



## Poetry Selections

Our featured poet for this session is Li Bai. We've included twelve poetry selections for your kids and teens to read, listen to, memorize, and recite. They are:

- Quiet Night Thoughts
- Watching the Waterfall at Mount Lu
- Spring Morning
- A Song of an Autumn Midnight
- Zazen on Ching-t'ing Mountain
- Ancient Air
- Question and Answer on the Mountain
- Hearing a Flute on a Spring Night in Luoyang
- Marble Steps Complaint
- Staying the Night at a Mountain Temple
- Viewing Heaven's Gate Mountains
- At the Yellow Crane Tower to Bid Meng Haoran Goodbye

For copywork, we have included Zaner-Bloser style handwriting sheets for primary, elementary, and cursive, as well as college-ruled for older students. We have chosen four poems, listed below:

- Zazen on Ching-t'ing Mountain
- Ancient Air
- Question and Answer on the Mountain
- Staying the Night at a Mountain Temple

*“Since heaven gave me life, I must use it!  
Spend gold freely—it will return again.”*

~ Li Bai

Poetry Recitation & Copywork



## Li Bai

(c. 701-762)

Li Bai, also known as Li Po, was one of the most famous poets in Chinese history. He lived during the Tang Dynasty, a time often called the Golden Age of Chinese culture. His poetry is still loved today for its beauty, imagination, and sense of freedom.

He is often called the “Immortal Poet” because his writing feels almost magical—full of wonder, nature, and a longing for something beyond ordinary life.

Li Bai was born in Central Asia (likely near modern-day Kyrgyzstan), but his family moved to China when he was young. He grew up in the mountains of Sichuan, surrounded by

rivers, forests, and dramatic landscapes that would later inspire his poetry.

As a boy, he was an avid reader and swordsman. He studied Confucian classics, but he was especially drawn to the ideas of Daoism, which emphasized harmony with nature, freedom, and the pursuit of a simple, natural life.

Unlike many scholars of his time, Li Bai did not follow a traditional path of government service. Instead, he chose a life of travel and adventure.

He wandered across China for many years, visiting mountains, rivers, and famous cities. Along the way, he met other poets, monks, and scholars—including his friend, the great poet Du Fu.

His travels deeply shaped his poetry. Many of his poems describe moonlit nights, flowing rivers, towering mountains, friendship and farewell, and the joys (and sorrows) of life on the road.

Li Bai wrote over a thousand poems, many of which are still studied today. His style was simple, yet powerful, known for being dreamlike, emotionally expressive, and deeply connected to nature.

He often wrote about nature's beauty—especially themes such as the moon and mountains, friendship and loneliness, freedom and escape from society, and wine and celebration. One of his most famous poems describes drinking alone under the moon, imagining the moon and his shadow as companions.

For a brief time, Li Bai was invited to the imperial court of Emperor Xuanzong. This was a great honor, as the court was the center of culture and power.

However, he did not fit well into court life because of his independent spirit and sometimes carefree behavior. Eventually, he left the court and returned to his wandering life.

Later in life, Li Bai became involved—indirectly—in a political rebellion known as the An Lushan Rebellion. Because of this, he was arrested and exiled to a distant region. Fortunately, he was later pardoned and allowed to return, but the experience marked a difficult period in his life.

He died in 762. According to legend, he drowned while trying to embrace the reflection of the moon in a river—a story that perfectly reflects the poetic and dreamlike nature of his life, even if it may not be historically true.

# Poetry Selections

Translating Chinese into English can be difficult—“as hard as climbing the Blue Sky,” as one writer put it. The two languages work very differently. Not only do we often miss the meaning of the metaphor, but the loss of rhyme and cadence can destroy the beauty of the poem.

This is especially true in classical Chinese writing, where many words are left out, and meaning is implied. Because of this, translators have to do more than just switch words—they must interpret the meaning, capture the feeling, and sometimes make choices about how best to express ideas in English.

## Quiet Night Thoughts

My casement veils glowing pools of moonbeams,  
Perhaps on the ground is simply frost it seems;  
Lifting my head I gaze up at the gleaming moon,  
Bowing my head I ponder my homesick dreams.

## Watching the Waterfall at Mount Lu

The sunlit incense peak gives off purple smoke,  
Far off I see the waterfall plunge.  
It flows down three thousand feet—  
As if the Milky Way fell from heaven.

## Spring Morning

I awake light-hearted this morning of spring,  
Everywhere round me the singing of birds.  
But now I remember the night, the storm,  
And wonder how many blossoms were broken.

# Poetry Selections

## **A Song Of An Autumn Midnight**

A slip of the moon hangs over the capital;  
Ten thousand washing-mallets are pounding;  
And the autumn wind is blowing my heart  
For ever and ever toward the Jade Pass....  
Oh, when will the Tartar troops be conquered,  
And my husband come back from the long campaign!

## **Zazen on Ching-t'ing Mountain**

The birds have vanished down the sky.  
Now the last cloud drains away.  
We sit together, the mountain and me,  
until only the mountain remains.

## **Ancient Air**

I climb up high and look on the four seas,  
Heaven and earth spreading out so far.  
Frost blankets all the stuff of autumn,  
The wind blows with the great desert's cold.  
The eastward-flowing water is immense,  
All the ten thousand things billow.  
The white sun's passing brightness fades,  
Floating clouds seem to have no end.  
Swallows and sparrows nest in the wutong tree,  
Yuan and luan birds perch among jujube thorns.  
Now it's time to head on back again,  
I flick my sword and sing *Taking the Hard Road*.

# Poetry Selections

## Question and Answer on the Mountain

You ask for what reason I stay on the green mountain,  
I smile, but do not answer, my heart is at leisure.  
Peach blossom is carried far off by flowing water,  
Apart, I have heaven and earth in the human world.

## Hearing a Flute on a Spring Night in Luoyang

From whose home secretly flies the sound of a jade flute?  
It's lost amid the spring wind which fills Luoyang city.  
In the middle of this nocturne I remember the snapped willow,  
What person would not start to think of home!

## Marble Steps Complaint

White dew grows on the marble steps,  
And in the long night, soaks into my stockings.  
But now I let the crystal curtain down,  
And gaze through it at the autumn moon.

## Staying the Night at a Mountain Temple

The high tower is a hundred feet tall,  
From here one's hand could pluck the stars.  
I do not dare to speak in a loud voice,  
I fear to disturb the people in heaven.

# Poetry Selections

## **Viewing Heaven's Gate Mountains**

The River Chu cuts through the middle of heaven's gate,  
The green water flowing east reaches here then swirls.  
On either bank the blue hills face towards each other,  
The flatness of a lonely sail comes from by of the sun.

## **At the Yellow Crane Tower to Bid Meng Haoran Goodbye**

At the Yellow Crane Tower, my friend, to the west you said goodbye;  
In this misty, flowery glorious spring, downstream for Yangzhou you ply.  
A speck, a silhouette, your solitary sail, toward the verdant hills receding, till  
My eyes but descry the grand Long River, rolling to the verge of the sky.

# Poetry Study

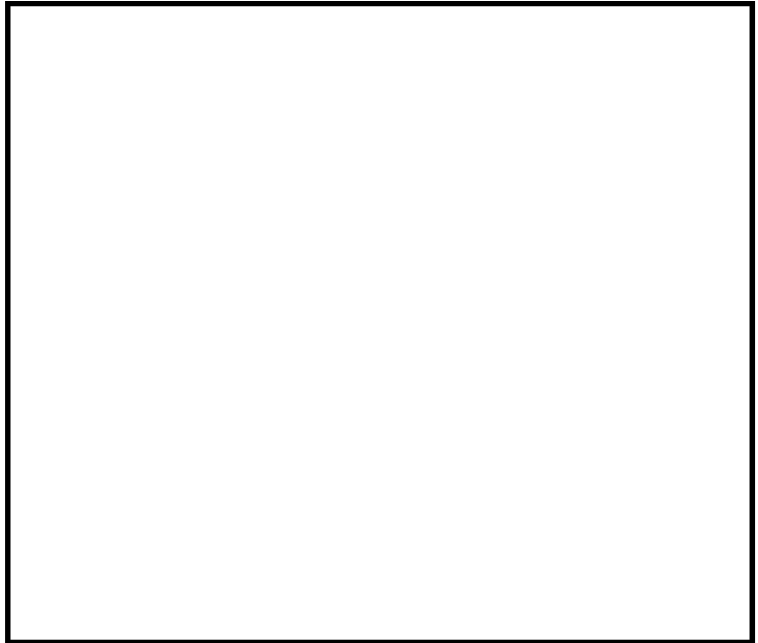
**Title:**

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**Type of Poem:**

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**Use the box to at right to draw a picture of what the poem brings to mind.**



**Write one thing you liked and did not like about the poem:**

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**Write three adjectives about the poem.**

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**Compose a few lines of your own poem inspired by this work**

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