

Poems from the Tang and Song Dynasties



ABOUT THE READING The Chinese have been writing poetry for more than 5,000 years. The first poems were songs. The *Book of Songs*, the earliest known collection of poems, was written on bamboo sticks around 600 BC.

VOCABULARY

chasms deep gaps in the earth; gorges

TANG POETRY

The Tang Dynasty (618–907) is often called the Golden Age of China. During this time, poetry flourished. Tang poems are considered the best classical poems in China’s literary history.



As you read the poems below, note the simplicity of the language and the poems’ imagery.

Moon

When I was little
I thought the moon was a white jade plate,
Or maybe a mirror in Heaven
Flying through the blue clouds.
—Li Bai

Li Bai is generally considered China’s best poet. The moon was one of his favorite subjects.

Climbing Stork Tower

The white sun sinks behind the hills,
The Yellow River rushes to the sea.
Want to see a thousand miles further?
Let’s climb a little higher!
—Wang Zhi-Huan

This poem is often recited to encourage Chinese children to try harder and accomplish more in life.

“Moon” by Li Bai and “Climbing Stork Tower” by Wang Zhi-Huan from *Maples in the Mist*, translated by Minfong Ho, illustrated by Jean & Mou-sien Tseng. Copyright © 1996 by Minfong Ho. Reproduced by permission of **McIntosh and Otis, Inc.**

SONG POETRY

The Song Dynasty (960–1279) is often noted for the growth of cities and the spread of printing and education. Printing provided a much wider access to books since manuscripts no longer had to be copied by hand.



As you read the poems below, pay attention to how the poets describe their surroundings.

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.

—Su Shi

This poem is tied to the irrigation and flood control measures carried out during the first century of the Song dynasty.

Lodging in the Monk's Hut

Clouds drift inside my pillow on the air of a
thousand peaks.
Under my bed, pines moan as if ten thousand
chasms sigh.

To see sky-high waves lap a silver mountain,
I open the window and let the great river by.

—Zeng Gongliang

The temple described in this poem was located near the river Zheng. There were no mountains or chasms there, but the sounds of the river and the wind made the poet imagine them.

“Storm at Lakeview Tower” by Su Shi and “Lodging in the Monk’s Hut” by Zen Gongliang from *A Thousand Peaks: Poems from China* by Siyu Liu and Orel Protopopescu, illustrated by Siyu Liu. Copyright © 2002 by Orel Protopopescu and Siyu Liu; translation copyright © 2002 by Orel Protopopescu and Siyu Liu. Reproduced by permission of **Pacific View Press**.

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. Main Idea What is the recurring theme of the poems?

2. Critical Thinking: Drawing Conclusions How does the poem “Climbing Stork Tower” teach ambition to young people?
