

**China Through the Arts Supplementary Lesson:  
Daoist Tales and Poetry**

**By**

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**For**

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This is a two week lesson for sixth grade students, although it can be adapted to meet the needs of other grade levels. Meant as an introduction to Daoism, or the teachings of Lao-tzu, it is only a first step on the path to understanding “something so simple that it can get along without being a way at all.”

Having already studied India and how Buddhism spread to China, students will also have learned about Confucius and how his teachings helped to bring about order from CHAOS to the Han Dynasty. New students will be introduced to the third of the “Great Master” thinkers of China, Lao-tzu, whose religion was called Daoism.

Students will read short stories, or parables, based on the teachings of Lao-tzu, probe and discuss their meanings and the possible applications to their own lives. In addition, they will be introduced to the Chinese poets of antiquity, creating their own artistic poetry visuals.

During the Beyond Activity, students will work in groups of four or five to create their own SHADOW PUPPET SHOWS, based on parables studied in the previous week. Skills honed will be *dialogue writing* and *drama presentation*. This lesson can be a one week lesson if preferred.

Materials:            Student copies of “Show me the Dao”  
                              Sentence strips or overhead with special vocabulary  
                              Newsprint or art paper for poetry visual  
                              Shadow Puppet Show Packets: instructions, materials needed  
                              Markers

Vocabulary:        one-ness, way simplicity, yin-yang, harmony, religion, philosophy,  
                              changes, meditation, path

Key Concepts: Day 1: The Tigger Tendency or Overzealous Isn’t Necessarily Better  
                              Day 2: Yin-Yang: Harmony results when opposites create a pleasing  
    effect, i.e., light and dark  
                              Day 3: Wait and See, Things Might Get Better  
                              Day 4: Nature’s Way: It’s a Gift to be Simple  
                              Day 5: The Dao in Our Lives: The Need to Win

## China Through the Arts Supplementary Lessons

### Daoist Tales and Poetry

#### *Day 1: The Tigger Tendency or Overzealous Isn't Necessarily Better*

##### **(1) Background**

- Distribute “Show Me the Dao”....
- Say that today we are going to begin our study of Daoism. This is pronounced and often spelled DAOISM, and is a religion based on the beliefs and writings of Lao-tzu. Practice pronouncing his name.
- Lao-tzu didn't teach or believe as Confucius did. What did Confucius teach?
- Lao-tzu believed that the WAY to a happy, sweet life was to understand and obey the laws of nature, the forces of the universe. This is what he called following the DAO or WAY. This universal force could only be FELT, not defined by words.
- Lao-tzu taught that people should live simply; to discover how nature acts, sit by a stream, feel a breeze, watch a drifting cloud. The river, breeze, and the stream moves without effort because they follow the DAO or WAY of nature that guides all things.
- Daoists do not believe in strong government, like Confucius, but that happiness and peace can be achieved by contemplating (thinking about) nature and leading a balanced life in tune with nature, not by following the rules of society. Daoism teaches that harmony comes from balancing opposite forces of nature called YIN and YANG.

YIN: female, earth, dark, cold

YANG: male, sky, light and heat

##### **(2) Survey**

- Lao-tzu lived and died around the same time as Confucius, 606 to 530 B.C. At that time, Chinese teachers taught their philosophy or ideas by telling stories. Have students answer questions before reading the Chinese story, “The Foolhardy Tiger” from Benjamin Hoff's *The Te of Piglet*.
- SURVEY: Ask them to answer questions on worksheet before they read the story. After reading, there are questions for their reaction responses.

##### **(3) Tigger Tendency**

- Now discuss the “Winnie the Pooh” character, Tigger, and his bouncy, jump-right-in personality and how it got him in trouble.
- Read excerpt from Benjamin Hoff's book, *The Te of Piglet*, and also the excerpt from the *Tao Te Ching*, the Daoist Book of Virtues.

##### **(4) Homework**

- Find definitions for new vocabulary words on the survey page: harmony, religion, philosophy.

Day 1  
Period \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

**The Tigger Tendency**

**I. Anticipation:** Before reading, write down your thoughts.

Bigger and stronger is better. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If I *think* I can and tell everyone I can, I can do it! \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Enthusiasm is all that's required to "Get the Job Done!" \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**II. Reaction:** After reading about Tiger and Tigger.

Was the Tiger better off because he was stronger and bigger? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How did being a good talker get the tiger in trouble? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Is plunging right into a project without adequate (enough) preparation something we in the West do? Give examples: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What are Tigger's character traits? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you call him an *over-* or *under-*achiever? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Homework:** Vocabulary words to look-up tonight.

1. harmony \_\_\_\_\_

2. philosophy \_\_\_\_\_

3. religion \_\_\_\_\_

**Day 2: Yin-Yang - Harmony results when Opposites Create a Pleasing Effect**

**(1) Review & Introduce New Vocabulary**

- Start with a review of DAO(WAY) and new words religion, harmony, and philosophy.
- Special words today: Yin-Yang, Change, and One-ness
- Additional activity for understanding Yin-Yang: Diamante Poem
  - 2 Adjectives
  - 3 Participles (transition)
  - 4 Nouns
  - 3 Participles
  - 2 Adjectives

**(2) Read and Discuss Poetry**

- Students should take out worksheet for Day 2
- Introduction to Daoist poets
  - Tu Fu (AD 712-770) and T'ao Ch'ien (AD 365-427)
- Tell students that the poet is an artist who uses words as his brush. One-ness with the universal forces of heaven and earth. FUNG SHUI, is an emotional approach to nature which is seen as a living, breathing organism.
- Now lead them through the study of the poem, FULL MOON. Stress symbolism of the moon, its shape (circle). Ask students what they see in the moon (the Chinese see a rabbit!), what might lurk on the dark side of the moon? How does change affect the moon?
- In groups: GRAND CONVERSATION, analyzing six other poems. Ask students to look for: symbolism, mood, nature, Yin-Yang contrasts. Pass out copies of: "Morning Rain," "Day's End," "Rain," "Restless Night," "Gazing at the Sacred Peak," "To Harmonize with the Poem of My Friend Tai."

