

## FINE ARTS ACTIVITY: HANDOUT B

### Writing Poetry in the Golden Age

During the Tang (618–906) and Song (960–1278) dynasties, the writing of poetry reached its greatest flowering. Later, this period was regarded as the Golden Age of Poetry in China. During the Song Dynasty, due to the invention of printing, poetry became widely known and studied. Almost all educated people during this period wrote poems. They wrote to express themselves and observe the world around them and also on social occasions, to honor visitors, to flatter a host, or even just send a message. In total, about 50,000 poems by 2,200 poets have survived from the Tang dynasty and even more from the Song. Poems from Tang and Song China have been studied and memorized around the world for more than 1,000 years since they were first written.

The subject of these poems can be classified in various ways. They fall into one of fourteen categories:

- flowers
- palace life
- animals
- daily events
- bamboo
- weather
- insects
- human character
- the sky
- tools
- seasons
- the earth
- music
- festivals

Though they were written in Chinese characters, these poems have been translated into English. Two of the most well-known poets are Li Bo and Du Fu who lived during the Tang dynasty. Here is a poem called “Fighting South of the Wall” by Li Bo:

*Yesterday's man on top of the wall  
Beneath the wall is a ghost today.  
Still the banners are like an array of stars;  
And the war drums' sound is not yet done;  
And out of my family, husbands and sons,  
All are there in the sound of the drums.*

from *The Asian World, 600–1500*  
(*The Medieval and Early Modern World*),  
Des Forges and Major, 2006.

There are several parts to your assignment:

1. Select and read one poem from the Golden Age. Read the poem several times to understand the beauty of the poem. In what subject category does it fall?
2. Write a short reflection about what you think of this poem. Why has it survived for more than 1,000 years?
3. Using your best cursive writing and a black pen, copy the poem for display on your scroll.
4. Read the poem of one of your classmates. Discuss your insights.
5. Review the fourteen subject categories; write a poem that is inspired by one. The most popular poetic form in the Tang dynasty used four or eight lines. “Craft” your poem so that the form uses only four or eight lines.