**Translating the *Tao Te Ching***

Greetings, language enthusiasts (and others). Your job with this activity is to work with your group to translate one verse of the *Tao Te Ching* from the original Chinese into English.

If you have been an obedient child, you will have been engaging in a little independent research about the nature of Taoism and the *Tao Te Ching*. Use this knowledge to help you in this task.

You are going to do exactly what Ursula K. Le Guin did in creating her translation of the *Tao Te* Ching: create a word-for-word translation, and then use Paul Camus’s 1898 transliteration (an interpretive translation) to help shape an English-language version of a verse of the *Tao*. Note: Le Guin had no knowledge of the Chinese language. But she did have a strong love of language in general, and an interest in unearthing meaning. Channel those two forces inside yourself for this task.

Your group will create a literal, word-for-word translation from the Chinese text, and then work together to shape that translation into something that makes sense in English and that conveys the Big Idea behind your section. If you are trying to Extend your abilities, you might also be structuring this English version as a free-verse (non-rhyming) poem that looks and sounds pleasing and satisfying to read.

Keep in mind that this is an ancient text. Lao Tzu (the author) uses idioms (figures of speech) that are not used in modern Chinese. Also, idioms in general are tricky for people who don’t speak the language! For example, in English there is a saying, “Kill two birds with one stone,” which means using your time wisely and getting two beneficial results out of one action, like walking to school can save money *and* provide exercise; or telling Prof. Pai Mei what a great teacher he is makes him happy *and* distracts him from noticing you didn’t do your homework. But can you imagine what hearing someone say “Kill two birds with one stone” would be like if you didn’t speak English or understand the context? In Chinese, there is a similar idiom, but the literal translation would be “Two birds one stone,” which would make it even more confusing!

Keep in mind, too, that in Chinese each character has meaning, but characters in combination can sometimes alter that meaning. You will need to read the text carefully and keep your mind open.

If you can find a Big Idea for your section, you might be able to use that to help you come up with “maybe ideas” of how to translate parts of your section that seem confusing. It is okay to get playful as you reach to find these ideas, but also remember our purpose: we are searching for meaning. When you do your final version, you can let go of being literal and instead try to convey the overall meaning and adapt the images in the text as needed, to try to make that meaning clear.

This is also an exercise in group work. At the end of each session with your group, you will complete a Group Work Assessment form, assessing yourself and your group members. This is a private activity that is only shared with Prof. Pai Mei. It is not about tattling; it is about learning to view yourself and others objectively (from the outside), removed from feeling, so that you can see and experience what the traits of an effective group member are.

The first step is to choose a job you will be responsible for within the group.

**PROJECT MANAGER**

You are responsible for making sure your group completes this task. Your jobs include helping others feel comfortable sharing their ideas, helping people stay on task, and making sure your group is following the instructions. You are responsible for walking your group through the instructions and for making sure they don’t skip or rush any of the steps.

**MASTER TRANSLATOR**

This is someone who can read Chinese. You will be responsible for helping your group create the literal, word-for-word translation. You will also help your group understand the subtleties of meaning that can exist in each character. As your group begins to work in English, you will help remind them of the meaning of and complexities in the original Chinese text.

**TECH SUPPORT**

You are the only person in the group who is allowed to have a computer, and you are only allowed to use it when it is needed to complete parts of the activity. These times are limited to: 1) opening a browser to go to ***zhongwen.com*** to look up the meaning of a particular Chinese character, 2) opening a browser to go to our class blog to find the link to the Paul Camus transliteration on the Language Arts page, and 3) opening Word to type up the final version of your group’s translation. Other than those three times, the computer needs to be closed, and when in use no other tabs or apps may be open.

**POET LAUREATE**

You might be someone who loves words. Your job is to help your group explore possibilities while they create the final English version of your section of the *Tao*. You might use a thesaurus, or you might help your group brainstorm synonyms without one. You will encourage your group to focus on combining clarity of thought with precision of word choice as you move from your word-for-word translation to the final, more poetic form. You will also read your group’s work out loud to the class when it comes time to share the translations.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

**Please follow the instructions carefully and try not to rush any of the steps.**

1. The Master Translator reads the section out loud, in Chinese, so that they and other Chinese speakers in the group can hear the work aloud.  
     
