UNDERNEATH	WHERE	WHO
AND	AWAY	INTO	AMONG	BY
DOWN	ON	AS	FOR	BUT
TOWARDS	THEN	STILL	AT	BELOW



Found Poetry, a Writing Game

Pretend Translations

“Found poetry” is poetry that is discovered by accident (for example, by selecting or highlighting words from a newspaper or advertisement) or created by random events. In this game, you will pretend to “translate” a found poem. Words have been selected from the poems in the book, *A Thousand Peaks*. Your teacher or group leader will shuffle and deal them in a pattern that resembles the four-line poems in the book that have five characters in each line. Read the words and then interpret them by writing your own “translation” in four to eight lines. Feel free to add articles or other connecting words as you need them and even to change the order of the words, but don’t simply use the words at random. You may want to use them as a jumping off point, however, to create your own poem. Students from grades 4 to 6 played the game. We invite you to try.

The first set of words used:

green	autumn	enter	into	voice
wild	rain	gallop	down	sky
stir	earth	then	fragrant	moon
move	lake	and	silver	window

From the different “translations” you can see the range of interpretations:

When the green autumn’s voice
enters into the new year,
the rain wildly gallops down the sky.
It stirs the earth- then the fragrant moon!
It moves across the lake and flies
through winter’s silver window.
-Alexandra Kuhlke (gr. 6)

The fragrant moon stirs the earth
As wild rain gallops down from the sky.
Autumn’s green voice enters a silver lake
And my window moves to see it all.
-Katherine Koehler (gr. 5)

When the soft voice enters into green autumn,
the wild rain gallops down from the sky.
Then the earth stirs the fragrant moon.
The silver lake moves into my window.
-Amanda Yezarski (gr. 4)

Found Poetry, a Writing Game

Pretend Translations



The second set of words used:

blue	shadow	bloom	on	mountain
cold	river	carry	away	cloud
sing	tower	where	dying	leaf
drink	wind	by	lonely	door.

The “translations” are just as varied as in the first game:

Bloom, blue shadow, on the mountain.
Carry away clouds, cold river,
where towers and dying leaves sing
like the wind drinking by a lonely door.
-Omar Alui (gr. 6)

Blue shadows bloom on the tall mountains.
The cold river carries away the clouds.
The singing tower cries for the dying leaves
as the wind sweeps them through the lonely door.
-Anthony Rando (gr. 5)

The mountain blooms blue shadows.
The cold river carries away the clouds
where dying leaves sing to towers,
drinking wind by the lonely door.
-Meaghan Steiger (gr. 4)

This one broke all the rules, mixing both sets of words:

A blue shadow moon blooms in the sky
down a river fragrant and shy, like a window
in a cloud carried by a wild wind
with its voice silver and green.
-Charles Sheridan (gr. 6)

The Art of Translation

Skill Areas: literature, writing

Age Level: middle school and up

Activity: producing an original translation

Special Supplies: thesaurus, rhyming dictionary

Discuss the difficulties of making a poem live in another language. Read aloud the note on translation at the bottom of page 49 of *A Thousand Peaks*. Go over the translation process of the poem, *Storm at Lakeview Tower*. Ask the students if they would translate the poem in a different way. If so, how.

When the students are clear about the process, ask them to translate the poem, *Night Snow* by Bai Juyi. Read the word-for-word transcription of the poem several times. Ask your students to jot down all possible meanings for each line, no matter how farfetched. You may also read aloud some of the following suggestions:

Explore possible connections between the lines. Does each added detail help clarify the picture? Make sure you can visualize the scene described in the poem. Can you separate it from the poet's thoughts and feelings about it or are they too closely linked? The poet has put certain images, emotions, and ideas together in a unique way, a way you may have never experienced before. Although the poem was written a long time ago, you should experience the charge the poet transmits in the form of the poem, the buzz of excitement it generates. Your translation will transmit that feeling to others in your own words.

Try not to make all your lines end-stopped, but let them flow from line to line. In the poem *Flower Shadows* on page 42 of *A Thousand Peaks*, the line ending in *sweep* moves right into the next line. That is called *enjambment* and it's a way of keeping a verse moving naturally, so it doesn't sound forced.

Below is a translation of *Night Snow* by Orel. You can share her translation once your students are finished with theirs. Point out how she places the poet in the scene in the first line (*surprise me*) and uses slant rhymes (*cold, know*) in lines one and three. In the original poem, the poet's presence is implied in the first line, but not explicit. Note the rhythmic echo of *I know* in the closing word *bamboo*:

Night Snow

My quilt and pillow surprise me with cold
 and then I see my window's bright.
 Deep into night, snow is heavy, I know,
 for now and then I hear breaking bamboo.

The Art of Translation

Translation of Storm at Lakeview Tower



Translating poetry is very hard when you have to retain not only the meaning but also the poetic spirit of the original. Here is how Orel and Siyu did it. Siyu provided Orel a prose translation with the Chinese original, the pronunciation, and a word-for-word transcription. Based on this information, Orel did her first drafts. Siyu questioned the parts that were not as close to the original as desired. Sometimes, she explained implied images and meanings.

This is the original and the prose translation given to Orel:

wàng hú lóu

望湖楼

Watch Lake Tower

hēi yún fān mò wèi zhē shān

黑云翻墨未遮山

black cloud splatter ink not cover mountain

bái yǔ tiào zhū luàn rù chuán

白雨跳珠乱入船

white rain jump pearl scatter into boat

juǎn dì fēng lái hū chuī sǎn

卷地风来忽吹散

roll earth wind come suddenly blow scatter

wàng hú lóu xià shuǐ rú tiān

望湖楼下水如天

Watch Lake Tower underneath water resemble sky

By Su Shi

苏轼

Lakeview Tower

Before black clouds, like rolling ink, can cover an entire mountain,
White rains have, like scattered pearls, jumped into boats.
Creeping on the earth, a sudden wind blows away everything.
Underneath Lakeview Tower, water seems to be the sky.



The Art of Translation

Translation of Lakeview Tower

In the first draft of Orel's translation, she established her rhyme scheme (*by, fly, sky*) which is exact, like the original, although she doesn't rhyme the third line and the original rhymes all but the second line. She adds similes (*like ink, like pearls*) to clarify the meaning:

Storm at Lakeview Tower

Barely covering mountains, like ink, black clouds roll by.
Jumping into boats, like pearls, white raindrops fly.
Rolling around the earth, the wind scatters clouds
until under Lakeview Tower, water looks like sky.

In her final draft, Orel tightened the poem, deleting an unnecessary article (*the wind*) and substituting metaphors for similes. Now *like ink* becomes *ink black*, *like pearls* becomes *pearl white* and *water looks like sky* becomes *water is sky*. She tightened the verbs as well, replacing *barely covering* with *splattering*, *jumping* with *bouncing*, repeating the opening consonant "b" of the word *boats*. This poetic device is called *alliteration*.

Storm at Lakeview Tower

Splattering mountains, ink black clouds sweep by.
Bouncing on boats, pearl white raindrops fly.
Rolling around the earth, wind scatters clouds
until, under Lakeview Tower, water is sky.

The Art of Translation

Translation of Lakeview Tower



You can try to translate a Chinese poem into an English verse based on the information below. On the left is the Chinese original, its pronunciation and transcription. On the right is its prose translation.

yè xué
夜雪
Night Snow
yǐ yà qīn zhěn hán
已讶衾枕寒
already surprise quilt pillow cold
fù jiàn chuāng hù míng
复见窗户明
then see window bright.
yè shēn zhī xuě zhòng
夜深知雪重
night deep know snow heavy
shí wén zhé zhú shēng
时闻折竹声
occasionally hear break bamboo sound

by Bai Juyi
白居易

Night Snow

Surprised by a cold quilt and pillow,
and then the bright window.
Deep into night, I know snow is heavy,
for occasionally, I hear the sound
of breaking bamboo.

Because Chinese grammar is so different from English, you may have to switch lines around to have the poem make sense in English. That is fine, as long as you try to stick to the format as much as possible, presenting the image before changing the reader's angle of vision on it. You may need more than four lines to translate the poem. A thesaurus will help you with synonyms. This is important when you are trying to make your translation as musical as possible. Sometimes only a one or two syllable word will do. Too many syllables can spoil the rhythm of a line.

You may use or dispense with rhyme. This poem uses slant (off) rhymes, those that share only one sound (usually a vowel) so you don't need to translate it with precise rhymes. If you want to use exact rhymes, a rhyming dictionary will help. Try several alternative words to rhyme in a given line, choosing the construction that seems the most natural. Some words are more difficult to rhyme than others. A word should never be used merely because it rhymes. Rhyme, when used well, may help you make connections you might not have found otherwise.

Skill Areas: creative writing, art, global studies

Age Level: middle school and up

Activities: identifying Chinese words, inventing words from pictures

On the sidebars of all the poetry pages of this book you will see the printed Chinese characters of the original poems. They are printed in the simplified form which is used in mainland China today. These simple characters have fewer strokes so that they are easier to remember and to write. Since learning the language takes less time now, students can move on to other subjects more quickly. Some scholars dislike the simplified characters because they are not the ancestors' way. They also object to these characters because they don't look as sophisticated as the ancient ones and offer far fewer strokes for fine calligraphy. Nevertheless, even the simplified characters are too slow for the pace of modern life. They are more difficult to use on computers compared with alphabets. For many years, Chinese scholars have proposed replacing the characters with alphabets, but it seems hopeless, because Chinese has too many homonyms.

On the student handout page of this lesson, there are illustrations of how Chinese characters evolved over the years. The class can spend some time trying to figure out the characters' meanings. Reading the poems where these characters were used may also help. You can hand them the answer sheet afterwards.

You may also ask your students to make up a word from a picture. First you can ask them to draw a picture of an object using pencils. Next, using a black magic marker, they will outline the most identifiable shapes of the picture. Help them to choose lines that will best express the word. Hang up these pictographs with your students and see if you can start to communicate.

Experiment with different parts of speech, not just nouns. How could one illustrate the adjective *big* for example? The verb *run*? Brainstorm with the class for ideas. You can borrow ideas from a game of charades. Now, try to invent pictographs for these words. Hang them up and see if they make sense.

It is always easier to draw something that exists, but difficult to draw something abstract. Ask your students how they would illustrate the idea of *intelligent* or the idea of *movement*. They don't have to make up a character to learn how difficult it is to create a pictorial language.

Talking with Pictures

What Do These Chinese Characters Mean?

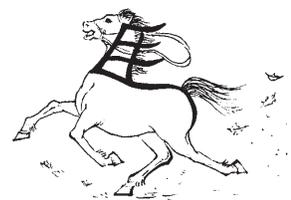


Chinese characters are not like the letters of the English alphabet. They are not just sounds, but entire words. Each character may have more than one meaning, but only one syllable. The Chinese characters started as pictographs, pictures of what they represented. About 3,000 years ago, a uniform writing system evolved. To ensure that everyone's writing looked the same, the realistic picture-like characters gradually became more abstract and acquired squarer shapes. Today, in mainland China, people use simplified characters. These characters have fewer strokes so that they are easier to learn. Many no longer look like what they describe.

The simplified character for *horse* 马 has far fewer strokes than its ancient form 𩇛. Look how this character evolved over more than five thousand years from its original form:



In the book *A Thousand Peaks*, Siyu Liu made small black and white illustrations on all the poetry pages using Chinese characters. First, she picked out characters that are key words from each poem. Then she wrote the characters in either ancient, traditional, or simplified form. She used different writing styles based on the mood of each poem. At last, she added her own interpretation of what may have inspired them. The bold lines of the pictures are the strokes of the characters, and the thin lines are her added interpretation. This picture is what she did for the *Horse Poem* based on the traditional character for *horse*.



The Chinese characters we are about to explore are more pictorial than many others. Compare the modern form with the old. See if you can guess the meaning of the character by looking at Siyu's pictures beside the text. Reading the poem may also help.

First, let's look at characters about plants:

The simplified character 禾 is used in the poem *Pity the Farmer*. It evolved through the years.



𥝌 is one of its ancient forms. What does it look like? What do you think it means?

The character 竹 was once written like

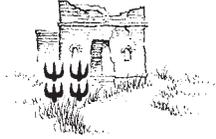


It is used in the poem *Bamboo Rock*.

Talking with Pictures

What Do These Chinese Characters Mean?

The modern character 草 is used in the poem *Grass on an Ancient Field*.



This form doesn't look very much like its ancient counterpart:



The simplified character 花 is used in the poem *Clothes Made of Golden Thread*.



The modern form is far different from its old form, which is more pictorial:



Now let's look at characters associated with natural phenomena:

The simplified character 云 is not drastically different from its ancient counterpart:



It is used in the poem *Clouds*. Do you need the picture to figure out its meaning?

The modern character 雨 is one of the most pictorial characters in Chinese, not very different from its ancient form:



It is used in the poem *Storm at Lakeview Tower*.

The character 月 used to look like: 月



Can you guess what it means? It might help if you read the poem *White Gibbons in Autumn Cove* which inspired this picture.

The poem *Watching Lushan Waterfall*



has this character: 川 It hardly changed from its ancient form: 川

This character doesn't mean waterfall. What can it be?

The picture for the poem *Lodging in the Monk's Hut* has two characters: 山 and 气



Their ancient forms are: 山 and 气

The meaning of one character is more obvious than the other.

Talking with Pictures

What Do These Chinese Characters Mean?

Now let's look at characters about structures and objects:

The simplified character 宫 is used in the poem *Passing Huaqing Palace*. One of its ancient forms looks like:



What do you think it means?

The simplified character 窗 is used in the poem *Freezing Fly*. Read the poem for clues.



This character didn't change much from its ancient form:



The character 井 didn't change much from its ancient form:



It is used in the poem *Song of a Well in a Small Yard*.

The ancient form of the character 丝 looks like:



It is used in the poem *Willow Song*. This character is not *willow*. What is it?

The simplified character 衣 is abstract, and its ancient form is pictorial:



You might need to read the poem *I See the Signatures of Those Who Passed* in order to find out this character's meaning.

The simplified character 舟 is used in the poem *Leaving Baidi in the Morning*. It changed a lot from its ancient form:



Which is more pictorial in your opinion?



Last, let's look at some characters about people:

The character 人 was once written like:



It is used in the poem *Travelling in Long Xi*. Read the poem for clues.

The character 女 looked like



What do you think it means? Read the poem *Presented to Premier Kou*, look at the picture, and see if you can find out.

Talking with Pictures

Answer Sheet

The characters about plants:

禾 means *crop*. Its ancient form 𥝌 looks like a plant heavy with seeds. It is pronounced hé.

竹 means *bamboo*. It used to look more like a bamboo plant: 𥝒 It is pronounced zhú.

草 means *grass*. It looks more pictorial in its old form: 艸 It is pronounced cǎo.

花 means *flower*. One of its ancient forms looks like a bouquet: 𦵏 It is pronounced huā.

The characters about natural phenomena:

云 means *cloud*. It doesn't look as pictorial as its ancient form: 𩇛 It is pronounced yún.

雨 means *rain*. Raindrops fall hard in its modern and ancient form: 雨

It is pronounced yǔ.

月 means *moon*. It used to look like a crescent moon: 月 It is pronounced yuè.

川 is a *river* flowing in its ancient form: 川 It is pronounced chuān.

山 means *mountain*. It used to look like three peaks: 山 It is pronounced shān.

气 means *air*. It used to look like rising air: 气 It is pronounced qì.

The characters about structure and objects:

宫 means *palace*. It used to look like a house with a pitched roof: 宫 It is pronounced gōng.

井 means *well*. It looks like an aerial view of a well in its ancient form also: 井 It is pronounced jǐng.

窗 means *window*. It looks like a window separated into panes with curtains on top. It is pronounced chuāng.

丝 means *silk*. It used to look like two strands of yarn: 丝 It is pronounced sī.

衣 means *clothes*. It is more pictorial in its ancient form: 衣 It is pronounced yī.

舟 means *boat*. It looked like a raft in its ancient form: 舟 It is pronounced zhōu.

The characters about people

人 means *person*. It looks like a standing person: 人 It is pronounced rén.

女 means *female*. It used to look like a kneeling person: 女 It is pronounced nǚ.

Talking with Pictures

Making Word-Pictures



Create your own word-pictures based on what you learned about Chinese. You can draw realistic pictures and then use ten or fewer lines to outline the major shapes that best express the words. Here are a few word-pictures created by fourth grade students.



home



tv



walk

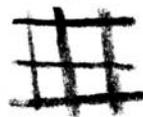
Several versions of “cry” were created by the same group of students. Which one conveys the idea most efficiently?



During the 1930's in the USA, many people who were desperate for work and shelter wandered from place to place, trying to survive. They were called hobos. They developed a unique writing system, a hobo language. Many hobos left signs to help others find a camp offering food and help. These signs never evolved into a real written language, but they demonstrate how writing begins.



dangerous neighborhood



jail



halt

Skill Areas: social studies, language arts, writing

Age Level: middle school and up

Activities: learning how Chinese developed and evolved, making up new compound words in English, playing with suffixes and prefixes

In this section of the guide, your students will learn how the Chinese language developed, and play word games in English that illuminate linguistic laws. First, go over the student pages on the Chinese language and encourage your students to make comparisons between Chinese (which has no alphabet) and English.

Test their absorption of the material by asking questions: Can you give examples of compound words in English? What do we have in English equivalent to the Chinese elements, such as *grass top*? If they don't know, write some prefixes and suffixes on the board and see if they can use them correctly in a few words. Some prefixes you might use:

in - meaning *not* as in *inadequate* and *indecent*

tri - meaning *three* as in *triangle* and *tricycle*

re - meaning *again* as in *reapply* and *recharge*

irr- meaning *not* as in *irrational* and *irresistable*

Some suffixes have clear meanings:

meter - meaning *measurer* as in *thermometer* and *kilometer*

ist - means a *doer* or *follower* as in *artist* and *Buddhist*

Others don't. These suffixes change the functions of words:

ment - changes verbs into nouns as in *government*, *development*

ly- changes adjectives into adverbs as in *quickly*, *normally*

Next, read the Chinese examples of compound words and see if your students can come up with more examples of compound words in English. They will now be ready to read the student page on *Making Up New Words*. As they play with words, inventing new ones and their definitions, they will be learning about how language works.

They might use their invented compound words to write a poem. The students could read their poems aloud and let others guess, from the context, the meanings of these new words.

Fun with Language

Languages Grow and Evolve



One way English creates new words is to build on simple basic words. For example, *man* is embedded in the words *human*, *woman*, etc. It can also make words that have nothing to do with man, like *manifest*. Chinese also creates many characters based on simple pictorial ones.

For example, the abstract word *large* 大 includes the character for *person* 人. People speculate that the ancient Chinese added outstretched arms to the character *person* to indicate the idea *big*. The word *sky* 天 looks like a *person* with outstretched arms and the sky above his head.

In English, often two words combine to make new words like *mankind*. This is also true of Chinese. For example, the character for *bright* is created by putting two characters together:

明 = 日 + 月
bright sun moon

When you see words like *telegram* or *telephone*, you know they are associated with long distance, because of the prefix *tele*. Similarly, in Chinese, when you see characters like 苗 and 蕊, you know they are words associated with plants because of the element *grass top* 艹.

There are about 86 elements for Chinese characters. They may be arranged side by side, and/or top to bottom. Here are some examples:

three drops of water 氵 as in current 流
two drops of water 冫 as in freezing 冻
single standing person 亻 as in lean 依
double standing person 彳 as in travel 行
food element 饣 as in hungry 饥
feeling element 忄 as in pity 怜
heart element 心 as in kind 慈
bird element 鸟 as in chirp 鸣
mouth element 口 as in twitter 啼
bottom fire element 灬 as in boil 煮
side fire element 火 as in burn 烧
wood element 木 as in branch 枝
silk element 纟 as in ribbon 绦
dirt element 土 as in dust 尘
metal element 钅 as in silver 银

Fun with Language

Languages Grow and Evolve

Many Chinese characters are created by using elements.

Sometimes, one of the elements indicates meaning, and the other indicates pronunciation:

芽	=	艹	+	牙
buds		grass element		tooth

Sometimes, both elements give only meaning, but not pronunciation to the new word:

秋	=	禾	+	火
autumn		crop element		fire

It is most interesting when an element suggests not only pronunciation *but also* meaning:

枯	=	木	+	古
wither		wood element		ancient

It is most confusing when an element suggests neither pronunciation *nor meaning*:

送	=	辶	+	关
see-off		walking element		close

English has many compound words. Some, like *tiptoe* and *eyebrow*, clearly state what the new word means. Chinese also has many compound words. Sometimes two or three characters are used together. These words, having more than one syllable, help prevent misunderstandings, since Chinese has so many homonyms.

剪刀	=	剪	+	刀
scissors		cut		knife

兄弟	=	兄	+	弟
brothers		elder brother		younger brother

Many Chinese characters don't follow any of the rules we talked about. They need to be memorized individually. Students of English can start writing once they learn all twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Students of Chinese have to learn hundreds. To be fluent in Chinese one has to learn at least 3,000 characters. No wonder it takes many years to learn to write Chinese!

Fun with Language

Making Up New Words



All languages change and evolve. New words enter a language all the time. For instance, we have no word in English that means *macho* so we borrowed it from Spanish. Writers create new words, often by putting two words together to make a compound word. Shakespeare added over a thousand new words to the English language, a number of which (such as *barefaced* as in a *barefaced lie*) are still used today. An etymological dictionary can tell you the origin of many words we use. Did you know that the word *breakfast* means to *break a fast*, that is, to eat after the long night's fast?