**(3) Create Poetry Visual**

- After reading, discussing poems, each group will be given paper and markers to create a poetry visual. Visual will include:
  1. Border of Significance (1 inch around, something that suggests meaning)
  2. Symbol of Poem
  3. One line quotation from poem
  4. What poem means in your own words
- SHARE!

Day 2  
Period \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Yin and Yang: Harmony

Today we will read and contemplate (think about) Chinese poetry that exemplifies Daoist thinking.

The Poet uses words, not brushes, to “paint” a word picture. Nature plays a big part in all of Daoist poetry. One should strive to achieve a “one-ness” with the universal forces of heaven and earth. This whole system, called FUNG SHUI, is an emotional idea of Nature.

The Chinese look upon nature as a living, breathing organism. They see a golden chain of spiritual life running through every form of existence and binding together, as in one living body, everything that exists in heaven above and earth below. Therefore, rocks breathe, the moon swallows, the wind whispers.

- 1) Read “Full Moon” by Tu Fu (712-770), poetry page Day 2. Keep in mind that as the poet strives for harmony with nature, we should think about the contrasts in nature:
- yin** – earth, dark, cold, female  
**yang** – sky, light, heat, male

Answer the following questions:

- a. What is the moon a *symbol* for? (What is a symbol?)
  - b. What is the significance of the *shape* of the moon?
  - c. Is the moon hot or cold? Both? (*yin/yang*)
  - d. Change: How does the moon change? Why? Do the changes make the moon more interesting?
  - e. In our poem, why is the moon lucky?
  - f. Riddle: How can the moon stay in one place and be everywhere at once?
- 2) Now work in groups to consider the other poems. Have several people read the poem. One person can take notes as you discuss the elements of Daoism: references to Nature, Symbolism, Yin and Yang, Mood of the poem.
- 3) Each group will be given paper and markers to create a poetry visual. Your visual must include:
- A symbol for your poem
  - 1 inch artistic border to reveal the poem’s meaning
  - One line from the poem
  - What *you* think the poem means

## Tu Fu (AD 712-770)

Selected Poems  
Translated by David Hinton

### Full Moon

Above the tower – a lone, twice-sized moon.  
On the cold river passing night-filled homes,  
It scatters restless gold across the waves.  
On mats, it shines richer than silken gauze.

Empty peaks, silence: among sparse stars,  
Not yet flawed, it drifts. Pine and cinnamon  
Spreading in my old garden...All light,  
All ten thousand miles at once in its light!

### Morning Rain

A slight rain comes, bathed in dawn light.  
I hear it among treetop leaves before mist  
Arrives. Soon it sprinkles the soil and,  
Windblown, follows clouds away. Deepened

Colors grace thatch homes for a moment.  
Flocks and herds of things wild glisten  
Faintly. Then the scent of musk opens across  
Half a mountain – and lingers on past noon

### Day's End

Oxen and sheep were brought back down  
Long Ago, and bramble gates closed. Over  
Mountains and rivers, far from my old garden,  
A windswept moon rises into clear night.

Springs trickle down dark cliffs, and autumn  
Dew fills ridgeline grasses. My hair seems  
Whiter in lamplight. The flame flickers  
Good fortune over and over – and for what?

### Rain

Roads not yet glistening, rain slight,  
Broken clouds darken after thinning away.  
Where they drift, purple cliffs blacken.  
And beyond – white birds blaze in flight.

Sounds of cold-river rain grown familiar,  
Autumn sun casts moist shadows. Below  
Our brushwood gate, out to dry at the village  
Mill: hulled rice, half-wet and fragrant.

### Restless Night

As bamboo chill drifts into the bedroom,  
Moonlight fills every corner of our  
Garden. Heavy dew beads and trickles.  
Stars suddenly there, sparse, next aren't.

The autumn chrysanthemums are alone in their  
beauty.  
I alone sing while fastening my garments.  
A feeling of melancholy stirs deep within me.  
It is true that there is much amusement in living,  
But in idling is there no accomplishment?

### Gazing at the Sacred Peak

For all this, what is the mountain god like?  
An unending green of lands north and south:  
From ethereal beauty Creation distills  
There, yin and yang split dusk and dawn.

Swelling clouds sweep by. Returning birds  
Ruin my eyes vanishing. One day soon,  
At the summit, the other mountains will be  
Small enough to hold, all in a single glance.

## **Tu Fu Selected Poems** (continued)

### **To Harmonize with the Poem of My Friend Tai**

#### **T'ao Ch'ien**

An empty boat glides on without oars,  
Returning to the infinite.  
At the year's start, I gaze here and there,  
And before I know it, it is already midyear.  
Under the southern window, nothing withers,  
And the forest is beautiful and luxuriant.  
Seasonal rains pour down from the sacred source,  
And the color of the dawn is attuned to the warm wind.  
We who have come must go;  
Man definitely has an end.  
While we live each day, waiting for the end  
And bending our backs in the fields,  
We surely cannot injure the inner self!  
Though we meet with change, transformation, danger,  
I am neither despondent nor exultant.  
If in daily affairs we hold our spirits high,  
Then what is the need to seek the sacred mountain tops?



