***Chinese Philosophy, Poetry and***

***American Transcendentalism***

**Lesson Overview:**

Prior to this unit (about three weeks,) students will become intimately familiar with the genre of poetry, learning a myriad of poetic devices, and spending several evenings analyzing how these devices bring life and meaning to their poems. During the day they will engage in Socratic Seminars to share, challenge and validate each other’s findings. When they encounter Li Po and Wang Wei’s pieces, they will be ready to work with found images from the text in a creative exercise first, and then move to analyze the translations. At the end of the lesson, students will encounter language from the American Transcendentalist movement, comparing and contrasting these authors views with the texts in this lesson before completing a two part culminating assignment. In part one, they will write an essay in which they explain how Buddhism and Taoism influenced the American Transcendentalists. In part two, students will write their own poem or essay in which they demonstrate their understanding of one of these philosophies.

**In this lesson, students will:**

* Engage in close readings of complex texts
* Use evidence to respond to text-based questions
* Engage in instructional conversations (in pairs, small groups, or whole groups)
* Write a clear and coherent literary analysis that compares two works and is supported with textual evidence
* Use poetic or rhetorical devices to create poems and/or essays
* Write a clear and coherent constructed response supported with textual evidence

**Essential Questions for the Lesson:**

* How did Buddhist and Taoist philosophies influence American Transcendentalists?

**Objectives/Standards:**

* Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. **CCSS R19.1**
* Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. **CCSS W 9.2**
* Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text ( e.g., a section or chapter). **CCSS RI 9.5**
* By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. **CCSS RI 9.10**
* Produce clear and coherent writing which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, audience. **CCSS W 9.2**
* Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions ( one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade topics, texts, and issues, building on the others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
  + C. Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion. **CCSS SL, 9, 1c**
  + D. Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing **CCSS SL 9.1d**
* Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. **CCSS L 9.1**

**I. Learning about Chinese philosophy through the Tao Te**

**Ching, Buddhism and Chinese Landscape Paintings:**

**Activity A.** (Analyze & define Taoist philosophy) In small groups, students will conduct Socratic Seminars in which they analyze and discuss excerpts from the *Tao Te Ching* (Appendix B), and work toward a constructed definition of Taoism. This process includes taking these excerpts home to read, annotate, and write, before coming to their own understanding of the text . In class, students will discuss their conclusions in small groups, and then share their common understandings and questions with the entire class. Essential questions they will consider are:

* What is the Tao (way), and how do we find it?

Students may consider that if we seek it (the way), we will not find it, as it transcends language and logic.

* What is the importance of inaction (wu-wei)? How can inaction be the way?

The hope is that they will reflect upon allowing for harmony by not forcing one’s actions/beliefs upon another being.

In small groups, students will create a poster that defines Taoism and complement it with a visual representation.

**Activity B1.** (Comprehend Buddhist philosophy) Students will view and take notes on the Youtube video *The Four Novel Truths: The Essence of Buddha’s teachings:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vjm2zdQ5ll0> to deepen their understanding of the Buddhist beliefs. In deepen their understanding, students will sit in small groups and identify how the Buddha’s point-of-view applies to their lives.

At first, students may struggle to see how they are the cause of their own discontent, but once they begin to think about the Christmas toy they became board with after only a few days, or how easily people can disappoint them when they don’t live up to their expectations, they will begin to understand the gravity of the Four Novel Truths.

**Activity B2**. (rhetorically analyze art) Students will read three visual texts of landscape paintings. In small groups students will participate in a gallery walk. Each photograph of a painting is posted on chart paper. In their groups, students are to “read” the visual text, discuss the images, and consider the prompts below. They are to write their group response on the poster.

* Choose three words that describe the feeling in this painting
* Briefly explain why these images are compelling.
* What does the painter want the audience to see? (Central Idea)

Teacher leads brief whole group discussion of students’ responses. When making statements about the paintings, students should always support their answers with evidence from the paintings. Teachers should encourage students to question each other’s ideas and pose questions for each other during the discussion.

Possible Student Responses: Students will likely notice the prominence of one central natural element, such as mountains, and the use of monochrome (or a few colors). Students may recognize the painter’s reverence for nature displayed in the predominance of the mountains—or other grand depictions of nature. They may also note the minimal use of color, and simplicity of the work and the power it exhibits in its simplicity.

**Activity B3:** (Interpret art and Buddhist philosophy) In pairs, students will have an instructional conversation about how the simplistic beauty of the paintings relate to the tenets of Buddhism and how this supports the artists’ intentions. In small groups, students will create a second poster that defines Buddhism and complement it with a visual representation.

**Activity 4:** (Compare Definitions of Taoism & Buddhism) In addition to the activities above, students will deepen their understanding of Buddhism and Taoism by reading excerpts from Schirokauer and Clark (14-15) and Thurman (9-11) for information about these beliefs. We will then compare their constructed definitions of Taoism and their summaries of Buddhism with the definitions forwarded by Schirokauer and Thurman.

**II. Poetry Analysis:**

**Historical Context & Chinese Poem Summaries:**

Both Li Po and Wang Wei wrote during the T’ang Dynasty (618 – 907 CE), considered an “early cosmopolitan moment” during which China saw itself as a highly developed nation. Li Po’s work is characterized by an economy of words that are nonetheless bold, joyful and unrestrained, and influenced by his Taoist beliefs. Wang Wei’s poems reflect Buddhist tenets, focusing on the love of natural beauty and human existence in nature. While both poems focus on nature and contain common images, Li Po’s poem, set in the spring, is full of lively optimistic natural imagery until its conclusion which highlights the futility of searching for the way (Tao), represented by the recluse. The imagery in Wang Wei’s piece, set during and autumn evening, is influenced by Buddhism, and is more peaceful, highlighting people co-existing with nature in a mountain setting. Both poets lived at the same time: Li Po c. 700 – 762; Wang Wei c. 699 – 759.

**Activity A**: (Explicate Poetry) In smallgroups, students will use the *Poetry Study* Sheet (Appendix C) to analyze the poetry of Li Po and Wang Wei (Appendix A).

**Detailed Analysis of Chinese Poems:**

***On visiting Taoist Recluse of Tai-Tien-Shan and Not Finding Him* by Li Po**

i. What is the Speaker’s purpose?

The speaker is in a wild, natural setting in the spring, in which he seeks the Taoist

recluse.

ii. Describe the poetic devices the author uses to describe the setting? What is the effect?

Student should focus on the vivid verbs, colors, animals, and vegetation (dogs barking, gurgling water, peach blossoms, thickening wild bamboos, flying fountains). This is a lush, lively scene, and knowing it is spring, they will certainly recognize the literary tradition of spring as a reawakening and rebirth.

iii. Is there a conflict? If so, is the conflict resolved?

iv. How does this poem reflect Taoist beliefs?

Students may at first feel that the conflict is not resolved, since the speaker does not find the recluse; however, when pushed to make connections to Taoism, they may discover that perhaps the speaker has learned a valuable lesson – that in seeking, he will not find. The recluse himself represents the Tao; and actively searching is not the way to the Tao.

***Autumn Dusk at a Mountain Lodge* by Wang Wei**

i. Describe the speaker’s surroundings and compare them to the scene in Li Po’s piece.

This poem is also full of simple, naturalistic beauty; however, students should notice that the author’s quiet verbs and description (empty mountains, air rising, spring flow[ing], boats glid[ing], grass wither[ing] are strikingly different. This contrast should reinforce our continual focus on the power of strong verbs. In addition, they would again recognize the convention of season in this evening, autumn scene, in contrast to the spring setting of Li Po’s poem.

ii. Choose one common image in both pieces, and discuss how the poets treat them differently.

Both use water (Li has flying fountains and gurgling water; Wang uses fresh rains and boats gliding in it). Again, this will highlight the contrasting sound and tone of both poems, mentioned above.

iii. Continuing the above discussion, draw upon your knowledge of Buddhism and discuss how Wang Wei infuses his poem with its principles.

Students should continue to notice the simplicity of the language, and how clearly it renders the scene’s beauty. The speaker is struck by this simple grace.

iv. What is the author’s intent? He displays reverence for nature and clearly shows how people live in it and by it, in harmony, as Buddhism prescribes.

**Activity B:** (Create *Found Poem*)Students will receive the translated texts of the above poems, in their initial forms, i.e., the Chinese character-by-character translation that is in column format in the text. At this point, they will not be given the completed translation of the poems. They will be asked to construct a *Found Poem* from one of the options provided, using the extant words, and filling in with their own to create a piece that has meaning for them. The goal will be to synthesize the techniques we have studied during our poetry unit, and apply them by adding elements such as figurative language, alliteration, etc… to create meaning from the given words. They will be encouraged to experiment with the language and play with form and imagery. Their final piece will be typed, and they will share it by reading it to the class.

**Activity C:** (Write literary analysis Essay) Students will write a literary analysis essay in which they compare their constructed poem to the translation of the piece. In the essay, they will be expected to discuss their intent and word choice, and compare them to the poet’s intent and effect. (See Writing Rubric E)

**III. The Influence of Eastern Philosophy on American**

**Letters:**

**Activity A:** (Comprehend American Transcendentalism) Teachers will introduce students to the Transcendental Movement that took place in America during the 1840’s and explain how this movement contributed to the American spirit. Consider <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ihas/icon/transcend.html> as a resource for delivering this information. Students will take Cornell Notes.

**Activity B:** (Compare Eastern & Western philosophies) In small groups, students will consider the similarities and differences between transcendentalism, Buddhism and Taoism. (Create graphic organizer to help students organize their thoughts.)

**Culminating Assignment – Part 1:** (Write Synthesis Essay) Students will choose *one* of three excerpts, written by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau (Appendix D). After carefully reading, analyzing, and discussing the text in small groups, students will develop a 2 – 3 page essay in which they explain how Buddhism or Taoism influenced the author’s intent. They will support their analysis with evidence (3 minimum) from *all* thesource material they have studied in this unit. (See Writing Rubric, Appendix E)

**Culminating Assignment – Part 2:** (Create Poem or Essay) Given the amount of time students have spent studying poetic devices, learning about eastern philosophy and American Transcendentalism, and explicating poems and essays, students will now create their own literary work in either the form of a short essay or poem. The work will be filled with images, diction and syntax that demonstrates their understanding of either Taoism, Buddhism or Transcendentalism. (Use Poetry Analysis Sheet to evaluate poem.)

**Appendix A**

***On going to Visit a Taoist Recluse on Mount Tai-Tien, but Failing to Meet Him***

**By Li Po**

A dog barks afar where the waters croon.

The peach flowers are deeper-tinted, wet with rain.

The wood is so thick that one espies a deer at times,

But cannot hear the noon bell in this lonely glen.

The wild bamboos sway in the blue mist,

And on the green mountainside flying cascades glisten

What way has he gone? There is none to tell;

Sadly I lean against a pine tree here and there.

***Autumn Dusk at a Mountain Lodge***

**By Wang Wei**

New rain clears dust from the mountains,

Empty, they are heavy in the dusky air

Soldiers against the evening sky.

Pine needle wink back at the moon,

And spread shining thin fingers towards the sky.

New water trickles over soft stones,

Climbing down the mountain to the base

A girl pauses among bamboo stalks,

Her black, silken hair flashes at the pines and

Her voice tingles over the water like chimes.

She sings a song of shadowy insignificance.

A fisherman cups his hand to listen,

His boat bends on the water.

The girl bows to her reflection

And cups the Lotus floating below

She sits on evening wet grass and

Smells the night’s sweet scents.

The fisherman calls to her youth,

Noble among nature

Her will does not answer him.

She stays.

**Appendix B:**

***Excerpts from Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu***

1. Tao that can be spoken of,

Is not the Everlasting Tao.

Name that can be named,

Is not the Everlasting name. (1)

2. When all under heaven know beauty as beauty,

There is then ugliness.

When all know the good [is] good,

There is then the not good. (2)

3. Do not honor the worthy

So that the people will not contend with one another.

Do not value hard-to-get goods,

So that the people will not turn to robbers. (3)

4. Act by no-action,

Then, nothing is not in order. (3)

5. A tree whose trunk is of a man’s embrace,

Begins from something extremely tiny.

A tower of nine stories high,

Is built form a heap of earth.

A trip of a thousand miles,

Begins right at one’s feet.

He who acts fails,

He who holds on to loses.

Therefore the sage does not act so he does not fail,

He does not hold on to, so he does not lose. (64)

6. Tao is a whirling emptiness,

Yet in use is inexhaustible.

Fathomless… (4)

7. The sage has no set mind.

He takes the mind of the people as his mind.

The good I am good to them,

The not good I am also good to them.

This is the goodness of nature. (49)

**Appendix C:**

***Poetry Study Sheet***

By responding to these points, searching for examples of the terms, and thinking about what they add to meaning, you will have carefully considered, or analyzed a poem. As always, look up any words whose denotation you do not know. Always read poems at least three times each.

1. Speaker: Who is the voice of the poem? What do you know about him/her?

To whom is s/he speaking? Differentiate this from the author if

possible.

2. Setting: When/where?

3. Paraphrase: Summarize i your own words, what is happening

4. Theme: What is the central purpose, theme or meaning?

5. Tone: What is the poets attitude? What words show you this?

6. Conflict: What is the conflict? Is it resolved?

7. Diction: What words are especially strong or meaningful? Where are there

effective images, examples of figurative language, etc…

8. Sound: Where does the author use the sound of words for emphasis?

9. Form: Study the structure—stanzas, line breaks, etc… What do they add

up to?