Morphemes are the meaningful chunks of language that make up words. Some morphemes are root words, like *bare* and *face*, that can exist independently, while other morphemes are affixes (prefixes and suffixes) that attach themselves to roots to make new words. Affixes cannot exist independently. For example, the suffix *ful* is not a word by itself (though it comes from the word *full*) but it is attached to root words to make adjectives: *dreadful*, *hopeful*, *awful*, etc. The prefix *un* means *not*. Some words that use the *un* prefix are: *unpleasant*, *unusual*, and *unhappy*. Can you think of others?

Compound words combine two root words: *sunshine*, *newborn*, *uphill*, etc. Guess the order in which the following three words entered the English language: *airplane*, *railway*, *doorway*. Did you put airplane last? New inventions require new words. That's how language grows.

In more recent years, new compound words having to do with computers have entered English: *software*, *motherboard*, *hard-drive*. People all over the world know these words now, even if they know few other words in English. Can you think of any other new words?

English is an unusually flexible language, one of the few that has reverse compound words. For example, we know the difference between a houseboat and a boathouse. Try making up some new compound words, just for fun, for some simple everyday words. A *bed*, for instance, could be a *liedown*, a *fork* might be a *foodspear*.

Next, see if you can make up some brand new compound words that express ideas we don't have words for in English. Write a definition for your new word. Try to reverse it and write a definition for your reversible compound. Here's an example:

Worklift- the lift you feel after finishing a hard day's work

Liftwork- anything that helps to make a job easier to do

Finally, try to make up new words using the suffix *gram* (which means written) as in *telegram*, *diagram*, *hologram*, *cardiogram*, etc. What could a *flowergram* be? A *cloudgram*? Write definitions for your new words. Try the suffix *logy* (variant *-ology* when it follows a consonant) which means a study, as in *biology*, *zoology*, etc. Make up a new study and define it. (Example: *Itchology*- the study of *itches*, where they come from and how to relieve them.) Try other suffixes and prefixes. See if your classmates can guess the meanings of your new words before you read the definitions.

Playing with Homonyms

Skill Areas: writing, history, language arts

Age Level: middle school and up

Activity: write a comical rhyme, using homonyms

Chinese has many homonyms. These words are often pronounced the same, but written differently. When spoken, a listener has to interpret the meanings of the homonyms by context. When confusion arises, a speaker will explain. It is very hard to read just the pinyin (pronunciation) without seeing the real Chinese characters which set the homonyms apart.

On Page 15 of *A Thousand Peaks*, There are two homonyms in the poem *Presented to Premier Kou*. In the third line, the characters 知 *know* and 织 *weave* have the exact same pronunciation zhī, but use different strokes. On Page 28, you will find 3 homonyms in the poem *Remembering My Brothers*. They are all pronounced yì, but each means 忆 *recall*, 异 *foreign* and 一 *one*. On page 44, the characters 拨 *stir* and 波 *wave* in the poem *Song of the Geese* also have the same pronunciation bō, but different strokes.

Some homonyms in English are spelled the same, while others are spelled differently. Marvin Terban's books for children are an excellent source for these. Make a list in class. Here's a short list to help you get started:

to, too, two
 for, fore, four
 mail, male
 flour flower
 so, sow, sew
 deer, dear
 sole, soul
 foul, fowl
 days, daze
 roam, Rome
 missed, mist
 grease, Greece
 whine, wine
 pair, pear, pare
 genes, jeans
 bear, bare
 hair, hare

Ask your students to share their comical rhymes, and everyone can have a good laugh and learn about the ambiguities of language at the same time.

Playing with Homonyms



The Chinese language doesn't have an alphabet like most other languages, but uses many single-syllable characters. Soon the Chinese ran out of sounds for their characters, so they invented intonation. Each syllable can be pronounced with four different tones. They are 1) same tone 2) rising 3) rising and then falling, and 4) falling. For instance, the sound *ma* can mean mother, numb, horse, curse, depending on what tone is used. Compound words are also used to further alleviate the problem. A compound word has two or three characters, therefore 2 or 3 syllables. This is very much like putting letters together to produce sounds, but in English you can connect more syllables in one word. Chinese has a huge number of homonyms, words that sound the same but mean different things. These homonyms sometimes cause misunderstandings, serious or comical.

When people in China are asked for their names, they often have to tell you not only the pronunciation of their names, but also the characters they use. Because of the homonyms, knowing the characters is the only way to know what the names mean. Every Chinese name has meanings, and the parents pick names very carefully so that the sound can't be interpreted in a negative way. The Chinese author of this book is called Siyu, a name that means *thinking universe*. However, with exactly the same pronunciation and intonation, but using different characters, it can also mean *silk rain, secret words, splitting universe, etc.*

There are two kinds of homonyms in Chinese, those that have the same written strokes and those that don't. This is also true in English. For example, *duck* the noun and *duck* the verb are spelled the same, but *dear* and *deer* are spelled differently.

The Chinese understand the differences between these homonyms by their context, just as in English. When we say, "I see the sea," we all know from the grammatical arrangement of the sentence what each word means. Since Chinese has a looser grammatical structure than English, it leaves more room for interpretation. The same words can be used as nouns or verbs, depending on context. To a more limited degree, that is also true of English, as this little nonsense verse demonstrates:

When fish fish
And ducks duck,
When sows sow
And boars bore,
When whales wail
And fleas flee,
I'll grow scales and play them
In the key of Middle Sea.

- O. P.

Make a list of homonyms. Some come in pairs (*dear, deer*) and other words have three homonyms (*sew, so, and sow...to, too, two...for, fore, four*). Write some comical rhymes, using these homonyms.

Beyond Words

Calligraphy, Fonts, and Illustrations

Skill Areas: language, arts, calligraphy

Age Level: middle school and up

Activities: learn to present a poem with a complimentary style

Special Supplies: pens, markers, computers

Traditionally, Chinese children learned to write with brushes and ink. Calligraphy was an important subject. Children were often told “Good handwriting can open a door.” They learned to form the strokes in a prescribed space, to make the characters the same size. To connect the strokes properly in script, they made them in a specific order. To add a style, they skillfully turned their brushes to vary the thickness of each stroke.

Today, children learn to write with pencils and pens. To give the strokes different thicknesses, they have to push down the pencils a little harder to create extra width. With a pen, they hold it a little longer so the ink accumulates. They are also encouraged to learn different styles for different occasions. Writing poems with ink and brushes is taught in school. The students choose styles they are comfortable with to write poems in large sizes suitable for hanging up. Nowadays, students can learn to type Chinese words on computers and choose a font, just like English speakers.

Art and calligraphy also play a role in the poetry of other languages. It may not be as obvious, but clear fonts, pleasing layouts, and interesting illustrations also attract English readers. Encourage your students to explore different printing fonts on the computer. Ask them to pick out fonts for the *shi* poems they wrote or simply their favorite poems. Write or type them out for presentations. You should also encourage them to illustrate.