**Day 3: Daoist Tales: Wait and see...**

**(1) Introduction - Analyzing a Model Story**

- Have an overhead of Tao Te Ching excerpt from Day 1
- Start with the *Sweet and Sour* story, “From Bad to Good to Good to Bad to Good”
  - \*Ask why SWEET and SOUR is a good title for Daoists. They will have a copy of this story.
    - \*Model how they should refer to the Tao Te Ching excerpt to see if characters lived up to DAO virtues or what happened if they did not
      - Father waited for things to change and get better
      - Son counted on things staying wonderful, becoming lazy and self-indulgent

**(2) Analyzing Stories in Groups**

- In groups: Pass out a story (six new stories) to each group to read and analyze.
- In each group:
  - One person reads the story
  - One person will take notes
  - Several will retell the story in their own words
- Worksheets will be filled out and saved for Shadow Puppet Shows
- Note. Could extend this an extra day by acting out a “Tableau” of several of the stories. Student actors become a character and “freeze” in place. When tapped by leader, the student performs as that character.

Day 3  
Period \_\_\_\_\_

Group Number \_\_\_\_\_  
Reader \_\_\_\_\_  
Note-Taker \_\_\_\_\_  
Storytellers \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Wait and See**

Name of story: \_\_\_\_\_

Main characters: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What was the twist or “denouement” at the end that makes it interesting?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In what ways did the main characters remain virtuous and follow the Way?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

In what ways did they stray from the “path”? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## From Bad to Good to Bad to Good

In ancient times there lived in the northern steppes of China a young farmer who was a fancier of horses. It was a great blow to him when, one day, his favorite mare ran away and crossed the frontier into the land of the barbarians. All of his neighbors and friends came to sympathize with him in his sorrow – and indeed he was inconsolable – but they found the young man’s father perversely cheerful.

“Sorrow?” he said. “Ah yes, it is sad to lose one’s horse, but then who is to know what blessing might not come from this bad fortune? We shall just have to wait and see.”

Several months later the horse came back home, bringing a handsome Mongolian stallion running alongside. Now the neighbors and friends gathered to admire the stallion and rejoice in the young farmer’s great good fortune, but this time they found the father shaking his head in the other direction.

“Ah yes,” he said darkly, “this seems like good fortune well enough, but who is to know what bad thing might not come of it?” He continued to shake his head with gloomy foreboding. “We must wait and see.”

With his favorite mare back in the stable and the magnificent stallion in the next stall, the young man began to enjoy a life of luxury and spent more and more time riding and less and less time farming. Then one day while riding hard, he was thrown from the stallion’s back and broke his hip-bone. Again his relatives and friends and neighbors came to sigh over this misfortune, but there was the farmer’s father belying their grief once more.

“Hoh!” he cried. “Let us not mourn just yet, for who is to know what blessing is even now on its way because of this accident? Wait and see! Wait and see!”

They didn’t have to wait long. Before the month was out barbarians attacked the northern frontier and all the able-bodied men were called to arms to repel them. So fierce was the fighting that nine out of ten men perished in the invaders’ onslaught, and many a young man’s bed was forever after empty.

Not so the young farmer’s.

His unfortunate fall from the horse left him unfit for battle. When everybody else went off to be slaughtered by the barbarians, he was forced to remain at home with his father, safe.

In later years – he lived to a ripe old age – when winter chills sent an ache through his mended bone, he was only grateful for the twinges of pain. They reminded him of his great good fortune to be alive.

*Han Dynasty (202 BC – AD 220)*

## The Pointing Finger

Even P'eng-lai has its tedious days, and when time hung heavy over that fairy mountain isle in the Eastern Sea, the Eight Immortals that dwelt there remembered and talked of their previous existence as mortals on earth. Upon occasion they took disguise and transported themselves from P'eng-lai to their old world to nose about in human affairs in hope of discovering improvements in human nature. On the whole, however, they found the mortals of today to have the same shortcomings and the same longcomings as those of yesterday.

It came about that one of the Immortals, on such a nosing-about expedition, was seeking an unselfish man. He vowed that when he found a man without the taint of greed in his heart, he would make of him an Immortal on the spot and transport him to P'eng-lai Mountain. Forthwith.

His test for avarice was simple. Upon meeting a foot-traveler in lane or road, he would turn a pebble into gold by pointing his finger at it. He would then offer the golden pebble to the traveler.

The first person he met accepted the pebble eagerly, but then, turning it over and over between his fingers, his eyes beginning to gleam and glint, he said, "Can you do the same thing again? To those?" and he pointed at a small heap of stones at their feet.

The Immortal shook his head sadly and went on.

The second person looked at the proffered golden pebble long and thoughtfully. "Ah," he finally said, his eyes narrowed in calculation, "but this is a fine thing you would give me. It will feed my family for a year, and feed them well, but what then? Back to rice water and elm bark? That would be a cruelty. How could I face their tears and laments? Kind Sir, as it is such an effortless task for you, perhaps you could turn your finger towards something a little larger, like, for example—" and he pointed at a bolder as big as himself beside the road—"that bit of stone?"

All along the way the story was the same, until the Immortal despaired of finding a human being whose cupidity did not outweigh his gratitude. After many a weary mile's walking, he came upon a man of middle years stumping along the lane, and, greeting him, said, "I should like to make you a present." He pointed his finger at a stone and it turned into gold before their eyes.

The man studied the gleaming chunk of stone, his head canted to one side. "What sort of trick is that?" he asked with a frown.

"No trick," said the Immortal. "Pick it up. Or would you prefer a larger stone?" He pointed his finger at a small rock and it instantly blossomed gold. "Take it, brother. It is yours. I give it to you."

The man thought a while, then slowly shook his head. "No-o-o. Not that it's not a very clever trick, and a pretty sight to see."

