

**Lightning Literature & Composition**  
**World Literature II: Student's Guide**  
**Latin America, Asia, & Africa**  
**Second Edition**

**Acquiring College-Level Composition Skills**  
**by Responding to Great Literature**

**The difference between the right word and the almost-right word  
is the difference between the lightning and the lightning bug.—Mark Twain**

**Brenda S. Cox**



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To my daughter Jasmine, now teaching in China,  
who helped me discover the joys of World Literature when we studied it together.



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THROUGH  
WRITING.**

**—Adeline  
Yen Mah**

## **Unit 3—Lesson 5**

### **Adeline Yen Mah (China)**

#### **CHINESE CINDERELLA**

Jun-ling Yen Mah was born in Tianjin, China, during the Japanese occupation in 1937. Her mother died shortly after her birth. During her childhood Jun-ling was repeatedly told, “If you had not been born, Mama would still be alive. She died because of you. You are bad luck.” Her father soon remarried, choosing a woman who was half French and half Chinese. Her children and stepchildren called her Niang, a Chinese word for “mother.” Loving everything foreign, Niang changed her stepchildren’s names; Jun-ling became Adeline.

Sadly, Niang was a selfish and abusive woman. Adeline, as the youngest stepchild, was ignored, mistreated, and neglected. On her first day of first grade, shortly after her family moved to Shanghai, no one remembered to pick her up from school. She wandered the streets for hours, trying to find her home, until she finally remembered that she knew her new phone number. She called from a restaurant, her father came to get her, and he lectured her on learning to read maps so she could find her own way home! Adeline tried to escape her unhappy home situation by absorbing herself in her schoolwork. Although she was an outstanding student, no one seemed to notice except for her Aunt Baba. Adeline dreamed of running away, learning kung fu, and being independent. She later wrote a novel called *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society*, which expresses these fantasies in fiction. The young adult version of her autobiography, *Chinese Cinderella*, tells of her own real childhood.

Adeline’s grandfather Ye Ye, who lived with the family until his death, was a major influence on her life. He was a devout Buddhist who loved Chinese proverbs and history. Ye Ye and Aunt Baba (her father’s sister) loved Adeline dearly, but they were powerless in the household, which was controlled by her stepmother.

Adeline was not allowed to go to other girls’ homes, and they were not allowed to come to her house. One day when she became class president, some of her friends followed her home

to surprise her with a party. Her stepmother was furious, sent everyone home, threw away her gifts, and threatened to send her to an orphanage. Instead Adeline was sent to a convent school in Tianjin, a thousand miles north of Shanghai, in the middle of a war zone where the Communists and Nationalists were fighting. Eventually, when she was the last student left in the school, some family friends smuggled her out to Hong Kong, where her family was living.

Then she was sent to a school where both orphans and boarders attended; Adeline was considered a boarder, but her family never sent her anything, never visited her, and rarely allowed her to come home for holidays.

Adeline dreamed of going to university, but her parents wanted her to leave school and become a secretary. However, when she won an international play-writing competition, her father finally agreed to let her study abroad. She wanted to be a writer, but he insisted that she train as a doctor. She qualified as a physician in London and returned to Hong Kong for her internship. Her father was adamant that she must intern in obstetrics, though she had been offered an excellent position as assistant lecturer in internal medicine. Still trying to please her father and stepmother, she followed the course they had set for her, until boredom and frustration led her to apply for a position in the United States. She received a job offer, but her parents, who were very wealthy, refused to pay for her plane ticket. She managed to borrow money from the hospital where she was planning to work and went to the United States where she became an anesthesiologist. She met a Chinese man there and married him and had a son; however, her husband was bad-tempered, dishonest, and abusive, and they finally divorced. She later married a Chinese-American doctor, had a daughter, and apparently they are a happy family now.



Adeline continued to seek approval and love from her father and stepmother and tried to reconcile her siblings, two of whom had been disowned, with each other and with her parents. She sponsored and paid for her sister Lydia's son to study in America and convinced her parents to see Lydia and be reconciled with her. In the last years of his life, her father had Alzheimer's, and her stepmother put all his possessions in her own name so that his children inherited nothing. Lydia then slandered Adeline to Niang, and Niang disinherited Adeline. The adult version of Adeline's autobiography, *Falling Leaves*, ends with a Chinese legend about an artist who became stronger because of her suffering, as Adeline did. When Adeline's beloved Aunt Baba died, full of love and peace despite her own years of suffering, Adeline says, "Life had come full circle. Falling leaves return to their roots. I felt a wave of repose, a peaceful serenity."

## THE SELECTION

In *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Adeline Yen Mah says, "A Chinese view of the world is highly dependent on the lessons learned from our forebears. Traditionally, this wisdom of the ages

is often encapsulated in the form of four characters and is presented as a proverb.” She subtitles the book: “My Discovery of China’s Character in Its Proverbs.” Each chapter of the book is based on a proverb. She tells the historical story behind the proverb and explains its relevance to recent history and to her own life story. The story is rich with other proverbs that she also explains along the way. A list of all these proverbs, with their translations, is in the back of the book.

Don’t let the many unfamiliar names in the book cause you too much difficulty. Refer to the list of characters below if you need help remembering who’s who. Pronunciations are given at the beginning of the book, if you want to know how to say the names. Refer to the Historical Background section if you get confused about where an event fits in history. The stories of ancient China are told more or less in chronological order, but the stories of the author’s life and of modern times are included where they relate to each proverb; they are not in chronological order. Refer to the map at the beginning of the book for the locations of the various states and cities of China that are mentioned. Enjoy the stories and see how they relate to the proverbs being explained.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

An overview of the history of China, and some of the events mentioned in the book (B.C.E., which the text uses, means “before the common era”; it is the same as B.C.).

- **1765–1122 B.C.E.:** Shang Dynasty rules eastern Yellow River Valley.
- **1122–256:** Zhou (or Chou) Dynasty rules eastern China.
- **770–476:** Spring and Autumn Period: rule by feudal lords under nominal Zhou king.
- **550–250:** Age of the Hundred Schools (of philosophy).
- **551–479 (approx.):** Confucius (Kung Fuzi) develops Confucian philosophy.
- **475–221:** Warring States period: Qin, Zhao, Yan, Qin, Haan, Chu, and Wei states in conflict.
- **221–206:** Qin (or Ch’in) Dynasty, China’s first strong central government; founded by Shi Huangdi (originally King Zheng; called himself Qin Shihuang).
- **214:** Great Wall begun by connecting older walls of different kingdoms possibly 200s or 100s B.C.E. Tao Te Ching is written, presenting ideas of Taoism.
- **202 B.C.E.–220 A.D.:** Han Dynasty.
- **145–90 B.C.E.:** Sima Qian writes Shiji (Historical Record). Published 73–54 B.C.E.
- **65 A.D.:** Missionaries from India bring Buddhism to China.
- **220–581 A.D.:** China divided into three kingdoms under a series of dynasties.
- **502–546 A.D.:** Buddhism popularized by Emperor Wu.
- **581–618:** Sui Dynasty reunites China.
- **618–907:** Tang Dynasty.
- **960–1279:** Song (or Sung) Dynasty.
- **1279–1368:** Mongols (Yuan Dynasty) control China.

- 1368–1644: Ming Dynasty.
- 1644–1912: Qing (or Ch'ing) Dynasty: Manchus.
- 1842: Treaty of Nanking; United Kingdom takes Hong Kong.
- 1851–1864: Taiping Rebellion, a series of uprisings against the Qing dynasty by a group combining Christian and traditional Chinese ideas with a demand for land redistribution.
- 1900: Boxer Rebellion, a bloody uprising by a Chinese sect against foreigners and those who cooperated with them, including missionaries and Chinese Christians.
- 1912: Republic of China established under Sun Yat-sen.
- 1916–1928: Fighting between Nationalists, Communists, and northern warlords.
- 1928: Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek unite most of China.
- 1931: Japan seizes Manchuria.
- 1931: Communists set up rival Chinese government in southern and central China.
- 1934–5: Mao Tse-tung leads Chinese Communists on “Long March.”
- 1937–1945: War with Japan.
- 1945–1949: Civil war between Nationalists and Communists.
- 1949: Chinese Communists defeat Nationalists; People’s Republic of China established.
- 1957–1975: Vietnam War; China supports Communist North Vietnam.
- 1966–1976: Cultural Revolution.
- 1976: Mao Tse-tung dies.
- 1977: Deng Xiaoping becomes vice premier of China; most powerful leader of China until early 1990s.
- 1984: United Kingdom and China sign agreement for return of Hong Kong, which will retain much autonomy and a free-market economy for 50 years.
- 1989: Tiananmen Square pro-democracy demonstrations end in massacre of students.
- 1993: Jiang Zemin becomes president of China.
- 1997: China regains Hong Kong.
- 1999: China regains Macao from Portugal.
- 2003: Hu Jintao becomes president of China.

## CHARACTERS

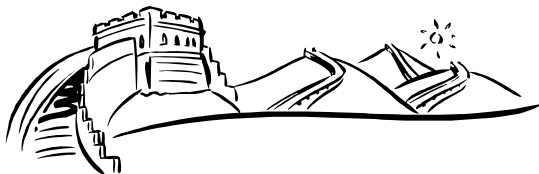
Name, page on which introduced, summary of position, dates (B.C.E.). Pronunciations of names are on pages xv–xvii of the book.

- **ZI CHU**, Prince of Qin, page 19, hostage of Zhao who becomes King of Qin in 250.
- **LU BUWAI** (Merchant Lu), page 19, merchant who helps Prince Zi Chu and becomes prime minister.
- **ZAO**, King of Qin, page 20, defeats kingdoms of Wei and Chu but is defeated by Zhao.
- **AN GUO**, page 20, becomes King of Qin in 251; Zao’s son and Zi Chu’s father.

### Unit 3—Lesson 5: Adeline Yen Mah (China)

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- **ZHENG** (Qin Shihuang or First Emperor), page 25, becomes King of Qin in 247, son of Lu Buwai but considered to be son of Zi Chu, becomes emperor of united China in 221 (pg. 68).
- **ZHAO JI**, page 25, Zheng's mother, Lu Buwai's former concubine.
- **LI SI**, pages 31 and 39, scholar, prime minister under First and Second Emperors.
- **HAN FEIZI**, page 48, Li Si's fellow student, promotes Legalist school of philosophy.
- **DAN OF YAN**, page 57, Crown Prince of Yan, boyhood friend of King Zheng but insulted by him later; plots to kill Zheng by sending Jing Ke.
- **FAN YUQI**, page 57, General of Qin who leads unsuccessful rebellion against Zheng, receives asylum from Prince Dan, kills himself to take revenge on Zheng.
- **TIAN GUANG**, page 58, scholar who helps Prince Dan, then kills himself.
- **JING KE**, page 58, assassin who attempts to kill King Zheng but fails and dies.
- **QIN WUYANG**, page 62, Jing Ke's assistant.
- **GAO JIANLI**, page 62, lute player, blinded for involvement in Jing Ke's assassination plot, tries to kill Zheng himself but fails and dies.
- **MENG YI**, page 85, younger brother of General Meng Tian.
- **MENG TIAN**, General, page 85, supervises building of Wall for First Emperor.
- **ZHAO GAO**, page 85, palace eunuch and tutor of Hu Hai, plots with Li Si to put Hu Hai in power.
- **HU HAI**, Prince, page 85, youngest son of Zheng, becomes Second Emperor, page 101.
- **FU SU**, Prince, page 85, oldest son of Zheng.
- **XIANG YU**, pages 110 and 128, leads revolt against Second Emperor, splits up China (pg. 170), is defeated and killed in 202 (pg. 234).
- **LIU BANG**, pages 110 and 130, leads revolt against Second Emperor, takes capital and sets up Three Laws (pg. 155), receives Hanzhong and Bashu with title King of Han, defeats Xiang Yu and becomes first emperor of Han dynasty, crowned in 201 (pg. 235).
- **ZI YING**, page 112, becomes emperor, surrenders to rebel leader Liu Bang; killed by Xiang Yu in 206; end of Qin dynasty.
- **CHEN SHE**, page 120, begins rebellion in 209, which is continued after his death by Xiang Yu and Liu Bang.
- **OLD MAN FAN**, page 132, Xiang Yu's adviser.
- **MAD MASTER** (Li Shichi or Kuang Sheng), page 145, adviser to Liu Bang.
- **ZHANG LIANG**, page 148, military strategist for Liu Bang.
- **HAHN XIN** (General Hahn), page 178, Liu Bang's general in chief.
- **DOU and RONG**, page 189, leaders of Qi's rebellion against First Emperor.
- **CHEN YU and ZHENG ER**, pages 138, 190, and 202, leaders competing for control of Zhao.
- **LI**, page 203, Chen Yu's adviser, then General Hahn's adviser.







**LESSON**

**PREVIEW**

**In writing about history, tell interesting stories and explain how events are connected and what they mean.**

**WHILE YOU READ**

Consider these questions as you read *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*:

- What does each proverb show you about Chinese culture and worldviews?
- Are there similar proverbs in your own culture?
- Are there familiar historical events, or events from your own life, that illustrate any of these proverbs, or that are similar to any of these historical incidents?
- How do the people in these stories act similarly to, and differently than, people in your culture (either today or in the past)?

**NOTE:** Your parent/teacher has some notes on this book to discuss with you.





## Chinese Literature

China's literary history stretches back more than 3,000 years. Since China was one of the first areas of the world to develop a writing system, its language and literature had a strong influence on other Asian countries, including Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Chinese characters are not phonetic; each represents a word or concept. Unfortunately this means that Chinese reading and writing is difficult to learn, as even a basic knowledge of reading requires memorizing around 1,000 characters. However, it also means that millions of Chinese people, speaking very different dialects (which could even be considered different languages), can all understand written Chinese, since each character represents the meaning of a word, not its sound. For instance, the character for house would be pronounced "nook" in Cantonese, but "wuzi" in Mandarin: a big difference!

The Chinese language includes many words that appear the same when they are transliterated into our alphabet, but have totally different meanings. For instance, in Mandarin Chinese (the standard dialect), *ma* could mean "mother," "hemp," "horse," or "scold." In Chinese, these words actually sound different because of the tones in which they are pronounced. That means that the musical pitch of each word and how that pitch changes (higher or lower) help determine the meaning of the word. *Ma* pronounced with a constant high tone means "mother"; pronounced on a low tone, going down and then up, it means "horse." Because of these tones, poetry and music are very closely connected in China. Every kind of Chinese poetry was originally meant to be sung to music, and even today Chinese poetry is more often chanted than read. Like Japanese poems, Chinese poems tend to be brief and pack a lot of meaning into a few words. They usually relate to simple, personal themes.

Literature and writing were so important to the Chinese that for more than a thousand years people gained government offices (the most highly prized jobs) by taking an examination that evaluated their skill with words. Besides being familiar with the classics, including the works of Confucius, they had to compose both prose and poetry. History was considered the highest literary art.

(Chinese can be transliterated into our alphabet in several different ways. I have generally used the Wade-Giles spelling, though sometimes I have also give Pinyin when it might be helpful.)

**CLASSICS (1400–221 B.C.):** Before the twentieth century, the man who had the most influence on Chinese thought, and therefore on Chinese literature, was

Confucius. A simple scholar, teacher, and philosopher, he lived from about 551–479 B.C. Confucius and his followers chose Five Classics of early Chinese literature that were considered to be the embodiment of both literary and moral excellence, conveying Confucius's ideals of proper behavior, duty, moderation, and public service. They teach people's duties to each other according to each one's place in family and society, as well as the importance of learning, humility, and honesty. They are:

- *Shih Ching* ("Classic of Poetry" or "Book of Songs"), a collection of 305 poems, written to be sung, and sometimes to be accompanied by dancing. Some were written as early as the beginning of the Chou dynasty (1122 B.C.). They are written in everyday language and range from temple songs to songs about military service, holidays, agriculture, love, and sports. Most of the lines are four syllables, and they use end rhymes and tones for a musical effect.
- *I Ching* ("Classic of Changes"), a book of divination and geometrical forms, which was expanded to teach a philosophy of yin and yang, or change and balance
- *Shu Ching* ("Classic of History, or "Book of Documents"), a collection of political papers and speeches supposedly from the earliest Chinese rulers
- *Li Chi* ("Record of Rites"), a book of rituals with related stories
- *Ch'un-ch'iu* ("Spring and Autumn Annals"), a chronological history of the state of Lu, where Confucius was born, with entries on events from 722 to 481 B.C.
- To these were added Confucius's sayings, gathered into another classic of Chinese literature, the *Lun-yu* or *Analects*. These are his responses to various situations, which are not always explained, so the statements sometimes sound disjointed.

Some philosophers disagreed with Confucian philosophy and turned to a religion called Taoism. They taught that people should live close to nature, be passive (or "nonactive"), and avoid involvement with politics. Their literary masterpieces are *Tao-te Ching* ("The Classic of the Way of Power"), a mystical work of prose and poetry believed to be the sayings of Lao-tzu, who founded Taoism, and the *Chuang-tzu*, the fables and adages of another Taoist philosopher. *Tao-te Ching* includes statements such as "Abandon learnedness, and you have no vexation" and "One who knows does not talk. One who talks does not know." [The poet Po Chu-i later parodied this statement, asking, if Lao Tzu knew so much, and one who knows is silent, how did he write a "book of five thousand words?" (which is one name for the *Tao-te Ching*).]

Mo-tzu was the first to write well-developed, logical essays in Chinese. The legalist Han Feizi and his teacher, the Confucian philosopher Xun Zi (see

chapter 5), were also famous essayists. The best example of this style was a book of 60 essays about philosophy and folklore, completed in 240 B.C., called *Lu-shih Ch'un-ch'iu* ("The Spring and Autumn Annals of Mr. Lu"), which is described in chapter 3 of *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*.

In the 300s B.C. a poet named Chu Yuan developed a style of poetry that was different from that of the Shih Ching. His plaintive elegies were usually chanted rather than sung. He drowned himself because of his sorrows, and his tragic end helped to popularize this style, which was imitated for the next five hundred years. One of China's first great lyric poets, T'ao Ch'ien, wrote about nature and rural life. He said, "The life of man is like a shadow-play/Which must in the end return to nothingness."

**QIN, HAN, AND SUI DYNASTIES (221 B.C.–618 A.D.):** After China was unified by the first Qin Emperor in 221 B.C., Chu Yuan's style of elegies was modified into a combination of prose and poetry called *FU*. Courtiers composed *fu* about frivolous subjects in order to amuse one another. Under the Han dynasty, these developed into more serious songs and ballads, called *YUEH-FU*. The most famous of these ballads, "Southeast the Peacock Flies," tells the sad story of a young couple who are persecuted by the husband's mother until they both commit suicide. The *yueh-fu* songs developed into a new style of poetry, called *KU-SHIH* ("ancient style poems"). The outstanding prose literature of the Han dynasty was history, especially Sima Qian's *Shiji* ("Historical Record"), which covered about 2,000 years of history and included interesting biographies of many people. (This book is the basis for *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*.)



The following period of division, and then the Sui Dynasty, saw an increasing influence of Buddhism on China and its literature, as well as the influence of various northern tribes who invaded and settled in China. Prose writers began to write *CH'ING T'AN*, or "pure conversation"—lofty discussions on intellectual topics. Others wrote literary criticism and accounts of history and folklore.

**GOLDEN AGE OF THE TANG DYNASTY (618–960):** The Tang Dynasty (618–907) is considered the "Golden Age" of Chinese literature. Forms of poetry with strict rules about numbers of syllables and parallelism were

developed (similar to Japanese *haiku* or Omar Khayyam's Persian *Rubaiyat*). The most famous Chinese poets wrote during this time. Wang Wei, a musician and painter influenced by Buddhism, wrote short nature poems emphasizing peace and meditation. Li Bo (or Li Po), a Taoist mystic, used less formal styles to write romantic ballads about wine, friendship, fantasies, and a simple, natural life. Tu Fu (Du Fu), a Confucian who wandered around looking for an official post, wrote passionately about injustice and the futility of war. His clever use of language influenced later poets. Po Chu-i (Bo Juyi) was a poet and historian who wrote satirical ballads about social problems, the common people, and government policies.

Chinese writers began to write both prose and poetry more freely, rejecting some of the many layers of rules added over the centuries. An irregular form of verse, *T'ZU*, developed that was more like everyday speech and more easily understood in songs. Short, imaginative romances, with heroic adventures, supernatural occurrences, love, and mystery, appealed to the upper class. These romances were later adapted to the theatre and became popular with everyone. At the end of the Tang Dynasty was another period of division and chaos, the Five Dynasties (907–960).

**SUNG, YUAN, MING, AND CH'ING DYNASTIES (960–1912):** During the Sung Dynasty (960–1279), printing was improved, public schools were established, and much literature was produced. From 1206–1368 the Mongols ruled northern China as the Yuan Dynasty, founded by Kublai Khan. The mixture of people groups in the north led to the development of a Chinese dialect with fewer tones, which became the basis for a national Chinese language. Under the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), southern Chinese culture again became dominant, and competitive exams for government service, which emphasized a knowledge of classical literature, were restored. The Manchus, Mongols from north of China, conquered China in 1644 and set up the Ch'ing Dynasty.

During the Sung dynasty, Chinese writers began to write stories in the vernacular, or everyday language, rather than the high literary language. This helped lead to the development of **DRAMA** in the Yuan Dynasty with songs and dialogue close to people's normal speech. More than 1700 musical plays were written and staged during this dynasty. These tragedies and romances are similar to opera. Most are about the middle and lower classes. One famous play, *Injustice Suffered by Tou O*, tells the story of a woman who marries a poor scholar, is widowed, suffers many injustices, and finally is executed for a crime she did not commit. These plays continued to develop into new forms during the Ming Dynasty, ranging from one-act plays to plays requiring thirty to forty changes of scene. During the Ch'ing Dynasty, folk dramas from different parts of China became popular and eventually merged into a style called "Peking Drama," which the Chinese still enjoy today.

**FICTION** was not highly regarded in ancient China, but the Chinese novel developed during this period. Written in the Yuan Dynasty, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* was a historical novel about a power struggle in the second and third centuries, and *The Water Margin* described the exploits of political dissenters who became an outlaw gang. One famous novel of the 1500s (Ming Dynasty), *The Journey to the West*, or *Monkey*, described the pilgrimage of a Chinese monk to India in the seventh century; the poor man met with 81 different trials and tribulations along the way, including many monsters! During the Ch'ing Dynasty, more romances and stories of the supernatural were written. The most famous novel of the time was *Dream of the Red Chamber*, by Ts'ao Chan. The story is a series of episodes in the decline of a large upper-class family; there are 30 main characters and more than 400 minor ones! The family's spoiled son runs into conflicts with his strict Confucian father and the women in his life.

*T'zu* **POETRY**, first popularized by women singers, became very popular in the Sung dynasty. A woman poet, Li Ch'ing-chao, wrote *t'zu* about her personal life: first the joys of love with her husband, then her grief over their separation due to his military service, and finally the pain of his early death. During the Yuan Dynasty a more informal type of poetry developed, which was used in musical plays. Poetry in the Ming Dynasty returned to classical styles, and the Manchu poet Nara Singde and others of the Ch'ing Dynasty continued the *t'zu* style.

**THE MODERN PERIOD (1912–PRESENT):** In the nineteenth century, China became more open to foreign influences and allowed missionaries and traders to enter the country. Foreign literature began to influence Chinese authors.

In 1912, the Manchu rulers of China were overthrown and a republic was established under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen and the Kuomintang Party. Along with the political changes, intellectuals called for a reform of Chinese language and literature. Fiction was written in more Western styles, in everyday language rather than the classical, literary language. Lu Hsun (Lu Xun) wrote satires of Chinese traditions, such as *The True Story of Ah Q*. In this short novel, Ah Q, an ignorant but lovable odd jobs man, gets involved with a “rebellion,” though he has no clue what that means. He ends up as the scapegoat for a crime he doesn't even understand.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Lao She wrote satirical, sometimes humorous, novels. His most famous was *Camel Xiangzi* (*Rickshaw* or *Rickshaw Boy*), the tragedy of a rickshaw puller in traditional Chinese society. Lao She taught in London for



some years, and his style was influenced both by traditional Chinese storytellers and by Charles Dickens. Mao Tun, a realist, and Pa Chin (Ba Jin), an anarchist, were other famous novelists of these decades. Pa Chin's novel *Family* shows a young man struggling against the restrictions of his traditional family and his society. Ting Ling wrote fiction about the problems of women in China. Drama during this time, such as Ts'ao Yu's play *Thunderstorm*, also addressed social issues in new ways.

During the war with Japan from 1937 to 1945, Chinese writers mostly produced patriotic literature to support the war effort (*An Artist of the Floating World* refers to this time period and the patriotic art that was manufactured on the other side, in Japan). In 1949, after a long civil war, the Communists under Mao Tse-tung came to power. They demanded literature that spread Communist ideas and censored anything else. They especially persecuted authors and intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Some of those authors' stories are told in the introductions to the short stories you will read in this unit. Mao wanted literature written by peasants, workers, and soldiers. Zhao Shuli's *Rhymes of Li Youcai* is an example. Li Youcai is a poor peasant who writes rhymes making fun of the corrupt headman of his village. Comrade Yang, from the county peasant association, comes and organizes the peasants into committees who work together to obtain justice.

In 1976 the government began to allow more freedom. Much “scar literature” was written about the anguish of the Culture Revolution, such as Feng Jikai's *Ten Years of Madness* and Rae Yang's *Spider Eaters*. (Others are listed in Appendix B.) But after the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in 1989, the government clamped down again. Today the most well-known Chinese authors live outside of China, in Taiwan, Singapore, and other parts of the world. The first Chinese author to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature was Gao Xingjian, in 2000; he lives in Paris. He was commended for his “universal validity, bitter insights, and linguistic ingenuity.” Gao first became famous for his experimental dramas. After he published a play that was banned by the government and was mistakenly diagnosed with lung cancer, he made a pilgrimage through China in search of peace. His first novel, *Soul Mountain*, was based on that experience. In 1987 he moved to France as a political refugee and later became a French citizen.

Other well-known modern Chinese authors are represented in the short stories assigned for this unit.



Book Stalls near Notre Dame Cathedral - Paris, France



## NOTES AND COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

### Pronunciation Guide and Introduction, pgs. xv–8

Also be sure to read page vii, which follows the dedication and begins, “My Grandfather Ye Ye told me . . .”

Notice that in the Pronunciation Guide there is a list of how to pronounce certain names in the book, but there is also a general explanation, at the beginning and end, about the Chinese language and names.

1. How is the Chinese writing system different from the one we use for English?
2. What is pinyin? On what dialect of Chinese is it based?
3. How is the order of a name in Chinese different from the order of a name in English? How would that change your name?
4. What is the basis of Chinese proverbs?
5. How are proverbs useful?
6. What two rewards does Ye Ye offer his granddaughter?
7. What does the proverb “Falling leaves return to their roots” mean?
8. The author says every form of thought is related to what three aspects of the thinker?
9. On what does the author claim the Chinese worldview is based?
10. On what do you think modern, Western worldviews are based? On what is your worldview based?
11. On page 7, how does a Westerner (Philip Larkin) describe Chinese proverbs?
12. What Chinese classic has Yen Mah used to write *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*? Who was the author of that classic, and when did he live?

### Chapter 1: “The Loss of One Hair from Nine Oxen,” pgs. 9–16

**Yellow Emperor:** Huang-ti, legendary third emperor of China, who supposedly reigned beginning in 2697 B.C.E., introduced writing and the bow and arrow, coined money, and was responsible for other developments.