Another activity you might want to try with your students is to play with the shapes of the letters to illustrate the word’s meaning. For example, the letter *o* in the word *love* could be drawn as a heart to illustrate its meaning. The letter *i* in the word *big* could be stretched up high. Students can also try to arrange letters in a specific shape to convey meaning. For example, the word *wave* can be written along a wavy line.

Poems presented in picture books are often sources of inspiration. See how art enhances, or perhaps diminishes, meaning.

Beyond Words

Calligraphy, Fonts, and Illustrations

Many Chinese poets were often fine artists, too. They would write their poems on paintings and took pride in the way they formed the letters, an art called calligraphy. To this day, the art of calligraphy is highly esteemed in China. Just as in English, handwriting can reveal much about the writer's mood and personality. Calligraphers often compete with each other by writing famous poems in their own styles. To appreciate a poem just by looking at its picturesque characters is not uncommon for Chinese readers.

There are many styles to choose from in Chinese. The following are characters for *wind* written in different styles, both in simplified and traditional forms:

风 风 風 風 風 風 風

In the book *A Thousand Peaks*, the characters in the black and white illustrations were written in varied styles to illustrate the mood of the poems.



A simple style was used to write the character *willow* 柳 for the picture illustrating the poem *In the Emerald Willows*. Every line in the character was clearly written. This style is as formal as the *Times* font in English.



A bold style was used to write the word *shadow* 影 for the picture illustrating the poem *Flower Shadows*. The heavy lines are of equal weight. The image is simple and powerful. This style is as assertive as the *Helvetica* font in English.



An elegant style was chosen to write the character *crimson* 绯 illustrating the poem *Rosy Cloud*. The soft curved lines are braided into a fairy's hair. This style is similar in feeling to the romantic *Chancery* font.



For the poem *Wind*, a loose script was chosen to write the character *wind* 风. The strokes are connected, as if written with speed. This style is similar to the *Brush Script* font in English.



Three characters are used in the picture illustrating the poem *Climbing Stork Tower*:

mountain 山, *sun* 日 and *current* 流.

A style for seal making was chosen, as if the three characters were inscribed on a seal that closes the book.

Now pick a computer font to write a favorite poem in a style that suits it and choose an illustration. You may also choose to write and illustrate your poem by hand.

Make a Timeline

Comparing Landmarks of World History

Skill Areas: comparative history, literature, research

Age Group: middle-high school

Class Activity: making a timeline

Supplies: poster board, crayons or magic markers, pens

Help your class to create a group timeline of the period from the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.) when the *shi* poem was created, to the end of the Qing in the early 20th Century, when it still flourished. Students should choose a scale that fits the size of the paper or oak tag they are using. If each foot equals a hundred years, for example, the timeline would be over 20 feet long! Start by photocopying some of your favorite *shi* poems from the book, choosing them from different periods of Chinese history, and paste them in chronological order along the timeline, as a guide. (Note: The poems in the book are not in chronological order, but the dynasties and dates are marked.)

Read to them pages 5, 6, and 35 of *A Thousand Peaks* for some background on Chinese poetry and a few relevant dates, such as the flowering of the *shi* poem during the Tang dynasty and the introduction of Buddhism to China. Others are featured in the student hand-out page. Supplement this with library and computer research on major events in world history to help your students connect what was happening in China with major events in the history of other cultures. You might want to assign different civilizations - such as ancient Greek, Roman, Icelandic, Celtic, and English history - to various students who will be asked to bring in relevant historical milestones, especially those having to do with poetry. Encourage them to find a few lines of poetry to include. Add these to the timeline after verifying for accuracy. This timeline could be a yearlong project. Keep all the Chinese milestones above the timeline and the information on other cultures below, so it is easier to compare.

Some literary landmarks students could research and report on:

The New Testament, written in Greek around the first Century C.E., around the same time as Martial wrote his witty epigrams

Beowulf, written in Old English in the 8th C

The Canterbury Tales, written in Middle English by Chaucer around 1400

Shakespeare (1564-1616), his poems and plays

Gutenberg (1394-1468), the German printer commonly credited as the European inventor of movable type.

Make a Timeline

Comparing Landmarks of World History



Poetry began in China over five thousand years ago, but the first poems were songs, part of an oral tradition. This is true in many other cultures as well. Did you know that Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad* were composed around a thousand years before Christ, but not written down until hundreds of years later? That Aesop, a 6th Century Greek slave who couldn't write, recited his classic fables? The first recorded book of Chinese poems we know about is the *Book of Songs*, written on bamboo sticks around 600 B.C.E. The scholar and teacher Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.) thought a man who did not know the songs was not truly educated. To this day, Chinese people feel that a person cannot be his or her best self without poetry.

The earliest known example of paper was found in a Chinese tomb built around 86 B.C.E., but paper was not used for writing until about 105 C.E. The rest of the world did not discover paper until hundreds of years later. The Chinese also invented block printing (around 710 C. E.) with whole pages carved in wood, and movable type around 1041. When did the Europeans first use movable type?

It is remarkable that Chinese *shi* poems were written for over two thousand years, from the beginning of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.) to the end of the Qing in the early 20th Century. What was happening outside China in this period? Find out and add words and pictures to the class timeline about your discoveries. You might want to include lines or whole poems from other cultures, like those by Martial below.

Born in Bilbilis, Spain, when it was part of the Roman Empire, Martial was a famous writer of epigrams, short witty verses. His full name was Marcus Valerius Martialis and he spent most of his life (40 C.E. - 104 C.E.) in Rome. Orel translated two of his epigrams from Latin. They show a remarkable similarity to Chinese *shi* poems. In what ways do they seem the same? In what ways are Martial's epigrams different from the Chinese poems?

On Carved Fish (Epigrams III.XXV)

What fish could seem more alive
Than those Phidias* caught here
With his chisel. They still thrive.
To watch them swim, add water.

*name of the most renowned ancient Greek sculptor

On A Bee Stuck In A Piece of Amber (Epigrams IV.XXXII)

This bee embalmed in a drop of amber,
As if her own nectar made the chamber,
Seems to have chosen a death to savor,
A shining prize worthy of her labor.



Free Speech vs Censorship: Should People Be Allowed to Read, Say, and Write Anything All the Time?

Skill Areas: society, history

Age Level: middle-high school

Activity: discussion and debate, critical analysis

After reading page 5 of *A Thousand Peaks* to your students about Qin Shihuang, the first emperor of China, turn to page 49, the “Afterword”, and read Siyu Liu’s account of how books were banned and destroyed during China’s Cultural Revolution. The authors denounced by the “revolutionaries” often lost their positions, friends, and families overnight. Many even lost their lives.

Discuss with your students why tyrants, throughout history, banned books and persecuted their authors. Ask your students to research infamous leaders from many cultures, such as Hitler and Stalin, who banned writers and their works. Suggest they find more information at the library or on the Internet about the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Set up teams to debate the questions posed on the student page. Stress the need for research to strengthen arguments. Of the four kinds of censorship (moral, military, political, and religious) the most common in the United States is moral. Stress that censorship can be official, like the Comstock Law of 1873, or unofficial, like the banning of books in schools and libraries (*Huckleberry Finn*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, etc.) because some people find them morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association rating system was an industry’s response to community pressures. A debate can be a strong motivator for historical research.

