

The Newman Young Writers Award 2013:

Writing Classical Chinese Poetry in English

• Introduction:

While we will be composing our poems in English (or a monosyllabic form of English), we will be following most of the same rules Chinese poets follow, and thus we will learn about the deep cultural sensibilities that lie at the foundation of Chinese literature, culture, and worldviews. To write classical Chinese poetry in English, however, we have to learn to use English in new ways.

There are many genres and variations within genres encapsulated in Classical Chinese poetry. Our contest will focus on one of the most popular, the jueju (or curtailed verse). Tens of thousands of these poems have been written and many remain popular today, especially in online communities where jueju poems continue to be written in a game-like fashion.

• Background:

Over the last 1,500 years, the ability to compose poetry following complex rules became important to one's prospects for service in the Chinese Empire. It was a way to demonstrate one's learning, and it was thought that the ability to harmonize the world and language through poetry revealed one's ability to do the same in human affairs. It is hard to imagine having to pass a poetry competition to hold a position of power in the US government, but in China this was an important element for all who aspired to move up (or stay up) the social ladder.

• Basic Rules for Jueju Poetry:

1. Only Use Monosyllabic Words. Surprisingly, English has one of the largest vocabularies of monosyllabic words. For this competition, words with one syllable are the only one's permitted for use in any poetry submission.
2. Choose Words that are "Imagistic." Use words that can be associated with an image as much as possible in your poetry submissions. Only rarely use "function" words (often called "particles" in English or "empty" words in classical Chinese poetry).

3. Pair Your Images into Groups of 2 and 3 Word Units. The first unit is made up of two words, and the second unit of each line is made up of three. Play around with different combinations and different parts of speech. Here are some examples:

Dark (adj.) 1+	Moss (n.) 2	Wind (n.) 1+	Clothed (v./adj.) 2+	Trees (n.) 3
Mist (n.) 1+	Drapes (n./v.) 2	Moon (n.) 1+	White (adj.) 2+	Stones (n.) 3

4. Use a Rhyme Scheme of AABA. For Example: June, Moon, X, Soon.

5. Observe Thematic Progression of Lines:

- Line One-Introduce a scene (often a scene in nature).
- Line Two-Extend and deepen the scene.
- Line Three-Introduce a shift or turn (often revealing something of the poets inner feelings, or toward the human world in general).
- Line Four-Conclusion, ending, landing.

Moss	Hair	Soft	Breeze	Blows
White	Blooms	Clear	Stream	Flows
Hang	Head	Am	I	Here
Raise	Head	No	One	Knows

• “Old Style” vs. “New Style” Poems:

1. Old Style poems are also called “level-one difficulty” as they follow rules 1-5 only.
2. New Style poems are also called “level-two difficulty” poems because they follow rules 1-5 and also Rules 6-7 (discussed later).
3. Students need not write New Style poems but are encouraged to try.
4. Contest winners will be chosen for the beauty and sophistication of their poems regardless of which style they are writing in.
5. Before we move on, here are a few poems that follow the Old Style guidelines:

Dark	Trees	Grey	Snow	Sky
Black	Bark	Slate	Clouds	High
White	Fur	Warm	Blood	Howl
One	Wolf’s	Long	Lone	Cry
Deep	Eyes	Small	Shapes	Crawl
Claws	Out	Fixed	On	Wall
Warm	Mouse	Flint	Cold	Still
Red	Tail	Fan	Flash	Fall

• Writing Your Own “Old Style Poem”:

1. There are two kinds of game boards you can download at our website: blank boards and puzzle boards. Blank boards can be used for “old-style” poems (level one difficulty) while puzzle boards are to be used to learn the level 2 rules and will be introduced later.
2. Blank boards can be printed and given to students. Then students can fill in the sheets with sample words (found on our website) or any monosyllabic words of the student’s own choosing. In this exercise, students can explore the basic forms of the poems by arranging words on the grid as they see fit, substituting whenever they like blank tiles that they write their own monosyllabic words on.

• Class Exercise (Level One)

1. Print off several blank boards and word card sheets to pass out to groups of students in the class (4-5 students per group would be ideal).
2. Have the students cut out the word cards from the sheets and ask each of them to draw a picture on the back of the cards that suggests the meaning of the word if they can (these can be used to gauge the imaginability of a poem. Have them set aside all the blank cards to write their own words on).
3. Now have students begin trying out different words in the grid, focusing on the 2+3 unit of meaning in the first line. Example: “Moon+Light” “Cold+Bright+Haze” Students should make this first line as evocative as possible.
4. Have them pay close attention to the sound of the final word. This sound will need to be rhymed in lines 2 and 4. They may want to make a short list of rhyming words (as concrete and poetic as possible) on the blank cards provided.
5. Now have them think about how each line should move from one to the next. Jueju poems follow a set thematic progression by line. Intro, Extend, Turn/Shift, Conclude (as discussed in the Rules for Level 1 and Level 2 Difficulty).
6. Students should feel comfortable changing their poems radically several times before they are done.
7. In the K-8 levels of the competition, classes can choose their favorite poem and submit as a class (and if selected, the class will be awarded \$500 as a whole). Otherwise, students can submit their own poems directly or teachers can bundle them and send them to us.

• Additional Rules for Level Two Difficulty

1. Parallelism Reveals Similarity between Lines 1 and 2: Lines must relate to one another, word-for-word and syllable-for-syllable, revealing a similarity both in grammar and in meaning.
2. Parallelism Reveals Difference between Lines 2 and 3: Lines must relate to one another, word-for-word and syllable-for-syllable, revealing a similarity in grammar but a difference in meaning.

Here is a color-coded example of a jueju that employs the Level Two Difficulty rules:

New	Rain	Grass	Green	June
Fresh	Dew	Bloom	Blue	Moon
Old	Dust	Husk	Red	Sun
Will	Rise	Dry	Leaves	Soon

- The green words are parallel because they are all used as modifiers/adjectives. The first two are similar, the third is oppositional. The blue words are nouns; the first two are similar, while the third is oppositional. Notice that the fourth line has no parallelism, which is common.
- Parallelism reflects the deep structure of Chinese cosmology: correlation, balance, cyclical birth and decay. When we shift from words to images, we can begin to reflect on how the poet's perception of the natural structure of the world can be reflected in a poem. We can see both horizontal and vertical correlations in this form of poetry and thereby also better understand why poetry was thought to bring humans (language) into harmony with nature. This is what makes the exercise of drawing images on the back of word cards so valuable for the game.

•Class Exercises (Level Two)

1. Those who wish to try their hand at the parallelism requirements should follow the exercises mentioned above, and must also follow these additional requirements regarding parallelism. Some students will find it easier to use the extra rules. To begin, the student chooses a word, and then quickly chooses their vertical correlatives:

Cold				
Ice				

2. Now the student chooses a contrastive word for the third line:

Cold				
Ice				
Warm				

3. Now students continue to the next position (column 2) in lines 1 and 2. Most will need to change these words a few times or kick out whole sets, but choosing words based on their vertical and horizontal contexts simultaneously isn't as hard as we might imagine, and the exercise teaches students to think very differently about how we put language together and what a "poem" is. Here are the first two lines:

Cold	Moon			
Ice	Stars			
Warm	Sand			

•Class Exercises (Level Two Continued)

1. At our website you can download two puzzle boards. One board contains a scrambled poem and will be used for the next exercise.
2. To unscramble the poem, students must cut up the first sheet so that each word is a small rectangle that can be placed on the game board.
3. Then they try to “harmonize” the language by placing the words in the proper parallel locations. It should be noted that the poems have more than one answer, but here at least students and teachers will feel confident that within the confines of the words, parallelism is possible.

Example:

Scrambled Words

Fog	Dawn	Moon	Breeze	Clothed
Stand	Brush	Draped	Fold	Clear
Sand	Land	Wind	Stones	Mist
Out	Here	White	Tide	I

Parallel Couplets

Fog	Draped	Wind	Brushed	Land
Mist	Clothed	Breeze	Folds	Sand
Clear	Dawn	Moon	White	Stones
Tide	Out	Here	I	Stand

•Class Exercises (Level Two Continued)

1. The other puzzle board that can be downloaded from our website uses Duilian exercises in order to teach students how to write in parallel and antithetical parallel couplets.

2. Here are some puzzle boards to help teach this concept. Have students create vertical parallel lines from the following sheets:

Dark	Trees	Grey	Snow	Sky

Now anti-parallel:

Dark	Trees	Grey	Snow	Sky

• How to Submit Your Poems:

Please submit your poems in Microsoft Word with your contact information at the top including:

1. Name: (If submitted as a class please include the name of the teacher, and if a student please list the student's name and the name of his/her teacher).
2. Address: (School, teacher, and email contact of teacher as well as phone numbers so that we can contact the teachers of the winners directly.) If you are a homeschool student, you can submit the contact information of your parents.
3. Email Your Document: As a Word attachment to Adam Love at Adam.love-1@ou.edu. If this format is not possible, submit the poem as plain text in the body of the email.
4. Twitter: If you have a Twitter account feel free to tweet @JCStalling with hashtag #jueju and share your poem after the closing date February 25th and you can see other submissions.
5. Publication Rights: By submitting your poems, you give us permission to use them as examples in future discussions of this work (social media and print). All work is attributed to the author
6. Further Questions: If you have further questions, please contact Bonnie Tibbs at bonnie.tibbs@gmail.com

• Prize Categories-20 Words: \$500

A \$500 prize will be awarded to the winner in each of three categories:

1. Grades K-5 (Elementary School): The prize will be awarded to the winning class submission or individual submission (Level 1 difficulty).
2. Grades 6-8 (Middle School): The prize will be awarded to the winning class submission or individual submission (Level 1 or 2 difficulty).
3. Grades 9-12 (High School): The prize will be awarded to the winning individual submission (Level 1 or 2 difficulty).

• Deadlines and Directions:

1. Deadlines: Submissions will be accepted between January 28th and February 25th. Send all entries to adam.love-1@ou.edu. Questions should be directed to bonnie.tibbs@gmail.com.
2. Judge: The entries will be judged by OU Professor Jonathan Stalling, who will present the winners their awards during the Newman Prize Ceremony at OU on March 7th.
3. Prize Ceremony: Winning students and their teachers will be invited to the Newman Prize for Chinese Literature banquet. If a winning poem was written collectively by a class, the teacher and one student representative (chosen by the class) will be invited to the banquet.

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Jonathan Stalling, who created the material in these documents, has taught this work at all levels of K-12 education, as well as at writers' colonies, prisons, and college classes here in the US and China since the 1990s. These materials reflect only one of the forms taught in his forthcoming book "Changing the Bones: English as the Medium of Classical Chinese Poetry." As these are under copyright protection, please contact Dr. Stalling directly for any questions pertaining to uses of this work beyond that of the Newman Prize for Young Writers Award Contest.