1. What does “the loss of one hair from nine oxen” signify? What did it represent in Adeline’s life?
2. Why was Sima Qian sentenced to death? What did he choose instead of death? Why?
3. What did he say his death would have been like?
4. Why was Sima Qian so miserable about his choice? For how long did he say it would affect him and his family?
5. What did Adeline find in her stepmother’s apartment that encouraged her to write this book?
6. Why did Sima Qian say that he had to continue writing? Why did he specifically want to write about history?





**Chapter 2: “Precious Treasure Worth Cherishing,” pgs. 17–27**

**Cultural Revolution:** Mao’s drive from 1966–1976 to enforce strict Communist principles and eliminate his supposed enemies, which led to chaos, violence, and a breakdown of education, government, and the economy

**dear:** expensive (British usage).

**catty:** unit of weight, a little more than a pound.

1. How close was Adeline’s relationship with her grandfather? What activities did they do together?
2. What did Grandfather Ye Ye tell her was more important than money?
3. What did he say was a “precious treasure worth cherishing”?
4. What kind of people might be told “Handan xue bu”?
5. Why was Prince Zi Chu a “precious treasure worth cherishing”?
6. What did Merchant Lu mean when he said to the prince, “The width of my opening depends on the width of yours”?
7. What does “speaking one sentence that results in ten thousand generations of gain” refer to? How did Merchant Lu use it?
8. How did Merchant Lu make Prince Zi Chu heir to the throne?
9. Why did Merchant Lu give his favorite concubine to the prince? How did he expect this to benefit him?
10. What modern Chinese leader was referred to as a “precious treasure worth cherishing”?

**Chapter 3: “One Written Word Is Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold,” pgs. 29–35**

**WARNING:** This is one of the chapters you need to discuss with your parent/teacher.

**erudition:** learning, scholarship.

1. What kind of story was Aunt Baba reading when she used this proverb? Who wrote it?
2. Why did Merchant Lu hang one thousand pieces of gold above his encyclopedia? Did anyone take him up on his offer? Why or why not?
3. How did Merchant Lu “give the appearance of virtue but act very differently in practice”?
4. What was Merchant Lu’s reward for all his plotting and scheming?
5. What do the Chinese consider the highest virtue?
6. How did the Chinese show respect for the written word?



**Chapter 4: “Binding Your Feet to Prevent Your Own Progress,”**  
**pgs. 37–46**

Lu Buwei is Merchant Lu from the previous chapters, and King Zheng is his son.

1. How did this proverb apply to the American man who would not give Adeline a job?
2. What policy did Li Si use this proverb to protest? How was the proverb applicable?
3. What argument did Li Si use to convince the king to change his mind?
4. What did Xun Zi say was essential for good government?
5. What did Li Si advise young King Zheng to do? How did he achieve this goal?

**Chapter 5: “Clapping with One Hand Produces No Sound,”**  
**pgs. 47–54**

1. What do you think Jiang Zemin meant when he applied this proverb to China-U.S. relations?
2. What was Han Feizi’s view of the law? Who did he believe it applied to?
3. Why did Li Si plot to get rid of Han Feizi?
4. What was the flaw in the Legalist School? What problems did it lead to?
5. What basic difference in worldview does the author say caused the different views of law in the West and in China?
6. How did Mao Tse-tung’s life illustrate the Western proverb “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”?

**Chapter 6: “When the Map Is Unrolled, the Dagger Is Revealed,”**  
**pgs. 55–66**

1. What family situation reminded the author of this proverb?
2. Why did Prince Dan of Yan want vengeance against King Zheng of Qin?
3. Who was General Fan Yuqi? How did Prince Dan treat him?
4. Why did Scholar Tian kill himself?
5. What did General Fan do to try to get revenge on King Zheng?
6. Why did Master Jing and Qin Wuyang bring a map to King Zheng? What was hidden in the map?
7. Why did the assassination attempt fail? Who later tried to kill the king and also failed?
8. How does Chinese writing encourage the use of metaphors and proverbs?

### **Chapter 7: “Burning Books and Burying Scholars,” pgs. 67–82**

Many Chinese have written about their horrible experiences during the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966. Appendix B includes some excellent books about this tragic period in Chinese history.

**King Zheng:** United China and became known as Qin Shihuang. Our history books call him Shi Huangdi or Shih Huang-ti. He began the building of the Great Wall of China.

**Zhou dynasty:** Also called Chou, ruled China from 1045 to 256 B.C.; it was the longest ruling dynasty in Chinese history. Its fall led to the Warring States period, in which this book begins.

**Confucius:** Chinese philosopher who taught that people should respect their elders and rulers and behave virtuously, reverently, and responsibly, keeping order in social life (more about Confucius on pages 117, 123, 124, 156, 202).

1. How did Aunt Baba compare Mao Tse-tung to the First Emperor?
2. Why did Qin Shihuang not split up his empire between his relatives?
3. How did Qin Shihuang change the government of China? How were the new leaders appointed?
4. Look at the map in the front of the book. The First Emperor’s capital, Xianyang, was located near the intersection of what two major rivers?
5. List what you consider to be the three most positive achievements of China’s First Emperor.
6. List what you consider to be the three worst evils caused by China’s First Emperor.
7. This chapter includes a number of events and strategies that are similar to those of other periods and places in history. Try to name at least one other historical event similar to one of the events mentioned in this chapter.
8. How are Chinese literature and art “inextricably linked”?
9. Why did some scholars die rather than allow their books to be burned?

### **Chapter 8: “Words That Would Cause a Nation to Perish,” pgs. 83–93**

**terra cotta:** reddish-brown clay, baked hard to make unglazed pottery.

1. What did the First Emperor have buried near his tomb?
2. Why did Prince Hu Hai at first refuse to plot for the throne?
3. What did Zhao Gao mean when he told the prince, “Great men do not perform grand deeds out of prudence”?
4. Why did Li Si use the proverb “words that would cause a nation to perish” to respond to Zhao Gao?
5. What pragmatic advice did Zhao Gao give to Li Si? (Pragmatic means acting according to practical results rather than principles.)
6. How did Zhao Gao express relativism (the idea that there is no absolute right or wrong) in his philosophy?
7. Why did the conspirators hide the emperor’s death?
8. How did Zhao Gao corrupt Li Si? What effects did this have on Li Si?

**Chapter 9: “Pointing to a Deer and Calling It a Horse,” pgs. 95–114**

**feng shui:** Chinese art of balancing people’s surroundings to bring harmony with spiritual forces.

**Iago:** In Shakespeare’s play *Othello*, General Othello’s aide who deceives and destroys him.

1. What was the Second Emperor’s goal?
2. How was his reign even more harsh than his father’s?
3. Why were Li Si and his family executed?
4. How did Zhao Gao test to see which ministers were loyal to him and which were loyal to the emperor?
5. After Zhao Gao had the emperor killed, why could he not become emperor himself? Who did he proclaim emperor instead?
6. What rebel leader did Zi Ying surrender to, in what year?

**Chapter 10: “Little Sparrow with Dreams of Swans,” pgs. 115–124**

Note that the author has gone back in time a few years here, to early in the Second Emperor’s reign, three years before Zi Ying surrendered.

1. What was Adeline’s grandfather communicating to her with the message, “little sparrow with dreams of swans”? What dreams did she have?
2. Who did Confucius say could be a *jun zi*, a person capable of ruling? What results did this idea have in Chinese history?
3. Why did Chen She start a rebellion?
4. Why was it so easy for him to raise an army?
5. What did Confucius teach about the responsibility of rulers and the penalties for abuse of power?
6. Do you agree that Confucius’s concept that “any man might be a *jun zi*,” as explained in this chapter, is the same as Thomas Jefferson’s “all men are created equal”? If not, how are these two concepts different? How has their application in history been different?

**Chapter 11: “Destroy the Cooking Cauldrons and Sink the Boats,” pgs. 125–142**

This proverb is similar to the ideas “burn your bridges,” “no looking back,” “point of no return,” or “do or die.”

**Fourth Uncle:** Birth order is very important in Chinese families, with the younger children deferring to the older children. Siblings are often identified by number. For instance, in Adeline Yen Mah’s autobiography, she calls her brother James “my third elder brother,” using the Chinese term *san ge*.



1. What two rebel leaders from Chu began to fight against the Qin in 209 B.C.E.?
2. Why did the Xiangs place the grandson of the late King of Chu on the throne?
3. Each of these two rebel leaders was given a different assignment. What were their assignments? Did they complete them?
4. When Xiang Yu's army, which was outnumbered ten to one, crossed the river, how did it benefit them to "destroy the cooking cauldrons and sink the boats"?
5. Why did Zhang Han (the Qin general) bring his army to the side of Xiang Yu (the rebel leader)? Why did Xiang Yu kill the Qin soldiers?
6. Why did Xiang Yu and Liu Bang turn against each other?
7. What do the two characters in the Chinese word for "crisis" mean? How is that appropriate?

**Chapter 12: "This Young Man Is Worth Educating," pgs. 143–158**

The author again goes back in time a little, to the point shortly before Liu Bang conquered the capital.

1. Why did Liu Bang at first refuse to see Mad Master? What changed his mind?
2. How did Zhang Liang's teacher test him to see if he were worth educating? What characteristics do you think he was looking for?
3. How did Liu Bang's reputation for generosity and kindness help him conquer the capital?
4. Although Liu Bang was tempted to relax into a life of luxury, what did his counselors advise him to do? What did he do?
5. What code of three laws did Liu Bang put into effect?
6. What were Liu Bang's strengths, which won the hearts of the people?
7. Why was it ironic that Mao Tse-tung, in the Cultural Revolution, "burned the books and buried the scholars"?

**Chapter 13: "Banquet at Wild Goose Gate," pgs. 159–168**

Now that Liu Bang has captured the capital and Xiang Yu has forced his way through the pass, they confront each other.

This whole chapter is about the concept of "face," which means honor, self-respect, and a person's appearance before his community.

1. Why do some members of Adeline Yen Mah's family refuse to speak to her?
2. Why did Xiang Bo warn Liu Bang that Xiang Yu was about to attack him?
3. When Liu Bang said he would treat Xiang Bo as if he were his older brother, what did he mean?
4. How did Liu Bang "give face" to Xiang Yu? What obligation did this put on Xiang Yu?
5. Why did Xiang Yu not kill Liu Bang?

6. Why did Liu Bang leave the banquet without saying good-bye?
7. What did the proverb “While Xiang Zhuang ostensibly performs a sword dance, his real intention is to kill Liu Bang, Lord of Pei” (notice this is only eight words in Chinese!) come to mean?

**Chapter 14: “Dressed in the Finest Brocades to Parade in the Dark of Night,” pgs. 169–185**

**WARNING:** There are some nasty lists of punishments in the middle of this chapter (pgs. 173–4); if you’re squeamish or tend toward nightmares, you might want to skip them!

**Xiang Yu:** With his superior military forces, took over China and gave Liu Bang a small outlying kingdom to rule (not keeping their agreement, which would have given him Qin since he entered there first).

1. How did Xiang Yu’s treatment of the city of Xianyang differ from Liu Bang’s? Which gained a better reputation among the people?
2. Why did Xiang Yu not stay to govern China from Xianyang, which had a strong and easily defensible position? What did he mean by using this chapter’s proverb?
3. Did Xiang Yu follow Confucius’s idea of rule, as described at the end of chapter 10?
4. Into how many kingdoms did Xiang Yu divide China?
5. Why did Liu Bang burn some of the bridges connecting his small kingdom to the rest of China? What were his intentions?
6. How was Hahn Xin’s crawling between a young man’s legs a “test of supreme courage”?
7. What did Hahn Xin advise Liu Bang to do?

**Chapter 15: “Plot to Sow Discord and Create Enmity,” pgs. 187–199**

1. What method did Adeline Yen Mah use to get her aunt the surgery she needed?
2. Why was there so much turmoil in the new kingdoms created by Xiang Yu?
3. Xiang Yu was faced with two major rebellions in different parts of the country. Who convinced him that Rong’s rebellion was more dangerous than Liu Bang’s? How?
4. How did Liu Bang make it clear that he was starting a new dynasty, the Han dynasty?
5. How did Liu Bang unite the people to attack Xiang Yu?
6. Liu Bang used a “plot to sow discord and create enmity” between which two men? Why?
7. Liu Bang took Xiang Yu’s capital, then Xiang Yu took it back. Liu Bang was besieged, then escaped. Finally, what did Mad Master tell him was the most important thing? What did he advise him to capture?

**Chapter 16: “The Heart of the People Belongs to Han,”**  
**pgs. 201–211**

This chapter goes back to Chen Yu and Zhang Er, who were mentioned on page 190. Note that this General Hahn Xin is the man that was raised from being keeper of the granary to general in chief on pages 178–181.

*I Ching*: Ancient Chinese book, originally containing geometric figures used to predict the future, then expanded to teach philosophy and moral wisdom

1. Why does language affect our thoughts and reasoning?
2. What does this chapter’s proverb mean?
3. Chen Yu’s adviser, Li, suggested a trick, which Chen Yu scorned; he wanted to fight openly. General Hahn came up with his own trick and defeated Chen Yu. Why did General Hahn then ask Li’s advice? How were General Hahn and Chen Yu different?
4. Liu Bang sent General Hahn to attack Qi and sent Mad Master to convince Qi to surrender, but did not tell his complete plans to either one. What tragic result did this have?

**Chapter 17: “The Human Heart Is Difficult to Fathom,”**  
**pgs. 213–226**

1. Was this proverb used by James and Kuai to imply that certain people were good or that they were bad?
2. On pages 218–219, Liu Bang listed Xiang Yu’s crimes. Which do you think was worst, and why?
3. Diplomat Wu tried to convince General Hahn to leave Liu Bang and follow Xiang Yu. Why did General Hahn refuse?
4. What did Political Strategist Kuai try to convince Hahn to do? (Does this advice remind you of an earlier character in these stories?) Why did Hahn refuse?
5. Advice is very important in most of these stories. What did Kuai say about accepting advice?

**Chapter 18: “Devising Strategies in a Command Tent,”**  
**pgs. 227–238**

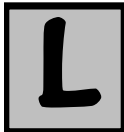
1. What did Adeline’s father say was the most important part of both business and war?
2. Liu Bang, who has been presented as a good character so far, here begins to change; perhaps power or the desire for power is corrupting him. What did he do immediately after signing a peace treaty with Xiang Yu?
3. How did Liu Bang get the support of General Hahn and Peng?
4. How did he later repay them? What previous proverb does this confirm?
5. How did Liu Bang discourage Xiang Yu and make his soldiers sad and homesick?
6. What is the word “China” derived from? Why?
7. What precious legacy did Grandfather Ye Ye leave Adeline?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Sima Qian says he wants to write because “I am still burdened with things in my heart that I have not had a chance to express” (pg. 16). Adeline Yen Mah says she wants to “transcend her hurt through literature.” What are some other reasons that people choose to write? How can writing about what is past help you to deal with the present?
2. On pg. 18 Ye Ye tells Adeline what he thinks is more important than money: relationships, morality, and education. Would you add other items to that list? What things do you and your family think are most important?
3. Li Si, and Adeline Yen Mah, argue that keeping out “foreigners,” or restricting the jobs they can have, will in the long run be counterproductive, like “binding your feet to prevent your own progress.” Do you agree? The United States has many laws restricting foreigners from coming into the country and limiting the jobs they may do. (The earliest immigrants to American, who may have included some of your ancestors from Europe or elsewhere, did not have such restrictions.) Do you think such laws are necessary and good, or should there be more freedom for people to come and do whatever jobs they can? How do government programs helping the poor complicate this situation (e.g., people could come and live on welfare rather than work)?
4. The First Emperor’s tomb, with his terra-cotta warriors, is described on pages 83–5. Why were so many ancient leaders buried with their treasures and representations of their servants or soldiers? What does this imply about their beliefs about life after death? What do you believe about life after death? How do you want to be buried? Do you think it makes a difference how you are buried?
5. Adeline Yen Mah gives some examples of people “pointing to a deer and calling it a horse.” Are you ever tempted to go along with something a person is saying, even if you know it’s not true? Is it possible to always speak the truth and not offend anyone? What if speaking the truth would cost you your job, or even your life; would you still do it? What things are worth standing up for and speaking out on, no matter what the cost, and what things are insignificant enough that they’re not worth an argument?
6. There is much discussion about law and government in this book. What do you think of Liu Bang’s three laws, on page 155? Are more laws than those necessary? If so, what? How can a government both make laws and be under the law?
7. In Chinese culture, a person’s “face,” or honor and integrity, is very important. What do you believe makes a person honorable? What, in your culture and in your family, is shameful? How can you act both humbly and honorably?





## LITERARY LESSON: WRITING ABOUT HISTORY—

### PEOPLE AND EVENTS

#### Getting to Know a Time: The Past and the Present

“Only true events happening to real people interest me anymore,” said Grandfather Ye Ye towards the end of his life (pg. 202).

Every day you read the stories, the “history,” of people and events. A newspaper article tells you about an earthquake that happened yesterday. A feature report in the same newspaper explains how chocolate was invented. A columnist shares an event from his own life and its relevance to yours. An interview in your favorite magazine presents the story of a popular singer’s life, and how she became famous. A biography of Saddam Hussein, or a story about the Crusades, helps you better understand conflicts in the Middle East. A book about soccer describes the sport’s invention and development and the lives of its most famous players.

All of these are history, whether the events occurred yesterday, a hundred years ago, or a thousand years ago. In *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*, Adeline Yen Mah intertwines the recent past (her own life), the last century (the China of Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung), and the ancient past of more than 2200 years ago (the reign of the First Emperor and his successors). She explains how these events are connected and draws lessons for the present. According to the book, history can be an “anchor,” a “source of life’s meaning,” and a way to “bring order out of chaos” (pg. 35).

#### Writing Nonfiction

Writing about history may use all four types of expository writing. **Narrative** writing tells a story; in this case, a true story about people and events of the past. **Descriptive** writing, as you learned in the last unit, draws the reader into the place where the story is happening, appeals to the five senses, and creates images that fill in the background of the story. **Explanatory** writing explains the causes and effects of events, the connections between people and events, and the cultural influences that motivate people’s actions. **Persuasive** writing may also be involved if the writer wishes to convince the readers of a perspective, conclusion, or opinion, or influence them to respond in some way.

Writing about history is nonfiction, like other kinds of expository writing. But many aspects of it overlap with fiction, and even with poetry. The writer introduces and develops characters, such as the First Emperor and Liu Bang. Those characters’ personalities are demonstrated through description, words, and actions, as in fiction, though the author doesn’t have the liberty to create those aspects; instead, he must locate and choose details from available information about the characters. The characters are involved in conflicts with one another, like the conflict between the Second Emperor and the old prime minister, Li Si. Their actions make up a plot, as in the story of Xiang Yu and Liu Bang’s rise to power. The action takes place in a setting, in this case ancient China, which the author may only mention or may describe in detail. Poetic techniques, such as sensory images, figures of speech, vivid words,

and appeals to the senses, may be used in developing the setting and characters. And a history writer often develops a theme, a central idea or message. *A Thousand Pieces of Gold* uses a Chinese proverb, or sometimes several proverbs, to summarize the theme of each chapter. One statement of the overall theme of the book might be the proverb on page 113, “Use incidents from the past as lessons for the future.” As you grow in your writing skills for any one genre or category, whether fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or drama, you will find ways to apply the same skills to the other genres.

### THE BEGINNING

In writing nonfiction, begin with a “hook,” an opening that catches your reader’s attention. In Unit 4 of *Lightning Literature: World Lit I*, I showed you some hooks used in autobiographies. Adeline Yen Mah uses several different types of hooks for her chapters, and I have rewritten some of her lines into openings that could work as other types of hooks for articles or essays. Use some of the many options for strong beginnings:

**STORY (ANECDOTE), PERSONAL OR HISTORIC:** Adeline Yen Mah begins her introduction and each of her chapters with a personal story to “hook” your attention and lead you to recognize that ancient history is still relevant today. A story from your own life, another modern story, or a dramatic story from history can start your essay with a bang. If you start with a dramatic story, or in the middle of a story, you might want to save the ending for later, after you have filled in the details. The suspense may encourage your reader to continue reading.

**PROVERB OR QUOTATION:** She uses proverbs as chapter titles, but they could also be used as openings for essays.

**DESCRIPTION WITH AN INTERESTING PERSPECTIVE:** Chapter 8 could have begun: “Row upon row of warriors are lined up neatly in battle formation, poised to fight on behalf of their emperor. Each soldier has his own distinctive facial features; no two look alike. When first discovered, they were carrying real metal weapons such as swords, halberds, dagger axes, spears, and spikes, which were made of a special alloy that had not rusted after two millennia. Who were these life-sized red clay soldiers prepared to serve? A man who died 2200 years ago, the First Emperor of China.”

**“YOU-ARE-THERE”:** “Hot and dusty, after clambering over seemingly miles of burial mounds, you at last peep into a shadowy opening. You see row upon row of warriors . . .”

**QUESTION:** “Do you know who the three most influential men who ever lived were? According to the Chinese, one was a philosopher, one was a king, and one was a Communist. Why were these three men so important to China?”

**DIALOGUE:** “‘I’ll kill you!’ Xiang Yu shouted to Liu Bang.”

**DEFINITION:** “My grandfather told me that a proverb is a wise saying that mirrors the past to benefit the present.” This usually should not be a strict dictionary definition, but a definition with some kind of twist or an unusual perspective.

**UNEXPECTED OR STARTLING STATEMENT, OR STATISTICS:** “People in China reverence the written word so much that they bow and pray while scraps of paper are burned.”

**INTRODUCTION OF AN UNUSUAL CHARACTER:** “They called him Mad Master. They respected him for his great learning, but avoided him because he was tactless, rude, and contrary, walking the thin line between madness and genius.”

You may think of a different way to begin, but be sure it attracts the reader’s attention. Following the hook, tell the reader your topic and point of view with some version of your thesis statement. You need to be clear in your own mind what your purpose is and make it clear to your reader also. After Yen Mah’s opening story about her grandfather, she summarizes her purpose by saying, “In this book, I would like to share my knowledge, as well as my love of proverbs, with you.” After several more stories, about modern Chinese history, she again clearly states one of her themes: “This true story illustrates the importance of proverbs in influencing behavior and forming opinions in China today.” By the end of the introduction, your reader should know what you are going to talk about, your perspective on the topic, how you are going to approach it, and what your tone will be. You may want to write your opening last, or at least revise it completely when you have written the rest of the article, since it is very important.

**“Always keep in mind that  
life is short, riches come and go,  
but written words are immortal.”  
Ye Ye in *A Thousand Pieces of  
Gold*, by Adeline Yen Mah**

### **THE MIDDLE**

In the body of your article you need to explain the who, what, when, where, why, and how of an event, including details and background. Sometimes it is best to summarize the story first and then fill in details. On page 39, Yen Mah first describes a situation and Li Si’s response to it, then goes back to explain Li Si and his background and involvement in the situation. If you begin with too many background details, the reader may find it hard to understand the overall picture and the importance of the details.

Consider your purpose for writing and the audience who will be reading your paper. Choose details, words, and a style that are appropriate for both. Use specific details and examples that reinforce your theme. Make sure your facts are correct, and present them clearly and in an interesting way. Give facts and background before interpreting and analyzing.

In historical writing, you usually should use the past tense and write in chronological order. Yen Mah, although she skips between different eras, generally keeps her main story, about ancient China, in chronological order. It gets a little confusing when she begins talking about the different rebel leaders and moves back and forth in time; if you need to do this, make the time changes very clear (“Two years earlier, the rebellion had begun.” “Ten years later, his son went on to . . .”).

### THE ENDING

Your ending should connect ideas and events and make the paper feel complete. At the same time, it should add some new twist or perspective, so that the reader will continue to think about the topic. Some ways to end an article or essay, with examples from the ends of chapters in *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*:

- **FULL CIRCLE:** Often the ending brings a paper full circle, referring back to the beginning. Yen Mah closes her introduction with a reference to the story about her grandfather with which she began. The ending of chapter 10 completes the story begun in the beginning of the chapter, about Adeline’s seeking her education abroad.
- **ANECDOTE:** The last part of chapter 3 is a story, which connects recent practices with the ancient story she has told.
- **ECHO ENDING** (a word or phrase repeated throughout the essay is used to close it): Chapters 3, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, and 17 all close with a repetition of the proverb or proverbs in that chapter.
- **QUOTE:** Chapter 4 ends with a quote prophesying trouble; the reader can see that this ancient quote applies to a modern situation. Chapter 17 also ends with a quote that connects the past and the present.
- **WARNING:** The chapter 4 quote is a warning against excluding “foreigners” from a country. Chapter 8 ends, “a warning was given that in life it is impossible to please everyone. A policy of accommodation toward amoral and ruthless individuals may, in the long run, lead to personal and national disaster.”
- **END OF ACTION:** Chapter 5 ends with the death of Mao and his last words. Chapter 9 ends with Li Si’s doom because he had betrayed his master.
- **SUMMARY:** Chapter 6 ends, “This is how metaphors grow; this is why I think in proverbs.” Chapter 18, and thus the whole book, concludes with a summary of what the author has been trying to communicate, a connection back to the story about her grandfather at the beginning of the book, and lessons she has learned for her life even through difficulties.
- **POETIC ENDING:** Chapter 7 uses poetic language at its close: “History is regarded as a mirror of the human condition, a timeless parable from the past, to aid in governing lives not only here and now but for countless generations to come.”
- **CONNECTION:** The end of chapter 11, among others, ties together the stories in that chapter, so that we see their connection and meaning and have a sense of closure or completeness, as if the last puzzle piece had been put in place. At the end of chapter 16, Adeline sees a connection between her past and her present. Often a connection between the past and the present is the best way to end a story from history.
- **IRONIC OR SURPRISE ENDING** (something happens that is different than expected): In the end of chapter 12, H.H.’s high hopes and idealism are destroyed by reality. In the end of chapter 15, a harmless-sounding plan leads to serious damage.
- **RELATED FACT OR FINAL DETAIL:** The final paragraph of chapter 13 is an explanation of “face” and how it explains parts of the stories in the chapter.

- **CONTRAST:** Chapter 14 finishes with a contrast between Adeline’s dreams and reality, using two proverbs.
- **APPLICATION TO THE READER’S LIFE:** The end of the book implies that we need to be careful what kind of legacy we leave for others through our conduct, and that we can receive good from people even when they treat us badly.

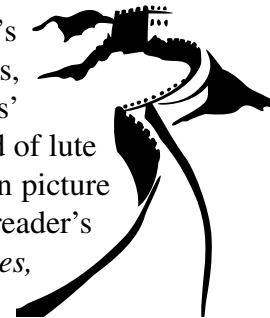
As you can see, several of these types of endings may be combined. Work on an ending that brings closure to your piece, so the reader feels satisfied and at the same time challenged to reflect further.

### **Narrative Writing**

Much writing about history is narrative: It tells a story. Narrative nonfiction writing is usually more structured than the fictional storytelling in a short story or novel. Most paragraphs have topic sentences that give them a focus. For instance, on page 7 a paragraph begins, “Westerners too have been captivated by the charm of Chinese proverbs.” This is followed by a story about a person the author met in London and his ideas. On page 122 a paragraph starts, “Much of China was aflame.” It goes on to tell about the fighting throughout the country. Still, the stories should be dramatic and entertaining enough that the reader will feel some suspense and keep wondering, “What will happen next?”

This reader involvement is usually based on well-developed characters that the reader cares about. Include stories that are personal, about individual human beings, more than impersonal narrative, about the general sweep of events. Tell about a variety of individuals if you can. Yen Mah mentions that Sima Qian “was innovative, bringing history alive by writing biographies of notable individuals” (pg. 14), not only of kings. This is called adding “human interest”: showing how events affected people’s lives.

Add descriptive images to your narrative to create pictures in the reader’s mind and set a mood. Historical stories might be exciting, sad, humorous, frustrating, inspiring, or tense. Include vivid details that affect the readers’ emotions. On page 63 when you hear that the assassins left to the sound of lute songs, with people dressed in mourning clothes seeing them off, you can picture the scene and feel the pathos of it. Variety in word choice also keeps the reader’s attention. For instance, on page 75 the author says the Great Wall *stretches, lies, climbs, ends, runs, traverses, strides, and stands!*



### **Explanatory Writing: Interpretation and Analysis**

A historian’s job, as Sima Qian said, is not only to record what happened but to “discern the patterns leading from the past to the present, proffering my views as one method of interpretation.” A story from history may be very interesting, but it won’t affect us strongly unless we can somehow evaluate its meaning for us today. Adeline Yen Mah does this throughout *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*. On page 52, she compares a Chinese view of law with

a Western view of law and helps us understand the consequences of each. She constantly draws comparisons between ancient and modern leaders, such as Mao and the First Emperor on page 67, or Li Si and Zhou Enlai on page 93. She shows how the past can be used to “attack the present” (pg. 78), how history can be reinterpreted to justify the present (79), and how history influences life today (pg. 82).

### Research

Research is an important part of writing about history. Make sure your facts are correct; double-check them if you are not 100 percent sure. If you have two sources that disagree, you may need to go to their sources and see which is most accurate or reliable. Especially if you find sources on the Internet, where anyone who wishes can post information, try to confirm them with more solid sources if you can. Don’t make assumptions, even very likely ones, without stating what you are doing: “It seems likely that . . .”

If you can, use original, primary sources from the time period you are investigating. This may be easy if you are writing about a recent event and you can call or email people who were involved in it. For events farther in the past, there may be documents, diaries, letters, autobiographies, interviews, or literature from the time period; locate them if you can. In most cases you will have to rely on secondary sources like modern books, articles, and encyclopedias. Adeline Yen Mah used *Shiji* for much of her material. Since most of the events happened before the author’s birth, it was not a primary source for most of the stories; however, it was at least written close to the time when they happened and so was likely to be more reliable than a source written much later. Whatever sources you use, make sure you refer to several of them and evaluate them carefully. If several different sources (not all based on one earlier source!) confirm a fact, it is more likely to be true.

Even primary sources may be incorrect. Consider whether the author had any reason to lie or exaggerate. For instance, if Sima Xian wanted to please the current emperor because he depended on him for his salary or advancement, he might have made that emperor’s accomplishments (or his father’s or grandfather’s accomplishments) look better than they were. The writer may also be giving an unbalanced view, based only on his or her personal perspective and memory. Adeline Yen Mah, in sharing her experiences growing up, talks about abuses that might be colored quite differently if her stepmother or one of her siblings were writing the story. Also consider whether the source was written for the public or for a private audience. A person writing a letter to a friend might be more frank and open than one who is writing for the public and does not want to show negative aspects of himself or his family. (Such frankness in published material can disrupt family relationships, as Adeline Yen Mah experienced!) Look for direct experience rather than hearsay. Marco Polo’s *Travels*, for instance, is a primary source about Asia during his time. However, he describes some things he saw or experienced himself, and other things that people told him. The things he heard about are more likely to be exaggerated or invented than those he says he saw. (He also wrote some years after the experiences, so even some of what he claims to have seen may have changed in his memory.)

To find sources, talk to people familiar with your subject and ask them for suggestions. Ask your parents, teachers, or librarians where you might find helpful sources. Start by reading an overview of the topic from an encyclopedia; it may suggest further sources to investigate. If you find a helpful book, check its bibliography for other possible sources. Your library may have books (or may be able to get books through inter-library loan), periodicals (newspapers, magazines), reference materials, and databases related to your topic. An Internet search will probably lead to a wide variety of information. When you find sources, evaluate their relevance by looking at the table of contents and the index to see if they have information you are looking for. As you find information, you may write it on index cards or type it on your computer; make sure you put it in some format where you can easily rearrange it as you organize your information and prepare to use it. Also make sure the source of each bit of information is included with it. You might make a list of your sources (complete with author, title, publisher, place of publication, and date of publication), number them, and use those numbers to identify the information in your notes. See *Writers Inc*, *Write for College*, or another reference for more ideas about finding, organizing, quoting, and presenting information. All sources that you use should be documented in some way, usually by a bibliography or works-cited page at the end of your paper.

### **Point of View**

A writer of history, like a fiction writer, speaks from a point of view; usually third person (he, she, they), but sometimes first person (I, we). Adeline Yen Mah uses first person for the stories of her own family and third person for stories about historical figures.

The point of view of a piece of nonfiction is also affected by the voice the writer chooses: *objective* or *subjective*. As you write, is your goal to be *objective*: to simply present the facts, information that can be proved to be true and tell exactly what happens? Even so, you will need to pick and choose from the many facts available and decide how to convey them. The third person is usually used for an objective, impersonal voice. You may have been told not to use “I” or “we” in an essay about science or history or literature; your teacher is looking for an objective point of view that focuses on facts rather than opinions and personal experiences. Objective writing is usually analytical, impersonally examining the evidence and reaching conclusions. News articles generally attempt to be objective, impersonal, and fair, though any writer writes from some slant based on personal background and worldview. Other parts of a newspaper or magazine, such as editorials and features, are more *subjective*. The writer includes opinions, personal observations, feelings, biases, motives, emotions, and connections between other people’s experiences and his or her own. A subjective voice can range from very partisan, clearly expressing one point of view, to a more balanced point of view.

What kind of voice does Adeline Yen Mah use in *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*? Obviously her personal experiences are subjective; we hear them only from her point of view and with her personal interpretation of the events. The Chinese history stories are more objective, though no doubt they include Sima Xian’s personal perspective. But when Yen Mah begins to interpret those stories and to draw lessons from them and compare them with her own life and

other lives, she is adding a more subjective viewpoint. She gives facts, such as that Li Si plotted to put the Second Emperor in power, and then gives her opinions when she makes judgments about those facts: “When Li Si listened to Zhao Gao, he lost his integrity and with it his moral authority” (pg. 93).

## CULTURE AND WORLDVIEW

As we learn about China’s past, we also learn much about its culture and worldviews. As Yen Mah says, “every form of thought is related to the language, culture, and history of a particular thinker, conditioned since birth in his or her own national category. Westerners and Chinese have different views of the world . . . ancient proverbs still shape the thoughts and behavior of Chinese people today” (pg. 5). She talks a lot about the Chinese language, and says “The language we speak, therefore, affects our thoughts and reasoning” (pg. 202). Her goal is “to provide a window into the Chinese mind” (8) and to explain “how the Chinese think, and why we think the way we do” (pg. 238).

What does Yen Mah show us about Chinese culture? She emphasizes respect for the past; she tells us that Chinese culture has been transmitted continuously for over two thousand years because the Chinese script has not changed in that time. She mentions the influence of Chinese culture on other cultures, such as Vietnam [though I think her statement that those cultures were “the same” is exaggerated (pg. 72)]. She claims that Chinese literature and art are “inextricably linked” (pg. 77) because the writing system is based on pictures. And she shows us much about her culture’s values, characteristics, and worldview.

## CULTURAL VALUES

From this book, do you get the impression that Chinese culture focuses most on honor and shame, fear and power, or guilt and righteousness? There are many references to honor and shame in the book. The rebels put their lives on the line for the sake of “renown and honor” (pg. 120). Some people commit suicide to wipe out their shame when they have failed in some way; Sima Qian is ashamed because he chose castration rather than death and thus dishonored his family name (pg. 12). When Prince Dan is insulted, rather than committing suicide, he looks for someone to “avenge his humiliation” (pg. 57). Honoring parents and leaders, a strong Confucian value, is very important; King Zheng builds his mother a palace (pg. 33), although she is under house arrest, in order to keep up the appearance of following this value, and thus to maintain his own honor. Chapter 13 is all about maintaining “face,” which is defined as “self-respect” or “honor,” a fundamental concept in Chinese culture. One Chinese proverb that Yen Mah does not mention says, “A person needs face as a tree needs bark.”



In an interesting twist, Hahn Xin receives honor for “voluntarily enduring the worst kind of humiliation” (crawling under someone’s legs, page 179). Humility is constantly apparent in Chinese culture (e.g., page 79, when Li Si denigrates his accomplishments). Courtesy in



China usually involves self-deprecation, putting oneself down, and even disparaging one's own family, since praising your family would be the same as praising yourself. Perhaps this is a way of recognizing that honoring yourself is not true honor; if you humble yourself, then others may honor you (as Jesus said in Luke 14:7–11).

There is at least one reference to guilt and righteousness, in Yen Mah's analysis of Li Si. After saying that his behavior made him "lose face in his own eyes," she adds, "if he feels in his heart that he is wrong, he must stand in fear even though his opponent is the least formidable of foes." Here internal guilt leads to both shame and fear.

Several leaders use fear to support their power: The Second Emperor "turned to terror to underpin his regime" (pg. 106); Xiang Yu "rules by fear, and 'everyone hates him to the marrow'" (pg. 182). However, Liu Bang is honored for his kindness and moderation, and he overcomes both the Second Emperor and Xiang Yu in the end.

### CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

As is generally true of honor and shame cultures, Chinese culture is strongly group-oriented, rather than individualistic. According to *Encountering the Chinese*, membership in a family and a clan are key elements of any Chinese person's identity. Children are expected to honor their parents, older relatives including siblings, and their elders in general. You see this in various relationships in *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*. For instance, on page 162 Liu Bang said he would treat Xiang Bo as an older brother and proceeded to treat him with "the utmost respect." Mad Master rebuked Liu Bang for not showing respect to an older person (pg. 147). Hu Hai, before he became emperor, objected on the basis that, "It is not right to displace an older brother and install a younger one in his shoes" (pg. 89).

People in the book are also loyal to, and find their identities in, their clans or states, such as Zhao or Qin. In modern China, people still find their identities in groups. They are members of class collectives while in school and work units after they graduate. A love for China as a whole also distinguishes the Chinese people: "The heart of the people belongs to Han" (pg. 236). Perhaps this group orientation also explains the deep love of home that is described in chapter 14, along with the feeling that individual accomplishments are not worthwhile if the person can't go back home and show his family and clan those achievements.



In Yen Mah's book, there are occasional glimpses of the formal nature of Chinese culture, for instance in the "Banquet at Wild Goose Gate." A code of etiquette for dealing with guests, mentioned on page 168, is so important that it has its own name: *ke qi*. According to *Encountering the Chinese*, Chinese culture is also relationship-oriented, tends to use indirect communication, values inclusion rather than privacy, practices spontaneous hospitality, and is time-oriented (arriving early communicates respect); you may find examples of these values in the book or in the short stories you will be reading from China.

### WORLDVIEW

Yen Mah says, “Factors such as ancestor worship, filial piety, respect for the elderly, Confucianism, and continuity of the Chinese language have all contributed to the importance of the study of history in China” (pg. 237). Several stories in the book show a Confucian worldview, which esteems duty to one’s family and ruler, respect to elders, loyalty, equality of opportunity, earning honor based on behavior and character rather than birth, and above all reveres learning, scholarship, books, and education (pg. 156). The goal of Confucianism is social harmony, and the means to reach it is education. The *san lao*, or desirable qualities, listed on page 193 sound very Confucian: honest in thought, deed, and word; strict standards in work, organization, attitude, and observation of discipline; plus moral fiber, filial piety, leadership, and intelligence.

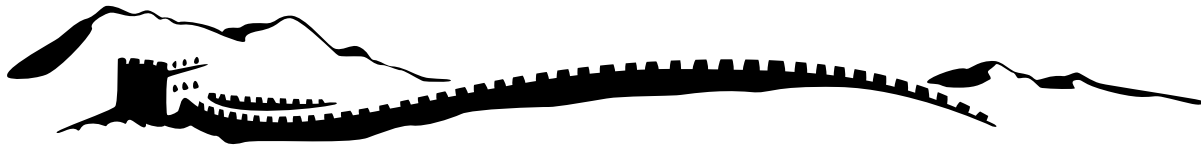
Confucius didn’t teach much about God, though he appears to have accepted polytheism; his main emphasis was on people’s responsibilities to each other. Chinese traditional religion does not include a supreme creator God, though the universe was seen as swarming with good and bad spirits, ghosts, and ancestors; and people attempted to placate these spirits so that they would do them good and not harm. “Gods” are only rarely mentioned in the book. Liu Bang, before appointing his general in chief, kneels and prays to “Heaven” at an altar. When he later becomes emperor, he establishes new gods of the “land and grains” as a symbol of a new dynasty. Under Confucian philosophy, the Emperor is mandated by “Heaven” rather than by a personal god, and is considered to be above the laws of men (pg. 52). Confucius did teach, though, that rulers exist for the welfare of the people and lose the “mandate of Heaven” if they abuse their power (pg. 123). When Hu Hai is considering taking over the empire, he objects on the basis of respect toward his father and brother and his lack of ability and says, “If I were to behave in such a manner, I would fall into danger and the spirits of the land would reject my sacrifices” (pg. 89). Zhao Gao convinces prime minister Li Si to ignore similar Confucian concerns by asking pragmatically, “Would it not be wiser to decide first on what is dangerous and what is safe before worrying about the will of Heaven or how to honor the sages?” (pg. 90). He also introduces a relativistic view by asking, “If circumstances are constantly altering, how can there be but one correct rule of conduct?” (pg. 91). In the end, Hu Hai, Zhao Gao, and Li Si leave Confucian ideas and rely on fate, or fortune, which gives them success in the short run and disaster in the long run.

The First Emperor’s extensive tomb, with its terra-cotta army, apparently expresses a belief in some kind of afterlife similar to life on earth (pgs. 84–5). He didn’t have much confidence in this afterlife, though; he spent his last years obsessed with the pursuit of immortality (pg. 74)! He banned the teachings of Confucius (pg. 202) and believed in Taoism, a worldview with a strong emphasis on nature and balance. It teaches that history moves in cycles, with each cycle dominated by one of the five elements (pg. 70); that a man by withdrawing from the world could be transformed into an immortal, divine man (pg. 78); that yin and yang are opposing forces in the world that balance each other (pg. 79); and that whatever happens in the world, good or bad, is fleeting and transitory. The desire for harmony, for balance between yin and yang, was expressed in worship both of ancestors and of nature. The First Emperor

made sacrifices to ancient kings (pg. 86) and to mountains and rivers (pg. 87). His general, Meng Tian, thought that by building the Great Wall he had “cut through the veins of the earth and disturbed it in other ways” (pg. 104), causing him to deserve death. In this he had transgressed against feng shui, which emphasizes respect for earth and nature. The Chinese traditionally believe that all of nature, including man, is a “living, breathing organism” (Burnett, pg. 100).

Over the years, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and traditional ideas about ancestors and gods combined to create a uniquely Chinese worldview. In the twentieth century, of course, Mao’s version of Communism attempted to destroy these religious views, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Taoist and Buddhist temples and religious buildings were destroyed or used for non-religious purposes. Since the 1970s, however, the Chinese government has been somewhat more tolerant of various religions.

History is not neutral. All these aspects of Chinese culture and worldview are reflected both in the events of Chinese history and in the ways that Adeline Yen Mah chose to explain and interpret that history. As you write about history, consider not just what happened, but what it meant to those who experienced it and what it can mean to you today. Whether you want to tell your own stories or other people’s stories, you will need to write about the past.



## WRITING EXERCISES

Whichever of the following exercises you choose, make sure you begin with a strong opening, choosing from the options in the literary lesson above, and a strong closing. Do research as necessary, and include a bibliography of any sources you used. Give your piece an appealing title. Note that “story” in these exercises is used to refer to true stories, not fiction.

1. Tell the story of a historical event or an event in your own or your family’s past that supports or uses one of the proverbs in the book (see list in the back) or any other proverb that you know. Write one to two pages, and include the proverb in your story.
2. Think of an event from history (your own country’s, another country’s, or biblical) that is similar in some way to one of the events described in *A Thousand Pieces of Gold*. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the two events.
3. Choose an event from your life or your family’s past that connects in some way with a story you know from history. Write an essay explaining the two stories and showing how they are connected and what you can learn from them. You might use a proverb, a moral lesson, or some other connection between the stories.
4. Choose an event from history or from your own life that illustrates a value, characteristic, or belief of some culture or worldview (see Appendix C). Write a 1- to 2-page essay about that event, explaining how it illustrates that value or characteristic.
5. On page 67, Mao Tse-tung is compared to the First Emperor. Write a paper comparing and contrasting these two men and their historical actions. Or do the same with any two historical figures.
6. Write about something that happened to you, a person you know, or someone in history, in such a way that the event illuminates some aspect of the character and personality of the person involved.
7. Write four paragraphs about something that happened to you or someone in your family, or another historical or recent event. In one paragraph, explain the event and its background, answering who, what, when, where, why, and how. In another paragraph, describe the setting and people involved in the event, using vivid words, figurative

language, and images. In another paragraph, narrate the same event in chronological order. In another paragraph, persuade someone about some aspect of the event: some lesson you learned from it, or some generalization about it (this was the worst/best/most frightening/most interesting event . . .). Put the paragraphs in a logical order.

8. Choose an event that happened in your family or among your friends. First write down as many details of the event as you can remember. Then ask one person to re-tell the event as he or she remembers it, with as many details as possible. Then ask another person (who didn't hear the first person) to do the same. Record them or take detailed notes. Compare their accounts with each other and with your own memory of the event. There will be differences, as we all perceive and remember different aspects of an event. Write an essay about the event, comparing and contrasting the three perspectives.
9. Write a brief story from history, your life, or your family history. In one paragraph write about it in a totally objective tone, relating only exact, provable facts. In the next paragraph, retell the same story subjectively, including personal opinions, feelings, and interpretations.
10. Research a story from history that is not familiar to you, following the guidelines in the literary lesson above. Write that story, with some explanation and interpretation. Your bibliography should list at least four sources, including at least one book and at least one Internet source if possible. Use a reference manual (such as *Writers INC*) to correctly format your listing of sources.
11. Write an interview of a historical character in which that person describes and evaluates his or her life or events in that life. The interviewer should use open-ended questions, such as "What was your most significant accomplishment, and why?" rather than questions like "In what year did you conquer China?" The character's style of speaking and attitudes should be appropriate to his or her real personality and time period, as much as possible. The character's tone should be very subjective, while the interviewer's tone will probably be objective. If possible, do the interview orally, with another student interviewing you, and record it.