   Then, Chinese speakers will help the non-Chinese speakers in the group understand what the general idea of the section is.
2. On the graphic organizer you were given, translate each character. Beside each character, write the possible meanings represented in the character.   
     
   If needed, Tech Support can get a computer and go to ***zhongwen.com*** to look up the meaning of any unknown Chinese characters.  
     
   Non-Chinese speakers: pay close attention here. Your noobie insights into the language as it emerges into English will be extremely useful to the group; you may be hear how the section unfolds in an interesting and useful way.   
     
   Everyone: notice how the image(s) unfold **as** the translation is being made. Keep track of your thoughts. Feel free to write down images in the graphic organizer as they occur to you.
3. Read the literal, word-for-word English translation out loud.
4. Now—and this is important!—work with your Master Translator to reconsider the translation. Remember that each individual character has meaning, but characters in combination can also alter that meaning. See if you can find an example of this to illustrate this idea to your non-Chinese speakers.  
     
   Remember, too, that this is old-timey language, and Lao Tzu is using idiom’s (figures of speech) that we might not use today. This is particularly true with characters that come in groups of four. Here, use context plus your imagination: what scene is being created?

Make notes on the word-for-word translation of these new thoughts and the new possibilities they present.   
  
Might there be layers of meaning within this verse that you are translating?

1. Now, with the assistance of your Tech Support, go to the Language Arts page on the class blog. There you will find a link to Paul Camus’s transliteration of the text. Find your verse and compare his interpretation to your translation.   
     
   Is anything different? Work with your Master Translator to explore the “maybe ideas” behind the differences.   
     
   Make notes on your word-for-word translation pages of any changes you’d like to make to your initial translation.
2. On the graphic organizer, brainstorm ideas about the Big Idea of the section. What is Lao Tzu trying to convey? What is the message?
3. Discuss: how can what you have learned about Taoism and the *Tao Te Ching* help you here? Go around the circle of your group and share the notes you have taken.

In the graphic organizer, write down your ideas about how aspects of this research might be in play in your verse.

1. Work together to create a rough draft of your English version, allowing sense and meaning to now steer the ship, rather than literal translation.   
     
   Things to keep in mind:

* Word choice—especially verbs—what word best conveys the meaning of what you are trying to get the audience to understand?
* Structure—if you structure the words on a page like a non-rhyming poem, where might the line breaks be? Why?
* Meaning—are there multiple possible meanings within the section? Is there a way to write it in English that helps those meanings co-exist?

1. We’ve come up with one way of doing it; what’s another? Make notes on the rough draft of other possibilities. Work together to find consensus (having everyone feel good about agreeing). If there is disagreement, how do you work together to find a version that works for everyone.
2. Read it out loud. Listen for flow. Listen for clarity. Listen for opportunities for precise word choice and image-building.
3. Ask: is the Big Idea clear?
4. Give your verse a title.
5. Type up the final version of your English translation, including the title, and print it out (printer 105!)
6. Say a simple “Thank you” to each member of your group, with eye contact. Accept the thanks that you receive.
7. After each session, complete the Group Work Assessment form. Remember: this is not about tattling; this is about learning to step back and view yourself and others objectively (from the outside, removed from emotion). *These forms are private: respect others’ privacy as they complete the form*. Please place face-down in the in-box when complete.
8. After your group has completed step 13, above, ask Prof. Pai Mei for the Reflection sheet.

Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Translating the *Tao* *Te Ching*—Reflection**

How did your group’s research into Taoism and the *Tao Te Ching* help you with this translation? Try your best to be specific, using an example or examples.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What connection(s) can you make from your verse of the *Tao Te Ching* to *A Wizard of Earthsea*? Try your best to be specific, using an example or examples.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What connection(s) can you make from your verse of the *Tao Te Ching* to the work we have done exploring mindset and clarity? Try your best to be specific, using an example or examples.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How might the ideas contained in your verse of the *Tao Te Ching* relate to your own life? How might it be useful to you? What might you do to practice it? Try your best to be specific, using and example or examples.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_