

Resources for English Literature Teachers for National Poetry Month April 2017
Chinese Poetry in Lan Su Chinese Garden

Lan Su Chinese Garden is a place to explore China, its history, culture, and arts. Throughout Chinese history, poetry has been a very important art form. Lan Su is filled with poetry – carved into rocks and inside and outside pavilions. Much of Lan Su’s poetry alludes to famous ancient couplets but also describes the beauty of this classical Chinese garden.

The Chinese poetic couplet is a wonderful way to introduce students to writing poetry. The form is short, just two lines. The two lines set up a balance of pairs, constructed with similar sentence structure. The structure can be very simple or more complicated.

Chinese couplets often describe nature. Written in the Tang Dynasty, the poet Wang Wei captures a simple moment enjoying nature:

*Walk and reach the place where the stream ends.
Sit to watch the moment when the clouds form.*

Students of all ages respond to the beauty and variety of nature and the animal kingdom. Consider taking your students to Lan Su Chinese Garden to tour the garden and write poetic couplets. See the poetic couplet writing activity for 5th-12th grade students. Field trip information is available here or contact the Director of Education, Katie Hill, at Katie@lansugarden.org or 503-228-8131 x1001.

Whether you come to see the stunning views of Lan Su or take your students outside in the school yard, nature is present to inspire students – a cloud, a bird, wind in the trees, or misty rain. Celebrate National Poetry Month in April by writing poetic couplets with your students as the Chinese have done for thousands of years.



POETRY ACTIVITY

In Lan Su Chinese Garden, there is poetry everywhere you look – carved into rocks, inside and outside buildings. Many are two-lined poems called couplets. These couplets often describe nature and aspects of the garden. The two lines set up a balance of pairs, constructed with similar sentence structure. Some pairs in a couplet might be: wind & rain, one & many, heavy & light, sun & clouds. Here are some examples:



Walk and reach the place where the stream ends.
Sit to watch the moment when clouds form.

Wang Wei, Tang Dynasty

Shades of bamboo, layers of rock: dark is the pine's hue
Slanted the path, crooked the stream: soft is the water's song.

Wang Jiansheng, for Lan Su Chinese Garden Lounge Pavilion

The tree sways with the wind, elegant and free.
Stone stands through storms, stiff and noble.

Maddison Maffeo, 2010, 6th grade, CAM Academy



ACTIVITY

Now it is your turn to add a second line:

1st Line: A fish gliding on the surface of the water parts the green

2nd Line:

1st Line: White sand retains the color of the moon

2nd Line:



Now create your very own couplet: