



Portland Classical Chinese Garden PO Box 3706 Portland OR 97208-3706 Tel (503) 228-8131
www.portlandchinesegarden.org

Portland Classical Chinese Garden: ROCKS

In *Lan Su Yuan*, the Portland Classical Chinese Garden, tall strangely-shaped rocks are seen throughout the landscape. In Chinese gardens, rocks are more than what they appear to be. The Chinese see their garden rocks as miniature mountains that allow those who wander in the garden to feel as if they are retreating into the wilderness. In China there are five sacred mountains that represent the center of the earth and its four corners. Some ancient stories explain that mountains are the pillars that link heaven and earth. Seeing rocks in a garden is an invitation to make a mental journey to these sacred mountains.

Portland's Chinese Garden was designed and hand-made by people in Suzhou, China, a sister city to Portland, Oregon; all the rocks and stones and all the architecture were then transported and assembled in Portland. Suzhou is in southern China, in the Yangtze River Delta. Not far away from Suzhou is a very large and special lake called Lake Tai. The large upright garden rocks were once part of the bottom of Lake Tai. Over many centuries, the moving waters wore holes and cracks into the hard stone turning the rock into strange shapes. People like to look at the rocks and imagine animals are hiding in the rocks. People like to see tigers or Chinese dragons peeking out of the holes. Some people see clouds floating inside the mountain. Some Chinese say that the holes are also like the eyes of a mountain that can see in all directions. It is no wonder, that the Chinese view rocks as alive with life force energy they refer to as "Qi." (*chee*).

Stones serve another important role in the Chinese Garden. Throughout the garden, pathways are created out of small stones arranged in beautiful mosaic designs such as flower petals and seeds. In the Scholar's Courtyard the stones underfoot create the winter scene of *Plum Blossoms Fallen on Cracked Ice*. Most of the walkway stones are set in place on their edge so that walking on them feels bumpy—actually providing a 'foot massage.' In this way, a person's *Qi*, or vital life force energy, is stimulated and brought into further harmony and balance. Therefore, walking in peace is actually part of a classical Chinese garden design.



Plum Blossoms on Cracked Ice in Scholars Courtyard



Sunflower Pattern in Fragrance Courtyard

Girl Standing by Crab Apple Blossom Gate and Mosaic in Courtyard of Tranquility



Lake Tai Stone with Inscription: "Half a Cloud"



Chinese Garden Rock Activities

1. **Design and sketch a pattern for a Chinese Garden mosaic** that could be found underfoot in a Suzhou-style garden. To make a mosaic come alive, take small pieces of colored paper in at least 2 contrasting shades. For example, these can be black and white or 2 contrasting tones of green. A mosaic in paper can look beautiful. One class actually created the colors of jade stone in paint before tearing the color blocks into small jagged pieces like irregular stones and then gluing the small jade colored pieces onto their mosaic patterns. Some students made animals; others made flowers patterns. See the Leak Window designs in the Architecture Activities section for pattern ideas. Another group of students challenged themselves to make a mosaic out of broken pieces of tiles. Each way brings to life the idea of *Walking on Art!*

Painted Colors of Jade used in Mosaic



Mosaic made from Broken Tiles



2. Write a poem while in the mountains. Traveling into the mountains allows you to discover a new way of seeing the world. Whether you are visiting the Portland Classical Chinese Garden, traveling into the Mt. Hood Wilderness of Oregon, hiking on mountain trails in your own state, exploring the peaks of China, or making a journey into the mountains in your imagination, you can experience the tranquility found on remote summits. In the mountains you can retreat from everything and everyone. You can quietly reflect on things that are in your mind. Arriving in the mountains brings new perspectives as you are transported into a timeless world as ancient as stone.

Record your thoughts in an original poem that is 4-5 lines or longer. It is the Chinese tradition to have one poet inspire the words of another poet who lives hundreds of years later. You can partake of the tradition of a ‘conversation across time’ when you read Chinese poems that leave an impression on you. Perhaps you will find a line in one of the poems below and transform the imagery to create new meanings. As you read the Chinese poems below, consider how **your** poem can make use of similar poetic devices that have touched people’s emotions and provoked new understandings of life across the centuries. Poetic devices include:

Change in Perspective: Finding the big in the small and the small in the big; seeing the near in the far and the far-away as within reach

Multiple Points of View: Thinking ‘as if’ another person or even ‘becoming’ a part of nature

Emotional Landscape: Uniting inner emotions and outer scenery

Vivid Imagery: ‘Painting in Poetry’ with vivid color and texture images

Sensory Awareness: Engaging all the senses in extraordinary ways

Dimension of Time: Merging *Then* and *Now*; the eternal present

Further Exploration: Leaving room to wander beyond the poem

Explore Chinese poetry inspired by mountains. Below you will find a few poems to initiate your own search:

Clouds on the Mountain

Mei Yaochen (1002-1060) Scholar official during the Sung dynasty

A shower passes across the blue sky,
Mountain clouds return to the tallest peaks.
Forest edge hides the rainbow,
Moving shadows descend the stream.
I return to see the parrots fly,
Once more I love this mountain peace.

Inscribed on a Painting

By Shen Zhou (1427-1509) Painter poet of mid-Ming dynasty

White clouds, like a belt, wind around the waist of the mountains,
A path narrow and long soars into the void, off a stony ledge.
Alone, I lean on a thornwood staff and gaze peacefully into the distance;
Wishing to respond with my flute playing to the singing of the mountain stream.

Climbing a Mountain

By Tao-yun (circa CE 400), poet and wife of General Wang Ning-chih

High rises the Eastern Peak
Soaring up to the blue sky.
Among the rocks—an empty hollow,
Secret, still, mysterious!
Uncarved and unhewn,
Screened by nature with a roof of clouds.
Times and Seasons, what things are you
Bringing to my life ceaseless change?
I will lodge for ever in this hollow
Where Springs and Autumns
unheeded pass.

The Road to Shu is Steep (excerpt)

By Li Bai (aka Li Po or Li Bo 701-762) Tang dynasty; China's Poet Immortal

The Road to Shu is steep, steep as climbing to the Sky!
It ashens those who only hear tell of it,
From its peaks to the sky can hardly be a foot:
The withered pines there have to lean over canyons
Filled with the contending dins of waterfalls,
Gullies thundering a thousand rolling stones!
Such perils, aye, as this,
Why, oh, why, Travelers from Afar, come ye to suffer them?

Sitting Alone, Facing the Jingting Mountains
By Li Bai / Li Po

A mass of birds flies up and disappears.
A solitary cloud walks solitary. Loafing.
Looking at each other and never bored,
Just myself and the Jingting Mountains.

A View of the Waterfall of Mount Lu
By Li Bai / Li Po

Sunlight flows on the Incense-Burner Peak
 sparkling a purple haze,
From above, the river hangs high on the cliff.
Vaulting down for three thousand feet—
The Milky Way tumbling down from heaven.

By Li Bai / Li Po (Two different translations from Chinese of the same poem)

To a Friend Who Asks Me Questions

Why do I live at the heart
 of these green mountains?
I smile without replying,
 my mind wholly serene.

Flowers fall, water flows,
 mysterious way ...
It's the other world that's there,
 Not that of humans.

**In the Mountain, A Question and an
Answer**

You ask me what my idea is, staying in
the green mountains?
I smile but have no reply, my heart at
peace in itself.

A peach blossom on the flowing water
goes into the distance;
there is another heaven and earth, not
among people.

Portland Classical Chinese Garden
Lan Su Yuan—The Garden of Awakening Orchids

Stone Gateway North Face Inscriptions

Overhead horizontal:
 True Meaning of Lake and Mountain

Outer Couplet vertical:
Rocks of amazing shapes embody the wonders of all times;
Perfume of lotus flowers stirs the autumn over half the lake.

Having Climbed to the Topmost Peak of the Incense-Burner Mountain

By Bai Juyi (aka Po Chu-I 772-846) Great Tang dynasty writer, magistrate, advisor to emperor

Up and up, the Incense-Burner Peak!
In my heart is stored what my eyes and ears perceived.
All the year—detained by official business;
To-day at last I got a chance to go.
Grasping the creepers, I clung to dangerous rocks;
My hand and feet—wearing with groping for hold.
There came with me three or four friends,
But two friends dared not go further.
At last we reached the topmost crest of the Peak;
My eyes were blinded, my soul rocked and reeled.
The chasm beneath me—ten thousand feet;
The ground I stood on, only a foot wide.
If you have not exhausted the scope of seeing and hearing,
How can you realize the wideness of the world?
The waters of the River looked narrow as a ribbon,
P-en Castle smaller than a man's fist.
How it clings, the dust of the world's halter!
It chokes my limbs: I cannot shake it away.
Thinking of retirement, I heaved an envious sigh,
Then, with lowered head, came back to the Ants' Nest.



Piled Rock Mountain inside the Portland Classical Chinese Garden

Inscription: Ten Thousand Ravines Covered in Deep Clouds

3. Draw an ascent up Taishan—one of China’s sacred mountains.

The Chinese phrase for pilgrimage—*chao shān jìn xiàng*—means paying one’s respect to a mountain. Taishan, (aka Mt. Tai as *shan* means *mountain* in Chinese) is one of Five Sacred Mountains in China. It is located in central Shandong Province and is about 1,532.7 meters (5,029 feet) high.

In ancient times, the first thing for an emperor to do on ascending to the throne was to climb Mount Taishan and pray to heaven and earth and to their ancestors. It was said that 72 emperors of different dynasties made pilgrimages to this mountain.

Taishan has an extremely rich cultural heritage. The mountain is one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilization; it had become a significant cultural center by 5,000-6,000 years ago. Cultural relics such as ancient architectural complexes, stone sculptures and archaeological sites are of outstanding importance. There are 22 temples, 97 ruins, 819 stone tablets, and 1,018 cliff side and stone inscriptions that people see today on their mountain climb. The way in which the culture has been integrated with the natural scenery—lofty peaks, deep valleys, spectacular waterfalls, enchanting rocks and the centuries-old pines and cypresses—is considered to be a precious legacy of Chinese culture.

Now YOU can climb Taishan and ‘see’ it yourself!

Read the article *Taishan—One of the Five Sacred Mountains* found at:

<http://www.china.org.cn/english/chuangye/41772.htm>

After reading the article *Taishan—First of the Five Sacred Mountains*, artistically imagine climbing Taishan Mountain in China. Include several of the viewing stops you have read about such as: Hundred Immortals Tower, Turning the Horse Around Hill, Halfway Gate to Heaven, Not End Yet Pavilion, Suspending Cliff, Heavenly Street or Azure Clouds Temple.

Draw at least 5 or 6 different formations along your path.

As a class project, this can be done in groups of 3 artists. Then, the drawings of each group can be assembled on long butcher paper to be viewed as a landscape scroll. In this way, as the scroll is unrolled, students can mentally travel through the mountain landscapes on a long and winding journey.

Extend Your Thinking: Develop your own analysis of why Chinese culture has considered rocks and mountains to be part of their culture’s heritage.