10. Commentary: Your opinion of the poem’s strengths and weaknesses

**Terms**

Look for examples of the following, and think about how they add to the meaning or experience of the poem. Don’t forget simile, metaphor, and personification.

Alliteration: close repetition of initial consonant sounds

Allusion: reference to other literature, or significant historical event/person

Assonance: close repetition of vowel sounds (not necessarily initial sound)

Connotation: the suggested meaning of the word, beyond its literal definition

Consonance: close repetition of final consonant sounds

Denotation: dictionary definition of a word

Figurative lang.: any use of words or images where the meaning is beyond

Denotation

List: can be any part of speech, consecutive or throughout poem—a type

Of repetition

Hyperbole: exaggeration

Imagery: using language to represent sense experience

Irony: when the unexpected occurs (situational irony)

When the implication of words is opposite of what is said (verbal)

Onomatopoeia: when the sound of the word mimics the meaning (e.g. buzz)

Paradox: Something that seems contradictory but can be true

Paraphrase: to restate in your own word; for our purposes, a summary is

Enough

Repetition: of word, phrase, grammatical construction

Rhyme: Is there a pattern? Why?

Rhythm: Fast? Slow? Varied? Why?

Symbol: something that represents something else

Tone: the author’s attitude toward the subject (see above)

Understatement: To represent something as less than it is

**Appendix D:**

***from* Self-Reliance**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse**, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact makes much impression on him, and another none. It is not without pre-established harmony, this sculpture in the memory. The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray. Bravely let him speak the utmost syllable of his confession. We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. It needs a divine man to exhibit any thing divine…

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. **Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you**; the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the Eternal was stirring at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not pinched in a corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but redeemers and benefactors, pious aspirants to be noble clay plastic under the Almighty effort, let us advance and advance on Chaos and the Dark. ...

These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. **Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members**. Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater, The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of our own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. ...

**A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds**, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. **With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do**. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Out upon your guarded lips! Sew them up with packthread, do. Else, if you would be a man, speak what you think today in words as hard as cannon balls, and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said today. Ah, then, exclaim the aged ladies, you shall be sure to be misunderstood. Misunderstood! It is a right fool's word. Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. **To be great is to be misunderstood**.

**Appendix D**

***from* Nature**

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

. . . Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. **In the woods, we return to reason and faith**. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. . . .

**Appendix D**

***from* Walden**

**Henry David Thoreau**

**I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life,** and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. **I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life**, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have *somewhat hastily* concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

**Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains.** I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born…

**Appendix E**

***Writing Rubric***

**Each category is rated on a scale from 1 to 5 for a total of 25 points**

**1=poor 2= weak 3=average 4=very good 5=excellent**

**Total points may be doubled or quadrupled, depending on the complexity of the writing task**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Category*** | ***Description*** | ***Points*** |
| **Content** | * Addresses the topic clearly and responds effectively to all aspects of the task * Demonstrates a thorough critical understanding of the text(s) * Explores the issue thoughtfully and in depth * Contains a structured and focused thesis and well developed paragraphs through textual support of the novel and other research regarding topic if required |  |
| **Organization** | * Paper is coherently organized and developed, with ideas supported by apt reasons and well-chosen examples * Paper is unified so that there is an introduction, body and conclusion * The writing reflects logical development rather than a list or a haphazard arrangement of details * Writer uses transition phrases and contextual information to direct reader’s attention |  |
| **Style** | * Demonstrates control of standard English at the sentence level, including areas as diction, and a variety of sentences * Diction and syntax are *appropriate in tone* |  |
| **Mechanics** | * Demonstrates *control of standard English* at the sentence level, including such areas as vocabulary, variety of sentence structure, grammar, mechanics, and spelling * Is generally free from errors in grammar, usage and mechanics |  |
| **Overall Impression** | * Student has proven their thesis with multiple examples, written in well-constructed sentences and precise word-choice that communicates a powerful and insightful understanding of the work and their essay topic |  |

***Comments:***

***Resources***

*The American Renaissance and American Transcendentalism. Artists, Movements and Ideals.*

PBS Online, 15 January 2013 <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/ihas/icon/transcend.html>

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*Works by Category: Landscapes*. National Palace Museum Website. 15 August 2004

<http://www.npm.gov.tw/english/dm/painting/b_02.htm>.