With growing excitement the Immortal pointed at a larger rock and a larger, until their eyes were dazzled by the glint of gold all around them, but each time the man shook his head, and each time the shake became more decisive. Had he found his unselfish man at last? Should he transform him this instant into an Immortal and carry him back to P'eng-lai?

"But every human being desires *something*," the Immortal said, all but convinced that his was untrue. "Tell me what it is you want!"

"Your finger," said the man.

## Golden Life

Long, long ago, when emperors were in fashion, there lived such a one who had everything there was to be had.

1. A beautiful and virtuous wife.
2. Many beautiful and good-tempered concubines.
3. Two dozen children, healthy and intelligent.
4. A country so rich and strong that neighboring countries had to pay tribute to him.
5. Gifts so numerous that it took half of each day to carry them into the palace for presentation.
6. Fourteen storerooms stuffed with such items as:
  - 15 marble bins full of gold, silver, and jewels of rare beauty
  - 50,000 cattles of rice
  - 75,000 sharks' fins (for soup)
  - 90,000 birds' nests (for soup when tired of shark's fins)
  - Rare fruits (pineapple-mangoes, grape-bananas, orange-lychees)
  - Rare animals (cats with elephant trunks and elephants with cat whiskers)
  - Clever inventions and toys that filled three halls

He was envied by the highest councilor of the chamber down to the lowest guard of the palace, for none of them knew what it was to have every longing satisfied.

Nor did the Emperor, come to that. Having cleared his mind of wanting everything there was to be had, he found a further longing. He desired immortality – to live forever and forever. “What a pity,” he said to his councilors, “to waste such power and glory on one puny lifetime. I must become immortal. See to it!”

The councilors wasted no time in sending out messengers all over the world to find the secret of immortality, for the Emperor must not be denied.

After many a day of anxious unrest in the palace, for the Emperor had lost heart even in playing with the water clock and the astrolabe, there came to the palace gate a Daoist, dressed in the simple robe of his belief.

He announced that he had brought the golden grain of immortality. It was, he said, the result of years of alchemy, the extracting and distilling of a myriad magic herbs, and there was but the one minuscule tablet in all existence. It would make of the Emperor an Immortal.

When the message was delivered to the Emperor, he ordered the Daoist to the throne room without delay.

With the precious golden grain of elixir on a bejeweled velvet cushion, the Daoist bore it in outstretched hands and, his head respectfully lowered, advanced towards the throne room. Through gate after gate, along corridor after corridor he went, and his every footstep was watched over by the palace guards. At last he came to the inner gate with his precious burden and started to move past the guard posted there.

At that instant, the guard snatched the golden grain from the cushion, popped it into his mouth and swallowed it.

The Emperor's veins swelled like blue snakes, and his face turned red as a fresh-boiled lobster. He wrung his hands and ground his teeth. When he could find speech, he swore that he would have the thief beheaded for his unpardonable crime.

The guard was brought in and thrown to his knees.

"What have you to say for yourself?" the Emperor thundered. "You ungrateful pig! I condemn you to death! Speak your last words."

The assembled guards and councilors trembled before his rage, but the guard of the inner gate remained calm. When he spoke, his voice was clear.

"Your Highness, the Daoist said that whoever ate his golden grain would live forever. I ate it; therefore I shall live forever. That being the case, it will be impossible to kill me, no matter how many times you remove my head."

The Emperor started to speak, but the guard held up his hand. "On the other hand, your Highness, if I should actually die of the beheading, then it would be known that the grain is not genuine." The guard smiled gently up at the Emperor. "That being the case, your Highness, a noble Emperor like you would never stoop to kill so lowly a person as I over a sugar pill."

The Emperor pardoned him.

*Han Dynasty (202 BC – AD 220)*

## *The Clever Wife*

A very long time ago there lived in a far corner of China, in Sinkiang, a good and simple man named Fu-hsing, who had an unusually clever wife. All the day long he would run to her with questions about thus-and-such, or about such-and-thus, as the case might fall out and no matter how difficult the problem he took to her, she always thought of a solution. Thanks to her wondrous acumen, the house of Fu-hsing prospered mightily.

Fu-hsing was remarkably proud of his wife and often spoke of her as his “Incomparable Wisdom,” his “Matchless Wit,” or his “Dearest Capability.” He only wished that all who passed his house could know it was her cleverness had brought him such great prosperity. For months he puzzled his head over a suitable way of declaring his gratitude, and his last conceived of a couplet that delicately conveyed his feeling. He inscribed the lines on twin scrolls and posted them on the gate before his house:

“A Matchless Wit like Fu-hsing’s  
Does with ease a million things.”

All who passed the house saw the scrolls, and those who knew Fu-hsing thought what a scrupulous and honest husband he was to thus praise his wife.

One day, however, the district magistrate happened to pass that way. On reading the scrolls, he drew his mouth down and his eyebrows together in a terrible frown.

“What a boastful, conceited fellow lives there!”, he thought. “What appalling arrogance! Such windbagery should not go unpunished!” When he returned to his quarters, he sent a clerk with a stern summons for Fu-hsing to appear before him forthwith.

The summons so frightened Fu-hsing that he could scarce speak enough words to tell his wife of it. “...can’t understand...I’m law-abiding...good citizen...pay taxes and tariffs without cheating...” He pulled frantically at his hair, sprinkling strings of it on the floor. “My dear Capability, what *can* I have done to bring upon me this summons?”

His wife laid a calming hand on his before he could tear out the last of his sparse hair. “It must be,” she said after a moment’s thought, “that the scrolls on the gate have given offense. Really, it is not worth worrying about! Go with the clerk to see the magistrate and have no fear. If you run into difficulty, we can talk it over when you return.”

Much relieved, Fu-hsing went off with the clerk and soon was standing before the magistrate, whose eyebrows by now had nudged so close together that they were quite entangled with each other. He sat glowering behind an immense table, his arms folded magisterially into his sleeves.

“So!” he exclaimed. “This is the braggart who posts scrolls on his gate to boast of his extraordinary cleverness!” He leant forward to glare into Fu-hsing’s face, the terrible eyebrows bristling like angry hedgehogs. “You would have the world believe you can do anything at all, would you! No matter how difficult? Very well!” Loosing his arms from his sleeves, he struck an angry fist on the table. “I have three small tasks for you to perform. At once! For a fellow of your prodigious talents, they should provide no difficulty. No difficulty whatsoever.

“First, then,” and *pound* went his fist, “you shall weave a cloth as long as a road.

“Second,” *pound, pound*, “you shall make as much wine as there is water in the ocean.

“Third,” *pound, pound, pound*, you shall raise a pig as big as a mountain.”

With an awful smile, the magistrate uncurled his fist to waggle a long finger under poor Fu-hsing’s nose. “Of course, if you do not accomplish these tasks for me *one-two-three*, you will soon learn how this court deals with swollen heads!”

Wretched and anxious, Fu-hsing hastened home to his wife and stammered out the three impossible demands made by the magistrate.

His wife threw back her head and laughed. “Foolish husband!” she said. “The hardest problems are those with the simplest answers!”

Fu-hsing continued to wring his hands. “But what shall I do? I know that you can accomplish anything, but this is beyond all reason...”

Madame Fu-hsing’s smile stopped him. “It is really quite simple. Rest well tonight. Tomorrow you must go back to the magistrate and present to him three quite ordinary implements which I shall make ready for you. I will give you certain words to take along with these devices, and you must say them to the magistrate just as I tell them to you.”

Fu-hsing attended well to his wife’s instructions, and the next morning, carrying a ruler, a large measuring bowl and a balancing scale, he presented himself to the magistrate once again. When he started speaking, the eyebrows were as tightly knotted as before, but as Fu-hsing continued, and laid in turn the three measuring devices before the magistrate, the brows gradually lifted up and away from his eyes until they became flying birds of astonishment.

“This morning, as I was setting out to do the tasks you gave me,” Fu-hsing began, “I realized that I needed further instruction from you before I could finish. Therefore, your Honour, I have taken the liberty of bringing these three measures to facilitate your task. I must respectfully ask you, first, to measure the road with this ruler that I may know the length of the cloth I must weave; second, measure the ocean’s water with this bowl that I may know how much wine I must make; and third, weigh the mountain with this balance I may know how big a pig I must raise.”

Fu-hsing made a deferential bow. “Just as soon as you have set the standards, your Honour, I shall be pleased to finish the tasks.”

So confounded was the magistrate at the cunning solution to his three problems that he allowed Fu-hsing to go without punishment, and never ventured to bother him again. Truly, the magistrate believed Fu-hsing’s Matchless Wit could do a million things.

*Han Dynasty (202 BC – AD 220)*



## The Peach Thief

Once when I was young, I went to the regional capital during the official examinations. It happened to be the time for the festival to celebrate the beginning of spring. The day before the festival, according to custom, all the merchants and tradesmen paraded to the governor's mansion in a grand show complete with drummers, pipers, and decorated floats.

I went with a friend to watch the parade, which is known as the Presentation of Spring. The masses of tourists and onlookers seemed to form a great wall. Four officials who sat in a hall were dressed in red, the color of celebration, and faced one another east to west. (I was too young then to recognize their ranks.) The hubbub of the crowd and the musicians' din rang in my ears.

From nowhere a man who carried a load on his shoulders approached the hall leading a boy with unbound hair. The man was talking to couriers from the officials. In the clamor of myriad voices I could not hear what he said, though I could make out sounds of laughter from the hall. Soon an attendant dressed in black appeared and loudly ordered a performance. The man climbed the steps of the hall and asked what he should perform. The dignitaries conferred briefly among themselves and spoke to an attendant, who turned to the man and asked what his specialty was.

"We can produce anything out of season!" came the reply. The attendant went to inform the officials, and in a short while came down again to say that the pair should produce a peach.

The man consented, removed his outer clothes, and placed them atop a bamboo box. Then, pretending to talk to the boy who was with him, he said loudly, "Their excellencies don't quite comprehend. How can we procure peaches before the thaw has arrived? But I fear their wrath if we fail. What can we do?"

"Father," the boy replied equally loudly, "you have given your word. There is no way to get out of it."

The performer pondered his problem with an air of dejection. Then he said, "Here's what I think. It is early spring, and the snow is thick. In the world of men there are no peaches to be found. But in the gardens of the Western Queen Mother, the land of perpetual bloom, where the peaches ripen once every three thousand years, nothing fades or falls. So we may find peaches there. We shall have to steal them from the very heavens!"

"How can we climb to heaven?" cried the boy.

"The technique exists," said the father, opening his bamboo box. He took out a coil of rope several hundred feet long, freed one end, and threw it up in the air, where it remained suspended as if hanging from something in the sky. The further he threw it, the further it rose, until it vanished among the clouds. When the rope was fully played out, the man called his son, "Come here. I'm old and tired – too heavy and clumsy to go. You'll have to make the climb." Handing the rope to his son, the man said, "If you hold onto this, you can manage it."

The son looked reluctant and complained, "My dear father, this is absurd. Do you expect such a slender line to support me thousands of feet in the air? What will keep my bones together if it should break midway?"

But the father pressed him, "I've already made the mistake of agreeing to fetch the peaches. It's too late for regret. I must trouble you to take the trip. Don't complain, and if we can get away with the fruit, we are sure of a reward of a hundred silver pieces – enough to find you a lovely wife."

