



Portland Classical Chinese Garden The Five Elements: POETRY

Poetry is One of the Five Elements in a Chinese Garden

In the Portland Classical Chinese Garden there is poetry everywhere you look. There are poems carved into rocks. There is poetry on the outside and inside of buildings. Some of the poems are only two or three Chinese characters (words) and many are longer two-line poems called couplets. Even the Chinese name of the garden—*Lan Su Yuan*—is a short poem. The name means Portland (Lan) Suzhou (Su) Garden (Yuan). It also translates as Garden (Yuan) of Awakening (Su) Orchids (Lan). Suzhou is the name of a city in China that is Portland's sister city that designed and helped to build the garden out of friendship.

Explain where poetry can be found in Lan Su Yuan.

Poetry is one of the five elements used to create peace and harmony in *Lan Su Yuan*. Water brings life to everything in the garden. Plants and trees are like the beautiful clothing of nature. Rocks and stones are like the strong bones of the earth. Buildings let people enjoy nature while staying warm and dry. Bringing all the parts together, poetry is the way people express their feelings about being alive in nature inside the garden.

Name the 5 elements found inside the Portland Chinese Garden. How does poetry tie the other elements together?

Poems in the Chinese Garden use the Five Senses

Across China's long history of thousands of years, poets have written about the beauty of nature. There are poems about the way fish dart about in rushing water. There are poems about moonlight and clouds floating by. There are poems about listening to the happy songs of birds and flowers. Chinese poets like to use all their five senses to capture their feelings about nature. Garden poetry acts as a reminder to people to listen, to watch, to smell, to touch or to taste the beauty of a single flower, the moving shadows on a wall, and the happiness of the fish in the lake.

Explain how poetry is used in the Chinese Garden to capture feelings about nature.

Poems of Two Lines Show the Balance of Nature in the Garden

Many Chinese Garden poems are special poems of only two lines called couplets. The two lines of poetry set up a balance of pairs in each line. If the first line talks about winter, the next line may speak of spring. If the first line mentions mountains, the second line may talk about clouds. If water is moving fast in the first line, how do you think a rock might be described in the second line? The two lines talk about nature's balance. Some pairs in each line of the couplet might be: wind-rain, walk-sit, stone-river, green-blue, lazy-busy, worried-peaceful, one-many. A two line couplet that can be found in the Portland Classical Chinese Garden shows how a plum tree is brave enough to bloom with many tiny flowers at the end of winter:

10,000 flowers dare to blossom in the snow

A single tree leads the world in greeting spring.

Couplet found in *Celestial Hall of Permeating Fragrance* (Scholar's Study) *Lan Su Yuan*

In this couplet, 10,000 flowers are paired with a single tree; the snow of winter and the bloom of spring create a balance between the changing of seasons. Around the Chinese Garden many couplets add to our pleasure of being alive and really noticing nature's wonders with all our senses.

Can You Match the Pairs in Chinese Couplets?

Example:

1st line: Walk and reach the place where the stream ends

2nd line: Sit to watch the moment when clouds form. By Wang Wei

Your Turn:

1st line: Birds have gone home, the sand holds their tracks

2nd line:

1st line: When the crane comes, the pine has company

2nd line: