

**SELECTIONS FROM THE CLASSIC OF ODES:
"QUINCE" AND "BIG RAT"**

Introduction

The *Classic of Odes* (also called the "Book of Songs") is a compilation of popular and aristocratic songs dating from the early Zhou period. The popular songs are said to have been collected on the orders of the early Zhou kings as a way of gauging the feelings of their subjects. Thus, even the songs that are thought to have their roots in folk song and poetry are likely to have been modified by a scholarly official and may not be in their original form. Nonetheless, the songs give us a rich and varied view of the lives and concerns of commoners and of the elite of the Zhou dynasty. The compilation had taken on roughly the form that we see today by 544 BCE. Tradition has it that the *Classic of Odes* was edited by Confucius, who chose the poems carefully for the moral lessons contained therein. There is no evidence that Confucius actually did this, but it is significant to realize that the odes were read and interpreted within a Confucian moral framework.

Selected Document Excerpts with Questions (Complete documents follow this section)

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Selections from the Classic of Odes

"Quince"

She tossed a quince to me—
I repaid with a precious girdle-gem.
But this was no repayment,
It just shows that I'll love her forever.

She tossed a peach to me—
I repaid with a precious greenstone;
But this was no repayment,
It just shows that I'll love her forever.

She tossed a plum to me—
I repaid with a precious stone of ebon;
But this was no repayment,
It just shows that I'll love her forever.

[Translated by Paul Rouzer]

Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on

SELECTIONS FROM THE CLASSIC OF ODES: "QUINCE" AND "BIG RAT"

Questions:

1. What is the point of view of the speaker in this poem? What can you conclude about the speaker's gender, age, and family status?
2. What can you conclude about the relationship between the woman who tosses the quince, peach, and plum, and the speaker?

"Big Rat"

Big rat, big rat,
Do not gobble our millet!
Three years we have slaved for you,
Yet you take no notice of us.
At last we are going to leave you
And go to that happy land;
Happy land, happy land,
Where we shall have our place.

[Translated by Arthur Waley]

Questions:

1. What can you conclude about the point of view and the identity of the speaker in this poem?
2. What sort of a person is the speaker? What does the speaker do for a living? What is the speaker's social status?
3. What does the "big rat" in the poem represent?
4. If you were a ruler to whom this poem was presented as an example of the mood among your subjects, what would you think? What actions would you take?

Complete Documents

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And go to that happy land;
Happy land, happy land,
Where we shall have our place.

Big rat, big rat,
Do not gobble our corn!
Three years we have slaved for you,
Yet you give us no credit.
At last we are going to leave you

And go to that happy kingdom;
Happy kingdom, happy kingdom,
Where we shall get our due.

Big rat, big rat,
Do not eat our rice-shoots!
Three years we have slaved for you.
Yet you did nothing to reward us.
At last we are going to leave you
And go to those happy borders;
Happy borders, happy borders
Where no sad songs are sung.

[Translated by Arthur Waley]