And so the boy took the rope and began to squirm up it. As he shifted his hands, his feet followed, the way a spider moves along its web, until he had slowly made his way into the emptiness of cloudy space and could be seen no more.

After a long while, a peach the size of a bowl dropped to earth. Delighted, the performer took it and presented it to the officials. They took their time passing it around for inspection; they seemed uncertain whether it was a real fruit or a fake one.

Suddenly the rope fell to the ground. Alarmed, the performer said, "We're ruined! Someone up there has cut the rope. Where will my son find safety?"

Moments later, something landed on the ground. He looked: it was the boy's head! In tears the man held it up in both hands and cried out, "The theft of the peach must have been discovered by the watchmen! My son is done for!" A moment later a foot dropped from the skies. In another instant the limbs fell down this way and that, until all the pieces were scattered on the ground. In great sorrow the performer picked up each piece and put it into his bamboo box. When he was done he closed the lid.

"I am an old man who had only this one son, and he traveled by my side all my days. Little did I dream, when he took my order, that such a bizarre fate would befall me. Now I must carry him to his resting place." Having spoken thus, the performer ascended the steps of the hall and kneeled. "For the sake of a peach," he said, "I have lost my son. If you would pity this humble soul and contribute something to the funeral expenses, I will be ever vigilant to repay you – even from the beyond."

The awed officials each gave some money, which the performer took and tied to his waist. Then he knocked on the bamboo box and shouted, "You can come out, sonny boy, and thank the donors." A tumbleweed head lifted the cover as a lad emerged and kowtowed to the officials. It was the same boy!

I learned later that the White Lotus Sect could perform this strange trick, and it would not surprise me if the two performers were descended from them.

P'u Sung-ling

## The Magic Pear Tree

A farmer came from the country to sell his pears in the market. They were juicy and fragrant, and his sales were booming, when a Daoist priest wearing tattered scarves and coarse cotton clothes appeared at the wagon and begged for some fruit. The farmer shooed him away, but he refused to leave. The farmer's voice rose until he was screaming and cursing.

"Your wagon holds hundreds of pears," said the priest, "and I ask for only one. That's no great loss, sir; why get so angry?"

The crowd tried to persuade the farmer to part with a bruised pear and be rid of the man, but the farmer indignantly refused. At last a market guard saw that the uproar was getting out of hand and put up a few coins for a piece of fruit to throw to the priest.

Hands clasped above his head, the priest thanked the guard. Then he turned to the crowd and said, "We who have left the world find man's greed hard to understand. Let me offer some choice pears to all you good customers."

"Now that you have your pear," someone said, "why don't you eat it yourself?"

"All I needed was a seed for planting," replied the priest. And holding the fruit in both hands, he gobbled it up. Then he took the little shovel that he carried on his back and dug several inches into the ground. He placed the seed in the hole and covered it with earth.

The priest called for hot water, and a bystander with a taste for mischief fetched some from a nearby shop. The priest poured the water over the seed he had planted. Every eye was now on him.

Behold! A tiny shoot appeared. Steadily it increased in size until it became a full-grown tree, with twigs and leaves in unruly profusion. In a flash it burst into bloom and then into fruit. Masses of large, luscious pears filled its branches.

The priest turned to the tree, plucked the pears, and began presenting them to the onlookers. In a short while the fruit was gone. Then with his shovel the priest started to chop the tree. "Teng! Teng!" the blows rang out in the air until finally the tree fell. Taking the upper part of the tree onto his shoulders, the priest departed with a relaxed gait and untroubled air.

During all this the farmer had been part of the crowd, gaping with outstretched neck and forgetting his business. But when the priest departed the farmer noticed that his wagon was empty. And then the suspicion came to him that it was his own pears which had been presented to the crowd. Looking more carefully, he saw that a handle had been chopped off the wagon. In vexation he searched until he found it lying discarded at the foot of a wall. And now he realized that the pear tree he had seen cut down was the handle of his wagon.

Of the priest there was no sign at all, but the marketplace was in an uproar of laughter.

*P'u Sung-ling*

**Day 4: Poetry About Women**

**(1) Background About Women's Status in China**

- The special words are SIMPLICITY and CONCUBINE for today's lesson on women poets of China
- Read and discuss the worksheet introduction regarding the status of women, then and now. Also, mention how many poems from antiquity were lost.

**(2) Read and Discuss Poems**

- Emphasize -  
Form: 2 line stanzas, right to left columns  
Voice: Of the women who've been left behind, lonely  
Mood: Melancholy, but often glimmers of hope, or is it resignation?  
Harmony in Nature throughout
- Poems to read together: Follow Worksheet
  - a. "Trader's Wife" by Li Bai
  - b. "A Present from the Emperor's Concubine" by Lady Pan
  - c. "Parting is Hard" (Anonymous Palace Women)
  - d. "Weaving Love Knots" by Hsueh T'ao

**(3) Homework**

- Read the next poem in class; write their own poem at home  
Poem by Li Ch'ing-chao (read from right to left)
- **Extra Credit:** Read poem "Falling Leaves" by Kong Shao-an. Have them write their own poem as if they are something in Nature. (The rock or tree is actually speaking).

Day 4  
Period \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

### POETRY ABOUT WOMEN

Although the attitude today has changed a great deal in China, women in Ancient China were not as important as men. Every family wanted an abundance of male children. Girl babies were sometimes put to death, while others were sold as workers or concubines (women who lived with emperors but were not wives). Often a husband would go off to war for a long time, leaving his wife to become sad and lonely. Girls were married at a young age.

Unfortunately, most of the women's poetry did not survive because it was either burned or lost. As we read, notice the *form* of the poem, how many lines are grouped together (stanza), and who is speaking (voice of the poet). What does each poem say about her life? Is Nature important in the poem?

#### 1) "A Trader's Wife" by Li Bai (701-762)

How old was the girl when she met her husband?

Clues in the poem?

When was she married, and what were her "dear vows"?

What endures (goes on and on)?

#### 2) "A Present from the Emperor's New Concubine" by Lady Pan (48-6BC)

What is the white silk compared to?

Why did she make the fan for him? What was it made of?

#### 3) "Parting is Hard" (Anonymous Palace Women)

How many lines are in each stanza? Why would the Daoist poet choose this form?

What is the *mood* of the poem? Sad? Happy? Both? How do you know?

**4) “Weaving Love Knots” by Hsueh T’ao (768-831)**

How does the poet make love knots?

What season of the year makes her think that love has gone sour?

What in Nature makes her hopeful?

\*\*\*\*\*

We will read together the poem by Li Ch’ing-chao. Notice that the poem reads from left to right, as one does when reading in Chinese.

Why are her feelings like **water**?

What is the significance of the **twig**?

**Homework:** Write your own poem in a similar form, right to left. Include some references to Nature.

**Extra Credit!!** Read “Falling Leaves” by Kong Shao-an (Tang Dynasty). Imagine you are something in Nature (eg., a rock, a twig). Write a short poem, two lines to a stanza, as if you were the rock or twig speaking.

**Beyond Activity:** Read the contemporary poem “Inside the Stone” by Kate Barnes. Why is this poem an example of Daoism?

## A Trader's Wife

My forehead covered by my hair cut straight,  
I played with flowers pluck'd before the gate.  
On hobbyhorse you came upon the scene,  
Around the well we played with mums still green.  
We lived, close neighbors on Riverside Lane,  
Carefree and innocent, we children twain.  
At fourteen years when I became your bride,  
I'd often turn my bashful face aside.  
Hanging my head, I'd look towards the wall,  
A thousand times I'd not answer your call.  
At fifteen years when I composed my brows,  
To mix my dust with yours were my dear vows.  
Rather than break faith, you declared you'd die.  
Who knew I'd live alone in a tower high?  
I was sixteen when you went far away,  
Passing Three Gorges studded with rocks grey,  
Where ships were wrecked when spring flood ran high,  
Where gibbons' wails seemed coming from the sky.  
Green moss now overgrows before our door,  
Your footprints, hidden, can be seen no more.  
Moss can't be swept away, so thick it grows,  
And leaves fall early when the west wind blows.  
The yellow butterflies in autumn pass  
Two by two o'er our western garden grass.  
This sight would break my heart and I'm afraid,  
Sitting alone, my rosy cheeks would fade.  
Oh, when are you to leave the Western land?  
Do not forget to let me know beforehand!  
I'll walk to meet you and not call it far  
To go to Long Wind Sands or where you are.

*Li Bai (702 – 762)*

## A Present from the Emperor's New Concubine

I took a piece of the rare cloth of Ch'i,  
White silk glowing and pure as frost on snow,  
And made you a fan of harmony and joy,  
As flawlessly round as the full moon.  
Carry it always, nestled in your sleeve.  
Wave it and it will make a cooling breeze.  
I hope, that when Autumn comes back  
And the North wind drives away the heat,  
You will not store it away amongst old gifts  
And forget it, long before it is worn out.

*Lady Pan (48 – 6 BC)*

## Parting is Hard

Parting is hard, I'll tell you twice.  
Fallen petals in the wind make me sad again.

When you came, the plum bloomed through the snow.  
When you left, the willows were in their spring glory.

Time and seasons hasten the traveler,  
there is good weather again on the homeward road.

The world of cares is already far behind:  
In murky dream, I see your face again.

*Anonymous Palace Woman*

There is a soldier on a battlefield.  
The numbing cold is freezing him to death.

I am making him this coat with my own hands,  
who knows if he will get it?

I add each stitch to it with kindness,  
tenderly fill it with down.

In this life we've already missed our chance to meet.  
I hope we can be together in the next.

*Anonymous Palace Woman*





## Falling Leaves

In early autumn I'm sad to see falling leaves;  
They're dreary like a roamer's heart that their fall  
grieves.  
They twist and twirl as if struggling against the breeze;  
I seem to hear them cry, "We will not leave our trees."

***Day 5: The Dao in Our Lives - The Need to Win***

**(1) Daoism in Daily Life**

- How would the philosophy of Daoism be used in daily life?
- Stories with advice or morals(parables)
- Meditations to read each day when you “center down”, when the “waters” are calm and you can think and reflect.

**(2) Special word today: meditation**

**(3) Read meditation called “Reflection” from *365 Dao Daily Meditations by Deng Ming-Dao***

- Children must sit quietly.
- You could take the students outside, sit on the grass in a circle.

**(4) Read and discuss with worksheet.**

- Read from “Chinese Tales” by Martin Buber
  - a. The Need to Win(Olympic athlete connection)
  - b. The Cook(advice for a whole way of life)
  - c. The Stand for Chimes
- “The Stand for Chimes” and “The Cook” could be read in groups.

***REMINDER:***

Monday they will begin to write and create their Shadow Puppet Shows. They will need worksheets from the group analysis of Daoist stories.

Day 5  
Period \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

### The Dao in Our Lives

#### 1) "Reflection"

What does it mean to meditate?

Do you have to be in a special place to meditate?

What is solitude?

How are water and the moon used in this meditation?

It is amazing to think that very little has been written about Daoism since the Zhou Dynasty (1112-256 BC) when Daoism's great books *Tao Te Ching* (Book of Virtues) and the *I Ching* (Book of Changes) were written.

#### 2) "The Need to Win"

How can the philosophy of Daoism help the Olympic athlete? You?