Some facts you might want to use in preparing your students for debates:

Sometimes the media has misled the general public, because of powerful interests that control sources of information. In a recent biography of Lyndon Johnson, Michael Beschloss reveals that while President Johnson publicly pursued the war in Vietnam, he secretly thought the American position was hopeless. Censorship in wartime is common in all countries and is often justified by the need not to reveal military secrets to the enemy.

Even in societies that support free speech, there can be fierce public pressure against those who disagree with government policy or the majority’s opinion. Celebrities, politicians, and reporters who expressed opposition to the Second Gulf War were called traitors by political officials and segments of the public. Some radio stations refused to play the music of the Dixie Chicks because Natalie Maines, their lead singer, made a disparaging remark about President George W. Bush. A crowd smashed and burned a pile of her CD’s. Even in peacetime, reporters have often had to defend their writings and confidential sources in court.

Example of an important time in the history of free speech: During the Vietnam War, many people protested. Even prominent members of the American Congress, like senators Fullbright and McGovern, spoke openly against government policy in Vietnam. Jittery young soldiers fired on student protestors at Jackson State and Kent State. Unarmed students died and the protests increased, which led to the end of the war.

Example of free speech hurting an individual but helping his cause: Martin Luther King bravely spoke his mind at a time when many segregationists actively opposed him. He lost his life, but advanced the cause of a more integrated United States of America.

Free Speech vs Censorship: Should People Be Allowed to Read, Say, and Write Anything All the Time?



At various periods in Chinese history, rulers destroyed books because they were afraid of losing control. The first emperor of China, Qin Shihuang, had books destroyed for fear he'd be compared unfavorably with past rulers! To intimidate his subjects, he had those who dared to confront him buried alive and their works burned. Some books, fortunately, survived the destruction, so that early Chinese history was not lost forever.

More recently, Mao Zedong (1893-1976), the leader of the People's Republic of China, started a political movement called the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During that period of fierce struggle, scholars who opposed his radical reforms were attacked. Most Chinese people, conditioned by a history of oppression, didn't dare question their leader's judgment. Many sang, "Chairman Mao, star of salvation, will lead our way," and followed his policies. The whole nation mobilized to weed out books that were deemed hindrances to a bright future for their communist country. Few books were allowed to circulate during this period of censorship.

After the Cultural Revolution, Chinese people gradually gained access to formerly banned books. TV, telecommunication, and Internet access make it much more difficult to control what people hear and think. For example, at the beginning of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic in 2002, government officials tried to suppress information about the progress of the disease. People who had Internet access, however, were aware of the danger. In 2003, the government was forced to correct this mistake. Several officials in Beijing, the capital, were dismissed for failing to control the spread of the disease.

The right to free speech has been part of the United States' Constitution since 1791, when the Bill of Rights was adopted. Do you think that this first amendment helped the nation to grow? In what ways? Did it ever hurt the nation? Can you cite an example? Some people believe that the open trial of those responsible for the first attack on the World Trade Center, with its detailed analysis of why it failed to bring down the structure, showed the terrorists how to be successful the next time.

Do you think that people should be allowed to read and write anything they want, even in a time of war? What if they openly oppose the president, the government, or the majority of the citizens?

Should people be allowed to write or say things that could lead to violence? For example, some anti-abortion activists have drawn up lists of doctors with the word "murderer" next to each name. Doctors on these lists have been killed. Is the cost of "free" speech ever too high?

Do you feel free to say whatever you wish? If so, would you dare to voice your opinion if everyone else was opposing you? When you might lose your job, your friends, or even your life? Do you believe in free speech for children at home and in school? Who should decide what children can or can't say, can or can't read? When you were small, were you ever forbidden to read or watch something? Do you think children need to be protected from books or movies or art works that could disturb them?

Can Qualifying Exams Help Us Select Political Leaders?

Skill Areas: history, analytical thinking
 Age Level: middle school and up
 Activity: writing, discussion

Read to your students page 21 of *A Thousand Peaks* about the *jinshi* (advanced scholar) exam. Then read the poems on pages 22, 24, 25, 26, 29, 32, and 33, along with the stories of how this exam defined and altered the poets' lives.

Read the student handout and ask the following questions:

What do you think of the *jinshi* system? Do you think it helped ancient China develop? Did it help men from humble backgrounds to move up in society? Did it hurt society as a whole, preventing China from moving out of feudalism to become a modern society?

Why do you think the *jinshi* tested only the sages' words? Is it because the emperors needed loyal men to carry out their orders, and preferred those who couldn't think for themselves? Can you think of other reasons?

Can an exam help select a candidate for political office? Should personality count? Why do successful actors and actresses pursue careers in politics? Can you name some who have been successful? (Ronald Reagan is the most famous.) How do you explain the political appeal of celebrities? Is it related to advertising, brand names that people trust? Does charisma play a big part?

Many of the leaders of the United States have graduated from top-notch law and business schools, but few from medical schools or other scientific disciplines. Is this because few scientists are attracted to politics? Or science has little influence with the public?

In the United States, there is no one exam required for government service, only for civil service positions, but students who want to pursue a higher education are required to take qualifying exams. In the U.S., most students take SAT's. In China, they take a multi-part college entrance exam that tests math, physics, chemistry, political science, Chinese and English. These tests are given throughout all time zones in the nation at exactly the same times on the same days every year. Great care is taken to guarantee fair chances for everyone, but only a small percentage of high school graduates pass.

Ask your students to share the lists of items they would include on a modern *jinshi* exam and defend their choices. You could compare their answers and tally on the blackboard or easel which tests were most popular. Ask them why the majority of the class thought these particular tests the most important. Ask whether they think these tests will still make sense in the future. What could happen to make their qualifying exam obsolete?

Can Qualifying Exams Help Us Select Political Leaders?



In order to select qualified officials to carry out their orders, Chinese emperors of the Sui dynasty (581-618) established an exam system that lasted more than a thousand years. This difficult test, known as the *jinshi* (advanced scholar) exam, was remarkably consistent. Poetry was part of the *jinshi* exam before the Song dynasty. Math and science were only included during brief periods when they were considered important. For most of its history, the exam tested knowledge of the classics by Confucius or other sages. Over 400,000 words had to be memorized and repeated perfectly on the exam! Women, along with others who were considered unworthy, such as performing artists and shop owners, were not permitted to take the exam.

Students prepared for years to take the exam and could take it again if they failed. Some had white hair by the time they finally passed. Once they passed, they believed, good fortune would be on their side. A candidate from a humble background hoped to be rapidly introduced into a world of wealth and power. Those from higher classes felt reassured, once they passed, that their family's future was secure.

Unqualified men longing for political power often tried to bribe their way to success. Corruption in the exam system was not rare. In the countryside, the exams were given in cells without doors in walled compounds guarded by soldiers in watchtowers to ensure that no answers were smuggled in. The penalties for cheating could be severe. In 1859, the emperor Xian Feng learned that some candidates had cheated in the palace exams. He had the examiners responsible for the cheating beheaded! Though the winning candidates didn't lose their lives, they lost their qualifications and jobs. That was devastating for them and their families.

