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Tang Poetry

Chinese poetry has been written for thousands of years. There are over 5,500 Chinese characters that are combined into words, and it would seem that just learning to read the language would take a lifetime. Yet most people in China have written in verse throughout the centuries. Writing poetry for the Chinese has been a natural and solacing part of life, seeing beauty in an imaginative phrase, as well as in nature.

The poems below were written during the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907). Some of the greatest Chinese poets from that era include, Wang Wei, Li Bo, Du Fu, and Bo Juyi. Read the following very old Tang poems. Then discuss what you think the meaning of the poems might be and your observations about the style of the poems.

He Chih-Chang
賀知章

*I left home young. I return old.
Speaking as then, but with hair grown thin;
And my children, meeting me, do not know me.
They smile and say: "Stranger, where do you come from?"*

Li Yi
李益

*Since I married the merchant of Ch'u-t'ang
He has failed each day to keep his word...
Had I thought how regular the tide is,
I might rather have chosen a river-boy.*

A Song of Pure Happiness

下江陵

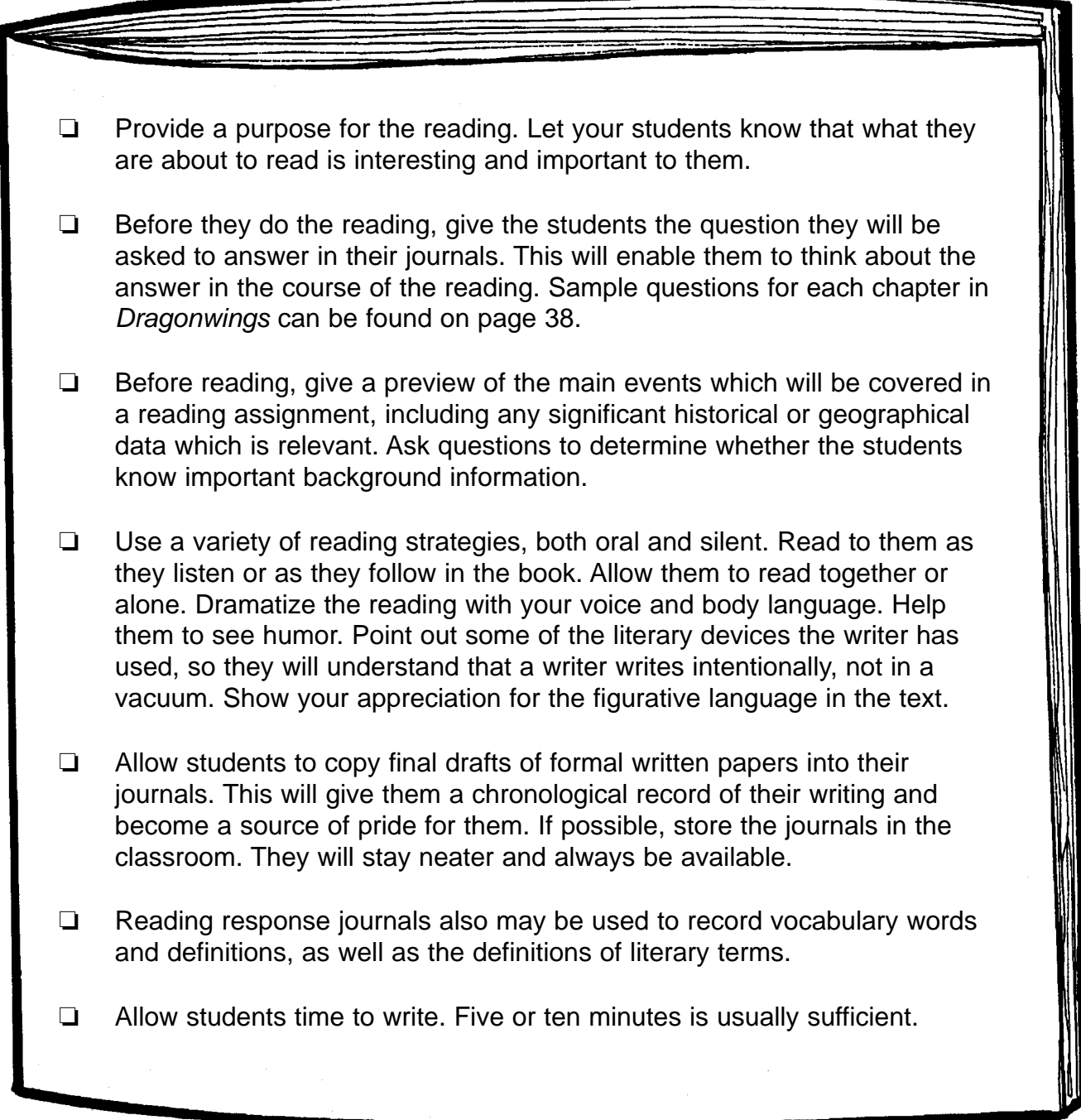
*Her robe is a cloud, her face a flower;
Her balcony, glimmering with the bright spring dew,
Is either the tip of earth's Jade Mountain
Or a moon-edged roof of paradise.*

Can you write a simple four-line poem like one of these? Remember to write about one thing or one person. Keep your language simple, yet draw a word picture with your poem.

Reading Response Journals

Reading response journals can be a very important addition to the reading of a book. They can help to personalize the story by relating it to real life and by helping show alternative ways of dealing with situations. This can be particularly significant when the book is a historical novel like *Dragonwings*, because young people do not always see themselves as a part of the flow of history. Without guidance, students may feel that people of the past seem too remote.

The reading response journal can be the conduit which relates past to present for the young reader. To make the reading response journal most effective, use all or some of the following tips.

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- Provide a purpose for the reading. Let your students know that what they are about to read is interesting and important to them.
 - Before they do the reading, give the students the question they will be asked to answer in their journals. This will enable them to think about the answer in the course of the reading. Sample questions for each chapter in *Dragonwings* can be found on page 38.
 - Before reading, give a preview of the main events which will be covered in a reading assignment, including any significant historical or geographical data which is relevant. Ask questions to determine whether the students know important background information.
 - Use a variety of reading strategies, both oral and silent. Read to them as they listen or as they follow in the book. Allow them to read together or alone. Dramatize the reading with your voice and body language. Help them to see humor. Point out some of the literary devices the writer has used, so they will understand that a writer writes intentionally, not in a vacuum. Show your appreciation for the figurative language in the text.
 - Allow students to copy final drafts of formal written papers into their journals. This will give them a chronological record of their writing and become a source of pride for them. If possible, store the journals in the classroom. They will stay neater and always be available.
 - Reading response journals also may be used to record vocabulary words and definitions, as well as the definitions of literary terms.
 - Allow students time to write. Five or ten minutes is usually sufficient.