#### 3) "The Cook"

List all the things "in Harmony" for Count Wenhui's cook.

What is more important than craftsmanship to the cook?

How does the cook keep his cleaver so sharp?

How does the cook handle obstacles?

What has the Count learned from Cook about how he should live his life?

#### 4) "The Stand of Chimes"

What is the reason the master carpenter is able to do such a fine job?

## Reflection

Moon above water.  
Sit in solitude.

If waters are placid, the moon will be mirrored perfectly. If we still ourselves, we can mirror the divine perfectly. But if we engage solely in the frenetic activities of our daily involvements, if we seek to impose our own schemes on the natural order, and if we allow ourselves to become absorbed in self-centered views, the surface of our waters becomes turbulent. Then we cannot be receptive to Dao.

There is no effort that we can make to still ourselves. True stillness comes naturally from moments of solitude where we allow our minds to settle. Just as water seeks its own level, the mind will gravitate toward the holy. Muddy water will become clear if allowed to stand undisturbed, and so too will the mind become clear if it is allowed to be still.

Neither the water nor the moon make any effort to achieve a reflection. In the same way, meditation will be natural and immediate.

## The Need to Win

When an archer is shooting for nothing  
He has all his skill.  
If he shoots for a brass buckle  
He is already nervous.  
If he shoots for a prize of gold  
He goes blind  
Or he sees two targets –  
He is out of his mind!

His skill has not changed. But the prize  
Divides him. He cares.  
He thinks more of winning  
Than of shooting –  
And the need to win  
Drains him of power.

## The Cook

Count Wenhui's cook was busy dismembering an ox. Every stroke of his hand, every lift of his shoulders, every kick of his foot, every thrust with his knee, every hiss of cleaving meat, every whiz of the cleaver, everything was in utter harmony – formally structured like a dance in the mulberry grove, euphonious like the tones of Jingshou.

“Well done!” exclaimed the count. “This is craftsmanship indeed.”

“Your servant,” replied the cook, “has devoted himself to Dao. This is better than craftsmanship. When I first began to dismember oxen, I saw before me entire oxen. After three years' practice, I no longer saw the entire animal. And now I work with my spirit, not my eyes. When my senses caution me to stop, but my spirit urges me on, I find my support in the eternal principles. I follow the openings and hollows which, according to the natural state of the animal, must be where they are. I do not try to cut through the bones of the joints, let alone the large bones.

“A good cook exchanges his cleaver for a new one once a year, because he uses it to cut. An ordinary cook exchanges it for a new one every month, because he uses it to hack. But I have been handling this cleaver for nineteen years, and even though I have dismembered many thousands of oxen, its edge is as keen as though it came fresh from the whetstone. There are always spaces between the joints, and since the edge of the cleaver is very thin, it is only necessary to insert it in such a space. Thus the gap is enlarged, and the blade finds enough places to do its work. That is how I have kept my cleaver for nineteen years as though it came fresh from the whetstone.

“Nevertheless, when I come across a tough part, where the blade encounters an obstacle, I proceed with caution. First, I fix my eye on it. I hold back my hand. Gently I apply the blade until that part yields with a muffled sound like lumps of earth singing to the ground. Then I withdraw my cleaver, rise, look around, and stand still, until I finally dry my cleaver with satisfaction and lay it carefully aside.”

“Well spoken!” cried the count. “By the words of this cook I have learned how I must look after my life.”

## The Stand for Chimes

Qing, the master carpenter, was carving a wooden stand for a set of chimes. When he was done, everyone who saw it thought it had been fashioned by supernatural beings. The prince of Lu asked the master, "What is the secret of your art?"

"Your subject is only an artisan," replied Qing. "What secrets could he have? Yet there is something. When starting out to make the stand, I guarded myself against every loss of vital energy. I collected myself in order to subdue my spirit to an absolute calm. After three days I became oblivious to whatever reward I might receive. After five days I became oblivious to whatever fame I might be accorded. After seven days I forgot my limbs and the rest of my physical self. Even the thought of your court, for which I was supposed to work, was gone. Then I got down to my art, undisturbed by anything outside. I went to the forest and looked at the shapes of trees. When I caught sight of one that had the right shape, the stand for the set of chimes appeared to me, and I went to work. If I had not found this tree, I would have had to cancel the job. My divinely inspired capability and the divinely inspired shape of the tree coincided. What is credited to the supernatural in my work is due entirely to this coincidence."

**Christine Osburn**

## **China Through the Arts Supplementary Lessons**

### **Shadow Puppet Shows**

#### **Materials**

- Instruction copies from *The Shadow Puppet Book* by Janet Lynch-Watson
- Large cardboard box or folding screen frame
- Light
- White cloth or white butcher paper to stretch over frame
- Access to laminating machine
- Colored tissue paper
- Bamboo or chopsticks for puppet sticks

#### Shadow Puppet Show Groups

1. Students will need their Daoist Tales worksheets.
2. Move back into groups.
3. Assign one story per group:
  1. From Bad to Good to Bad to Good
  2. The Pointing Finger
  3. Golden Life
  4. The Clever Wife
  5. The Peach Thief
  6. The Magic Pear Tree
4. The students will be turning the Daoist(Daoist) stories into Shadow Puppet Plays. This art form has been practiced in China for over a thousand years. Originally, they were used to illustrate Buddhist stories.
5. Group participants: 2 people to write dialogue  
2-3 people for creating puppets, sets, props, etc.
6. Class Rubric for assessment.

#### ***Suggested Timeline:***

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Monday:    | Write dialogue and work on puppets     |
| Tuesday:   | Continue to write and make puppets     |
| Wednesday: | Peer edit/check on progress of artwork |
| Thursday:  | Rehearse plays                         |
| Friday:    | Performances                           |