The exam became so limited in the end, from the Ming through the Qing dynasties, that candidates were only allowed to repeat, paraphrase, and expand on the ideas of ancient scholars. Math and science were not included. Creative ideas and different schools of thought were discouraged. When Europeans started to knock on China's doors with cannons in 1864, China was not prepared. Many Chinese scholars rushed to study abroad to figure out what had made their nation, once so prosperous and strong, suddenly so weak. Reform plans proposed by scholars who returned with foreign ideas frightened the monarchy. Some of these pioneers were killed for trying to bring China up-to-date. The *jinshi* was abolished in 1906, and schools no longer emphasized rote learning of the sages' words. After the last dynasty ended in 1919, China was consumed by civil wars and the Japanese invasion until, in 1949, the country was united under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

What do you think an ideal leader should know? If you were preparing a modern version of the *jinshi* exam in the United States, what would you put on it? Make a list of the kinds of tests you'd require and why. These tests do not have to involve only pens and paper. You could include emotional and physical tests as well. Be prepared to defend your choices.

Living in Harmony with Nature vs. Changing Nature to Suit Our Needs

Skill Areas: history, analytical thinking

Age Level: junior high school and up

Activity: role playing—Daoist versus Confucian

Read to your students pages 5 and 35 of *A Thousand Peaks*. Study together the information on the handout sheet, making sure they understand the two philosophies and the meaning of the terms *dao* and *ren*. You might want to supplement these with some readings from the philosophy of Confucius and Lao Zi's *Dao De Jing*, available in many translations. More information on these philosophies can also be found online by using the keywords "Ancient China."

After going over the differences between the two philosophies with your students, divide the class into two groups of Daoist and Confucian philosophers, or let the students choose the side they prefer. Ask the question, "How would you improve the environment, according to your philosophy?" Students (in their roles) would debate, giving reasons why their approach would be best for a modern society.

You might want to ask the following questions to stimulate debate, focusing on examples relevant to your region:

Living large or small: Are we building too many malls, too many big houses? Do we need all the things that we accumulate? Would it enhance our communities if we all bought only what we truly needed? Is our consumer culture in permanent conflict with the need to conserve Earth's resources or do you see ways the two can be reconciled some day?

Should we ban chemical fertilizers, insecticides? Do these products harm the environment? Could their effects result in new forms of deadly disease? If we rely on manure, or other traditional organic fertilizer, will we more susceptible to bacterial infection? How do you feel about the use of antibiotics and hormones for producing meat and fish?

Dam building for generating electricity prevents salmon migration. What do you think should be done? As we take away more and more habitat from wild animals, they, in turn, invade our towns, looking for food. People who feed them have intensified the problem. Is feeding wild animals tampering with nature? According to Lao Zi, if we don't do anything, everything will be done. How does this saying apply to our treatment of wild animals?

Scientists have added spider genes to a select herd of goats. They hope to extract dragline silk, a type of fiber spiders use to make webs, from their milk. Pound for pound, this material is stronger than steel. How would a Daoist or Confucian feel about this kind of genetic engineering of plants and animals? About cloning human cells for stem cell research?

What rules does your society impose on its people? If you were allowed to change any of these rules, what would you change? What changes in society might make some of the rules unnecessary?

Living in Harmony with Nature vs. Changing Nature to Suit Our Needs



In China, around the fifth century before the Christian era, two important philosophies were born. One, Confucianism, grew from the teachings of the scholar/teacher Confucius (551-479B.C.E.) whose life was documented by his many followers. Confucius was a great admirer of poetry, painting, and music, and felt that government officials should appreciate all three to be fit for the company of civilized men. His rigid rules about how men should live in an ideal society fitted the needs of Chinese emperors so well that they were incorporated into the imperial governing system. This protocol helped the feudal society to last for more than 2000 years, but it stifled the rights of individuals.

According to Confucius, everyone needed to know his place and obey his superiors, yet at the same time exhibit *ren*, the virtue of human kindness, towards superiors and inferiors. At the summit was the emperor whom his subjects obeyed unconditionally. On the second level were the administrators who worked for the emperor, followed by ordinary men and their sons. Fathers were the most important members of the family, to whom all the other family members owed allegiance. Children were required to sacrifice their own interests to serve their parents and perpetuate the family's lineage, all in the name of filial piety, or devotion to one's elders.

The young people were often frustrated because their parents decided how they should live and whom they should marry. A considerate emperor was expected to relieve a man from service so he could tend to his ailing parents. Su Renshan, a nineteenth century painter much admired today, left home after a family dispute. When he returned five years later, his father had him put in jail for not being filial. The painter died in prison.

Lao Zi, whose name means Old Master, was another influential teacher who lived at the time of Confucius, though he was a little bit older. His classic and only work, the *Dao De Jing*, is a little book on the art of living. Unlike Confucius, who focused on society and its structure, Lao Zi spoke about how an individual should live in harmony with nature and himself, following the *dao*, or "the way," the primal law of the universe. If a person lived in harmony with himself, he would live in harmony, naturally, with his fellow men and the universe. A rigidly organized society was against the law of nature, according to Lao Zi.

A man who sought position in society or to accumulate wealth would lose himself in the process. The will to power, to dominate others, could only lead to misery. It was better to stand with both feet planted firmly on the ground than to be going up or down the shaky ladder of success. "Do nothing and all things will be done," Lao Zi said. He didn't mean people should be lazy, but natural, not straining to impose an unnatural order on the world.

How could you use the Daoist or Confucian philosophy to improve the environment today? For example, at Cedar Beach in Mount Sinai, New York, a colony of abandoned cats was growing for years. Some well-meaning local residents fed the cats and built small shelters to help them survive the winters. As the colony expanded, the cats killed birds in the area and disrupted the nests of piping plovers who nest in the sand. Signs were posted on the beach to warn people about the plight of the endangered plovers. Do you think people should be discouraged from feeding stray cats in order to protect birds? Should people who abandon kittens or cats be fined and/or punished? What about the people who feed and protect the strays? Is it essential to protect the plovers? What would a Daoist say? A Confucian?



What Can Be Done About the Unequal Treatment of Men and Women?

Skill Areas: social studies, literature
Age Level: middle school and up
Activity: research, discussion, debate

Read the pages about women's position in ancient China in the Introduction, page 6, and the section on Social Structure, page 9 of *A Thousand Peaks*. (You might suggest interested students read more about China's only self-proclaimed empress, Wu, in the book *Empress* by Evelyn McCune. Wu, one of the greatest rulers in Chinese history, is portrayed as a villain in most of the official historical records of a patriarchal society.) Read and discuss the poems and the poets' lives on *Poem of My Lost Country*, pg. 14, *Presented to Premier Kou*, pg. 15, *Clothes Made of Gold Thread*, pg. 17, *Song of a Tung Tree by a Well*, pg. 18, and *I See the Signatures of Those Who Passed*, pg. 24.

Read the student handout and choose topics for debate from the following questions:

What do you think of the lives of women in ancient China? Could you live a life like that? If not, then why did women tolerate it? Was the technology, economy, and society of ancient China advanced enough for these women to make a change?

What has contributed to the greater freedom of women in both China and the United States today? Is it because many jobs require less physical strength, but more thinking? That with telecommunication and computers, many females could work at hours that suited them? That highly educated modern women could hold better paying jobs? That they were liberated from continuous childbearing by birth control? Is it also that laws are different than in the past?

Many women now become doctors, lawyers, pilots, and even soldiers. Do men feel threatened? How do they react? Do they try to make work for their female counterparts more difficult? If women nowadays enjoy so much freedom, why do they still suffer from domestic violence? Does physical size still matter?

How do other cultures treat their women? (You might encourage your students to read more about women in other cultures, especially the Middle East and Africa.) Why does almost every culture restrict the rights of women? Is it possible that some of these restrictive rules were designed to protect women originally, or just to assure that men could control the paternity of their children?

Does biology impose limitations on women or are these perceived limitations purely cultural? What do you think can improve male attitudes towards women? Should men get more involved in housekeeping, childrearing, etc.? What other areas?

What did women lose in the process of getting more freedom? Are they getting more work-related stress, more heart attacks? Is the liberation of women bad or good for families and society?

Optional topic for discussion: Ask your students how their lives would be different if they had been born into the opposite sex. Would their opportunities decrease or increase?

What Can Be Done About the Unequal Treatment of Men and Women?



In ancient China, women were not as valued as men. Confucius was famously quoted as saying that women and other worthless people were difficult to deal with. Confucian scholars made rules about how women should live and girls were required to memorize them. Ancient Chinese society also imposed many unwritten rules on women.

A girl had to obey her father before she married and her husband afterwards. After marriage, she normally lived with her husband's extended family. She had to obey her in-law's commands and sacrifice her own interests for the welfare of her husband's family. She could be treated like a servant, particularly if she came from a poorer family, and, in the worst case, had been purchased. Since women could not inherit property, a rich family would give their daughter a large dowry to ensure her an easier life. A bride's position could be elevated, however, if she had a son to carry on the family name, especially the first male offspring in that family's line. Everyone would respect her if her sons grew up to be successful and dutiful, even more so if they passed the *jìnshì* exam. If she failed to produce an heir, she would be pitied and/or despised. Her husband would be urged to take in other wives, or concubines, if he could afford them. If her husband died before her, she would be urged to remain a widow, or even to commit suicide if she had no children.

Rich men in ancient China could acquire many concubines. The position of a concubine was low. When she lost her favor, she lost everything. An emperor could have hundreds of concubines walled up in his palace. Beautiful and talented girls were selected and given to him. Many didn't even get a chance to see the emperor before they grew old in his palace. The family of a chosen girl hoped for its daughter's success, but also feared her fall from favor. Either way, her family would probably never see her again once she crossed the threshold of the imperial palace.

Today, Chinese women enjoy much more freedom. Polygamy was abolished in 1949. Women gained the right to own property, to divorce, to choose marriage partners, and to keep their own names. Mao Zedong said, "Women can hold up half the sky." The idea was carried so far that there was a period in China when women were criticized for not going to work outside the home. This is no longer true, but most women in China today work to help support their families. Women who acquire higher education are generally well paid, but there is a general feeling that they need higher scores to get into universities. Far fewer women are admitted than men. However, women in China now hold government positions at all levels and work in diverse professions. Because many workplaces still prefer men, women are not always paid equally. Since the 1980s, China has gradually adopted a one child, one family policy to control its population. This causes much frustration for families who want boys, especially in rural areas where people have not yet accepted the idea that males and females are equal. Economics also plays a role, because males are expected to support their parents in old age. Farmers still have no social security in China.

Unequal treatment of men and women is not uncommon in other societies. In the United States, women struggled for the right to vote and a wage gap for men and women in similar positions still exists. Are there still limitations imposed on women in your society that men do not suffer? Why? How does it compare to the situation of women in China? Do you think attitudes towards women can be changed by education? Why or why not?

List of Dynasties

Shang	1600 B.C.E. - 1100 B.C.E
Zhou	1100 B.C.E. - 256 B.C.E
Warring States	403 B.C.E. - 221 B.C.E
Qin	221 B.C.E. - 206 B.C.E
Han	206 B.C.E - 220 C.E.
Three Kingdoms Period	220-265
Jin	265-420
Northern and Southern Dynasties	420-589
Sui	581-618
Tang	618-907
Five Dynasties Period	907-960
Sung	960 -1279
Yuan	1279-1368
Ming	1368-1644
Qing	1644-1911
Republic of China	1911-1949
People's Republic of China	1949 - present

The Chinese Language, Its Pronunciation and Translation

The phonetic transcription on top of each Chinese character is called *Pinyin* which is widely used in mainland China. Letters which are pronounced differently in English are listed below:

- "a" as "a" in "father",
- "o" as "ore" in "more",
- "e" as "er" in "brother",
- "u" as "oo" in "food",
- "ü" is not present in English. It is like "u" pronounced with puckered lips,
- "zh" as "j" in "jelly",
- "c" as "ts" in "its",
- "q" as "ch" in "chew",
- "x" as "sh" in "sheet".

In general, each character has only one syllable. When you see "ai", "ao", or "ui" etc. try to combine the two sounds into one. In addition, each character is pronounced with a specific tone. There are 4 tones, the 1st one is flat "-", the 2nd rises "/", the 3rd falls and then rises "v", and the 4th falls "\". Characters with the same romanization may mean different things.

The Chinese language has no plural, tense, or articles. A syllable may be read as a noun, verb, or adjective, or even have several functions at once. Being so flexible, Chinese is an ideal language for poetry.

FROM REVIEWS of A THOUSAND PEAKS:

“An authentic introduction to Chinese poetry and culture. Each of the 35 poems, selected from two millennia of Chinese literature and translated into graceful English verse, is placed on its own page in a handsome, open design... about as close to Chinese literature as young English-speaking readers can get.”

School Library Journal

“...not your average poetry collection. Within the three sections organized under headings such as “Social Structure” each poem amplifies the theme, and informative text below often includes a brief bio of the poet...”

Publishers Weekly

“A wonderful sampling of Chinese traditional *shi* style poetry... Not only is the surface meaning captured for each poem, but also its poetic spirit and quality...”

Hua-yuan Li Mowry, Dartmouth College

“An unusual, informative resource for cross-curricular use.”

Booklist

Author Orel Protopopescu conducts prose and poetry workshops for students and teachers. She is the author of three picture books, the most recent being *Two Sticks* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), a book on teaching poetry, *Metaphors & Similes You Can Eat And 12 More Poetry Writing Lessons* (Scholastic, 2003). A new picture book, *Thelonious Mouse*, is forthcoming from FSG. Her poetry has been published in *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Oberon*, *Long Island Quarterly*, and other reviews. She lives with her family on Long Island.

Author and illustrator Siyu Liu was born in China. She is a graduate of Qinghua University and Jinghua Art School, and holds a M.A. from State University of New York, Buffalo. An architect and artist, she lives on the East Coast with her family.

A THOUSAND PEAKS, *Poems from China*, was a finalist for a ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Award and one of two finalists for an Independent Publisher's (IPPY) book award in 2002. The book was honored at the New York Public Library along with other books on its “Books for the Teen Age 2003” list.

For more information on *A Thousand Peaks* contact Pacific View Press at www.pacificviewpress.com.

PROGRAM FOR MIDDLE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:

Siyu and Orel will introduce the four-line *shi* poem, an ancient form, and show how they collaborated on their book of translations and history. Siyu will demonstrate how Chinese characters have evolved, and talk about the suppression of poetry in her childhood during the Cultural Revolution, as well as some of the stories that accompany the poems. Orel will guide the group in creating a modern *shi* in English.

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