

OPENING
DOORS
to a
RICHER
ENGLISH
CURRICULUM
for ages 10 to 13

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with Leah Crawford
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Foreword by Pie Corbett

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Unit 4

Among the White Clouds

‘Cold Mountain’ by Han-Shan

Opening Doors key strategy: extended metaphor

Can you build your understanding of an extended metaphor in poetry?

Can you write an original poem with your own metaphor extended effectively?

Han-Shan was supposedly a ninth-century poet who is associated with the Chinese Tang Dynasty. He seems to have led his life in simplicity and seclusion, even writing some of his poems on rocks. Thanks to dedicated translators, we can enjoy the beauty of Han-Shan’s words today. In this unit we will look at some short sections from his ‘Cold Mountain’ poems, which will provide a marvellous resource for your pupils to appreciate how the mountain metaphor is extended and how the wonder of poetry has deep and global roots.

Access strategies

Once your pupils start to engage with the cold mountain image, they will start thinking of all the places they have visited which seemed both beautiful and threatening. We would suggest using the first two lines from three selected stanzas, as presented below, to begin learning about the extension of a metaphor:

Men ask the way to Cold Mountain
Cold Mountain: there's no through trail.



I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,
Already it seems like years and years.

Clambering up the Cold Mountain path,
The Cold Mountain trail goes on and on:

Use a **mind link strategy** to explore exactly what each of the couplets might mean in a metaphorical way:

| | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Stanza 1: Men ask the way ... | What do 'cold' images mean? Is it literal or does it have a wider meaning? | Why do people 'ask the way'? | What does a 'through trail' mean? |
|--|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

| | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Stanza 2: I settled ... | What exactly does 'settled' mean? | Has 'long ago' got an exact time context? | Why is 'years' repeated? |
| Stanza 3: Clambering up ... | Define 'clambering'. | What image does 'trail' have for you? | How does 'on and on' link with 'years and years'? |

This analysis will lead to very rich **dialogic talk** if you ask different groups to address different couplets and feed back their ideas to the class. Emphasise how much poetry relies on our experience of vocabulary and meaning for interpretation. Improving comprehension is as much about our life experiences and the words we have read as about any class strategy.

It will be fascinating now to ask your pupils to draft the content of each stanza, though not necessarily as a poem at this stage. The idea is for them to understand that 'cold mountain' is a metaphor and how fresh concepts can extend the initial idea. Ideally, they will begin to use metaphor to link their three stanzas together. Visuals and illustrations may well support their thinking as they build their own meaning from the 'cold mountain' image.

These **taster drafts** should enable the children to experiment and ask further questions. How well can they capture the essence of the 'cold mountain'? Use assessment for learning at its most powerful to refine and improve their image-making. A cold mountain could be a stark but beautiful place which is only accessible on foot, and perhaps

dangerous too, but it could also be sacred or spiritual. What does the phrase mean to you and your pupils?

I (Bob) first came across the ‘Cold Mountain’ poems in *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* by Kenneth Koch (1973). It is a superb book in which Koch outlines his own teaching journey. He observes: ‘My poetry ideas were good ideas as long as they helped the children make discoveries and express feelings, which is what made them happy about writing’ (Koch, 1973: 111). He also makes the link between quality texts and quality writing, which of course plays an integral role in enhancing young learners’ engagement with literature.

The following taster draft by Sara Elkhoulfi from Greenacres Primary Academy was inspired by Han-Shan:

The beautiful scenery was a palette of winter and spring.
The mountain range was a skate-park with snowy ramps.
The range of mountains was a frozen city.

This was edited and improved following feedback from her inspiring teacher, Tim Roach:

The allure of the scenery was a palette of winter and spring.
The steaming waterfall was cascading over the Cold Mountain.
The frothy milk was hiding the mountains.

Reading journeys

Your pupils will now enjoy comparing their own drafts with these stanzas from Han-Shan.



6.

Men ask the way to Cold Mountain
Cold Mountain: there's no through trail.
In summer, ice doesn't melt
The rising sun blurs in swirling fog.
How did I make it?
My heart's not the same as yours.
If your heart was like mine
You'd get it and be right here.

7.

I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,
Already it seems like years and years.
Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams
And linger watching things themselves.
Men don't get this far into the mountains,
White clouds gather and billow.
Thin grass does for a mattress,
The blue sky makes a good quilt.

Happy with a stone underhead
Let heaven and earth go about their changes.

8.

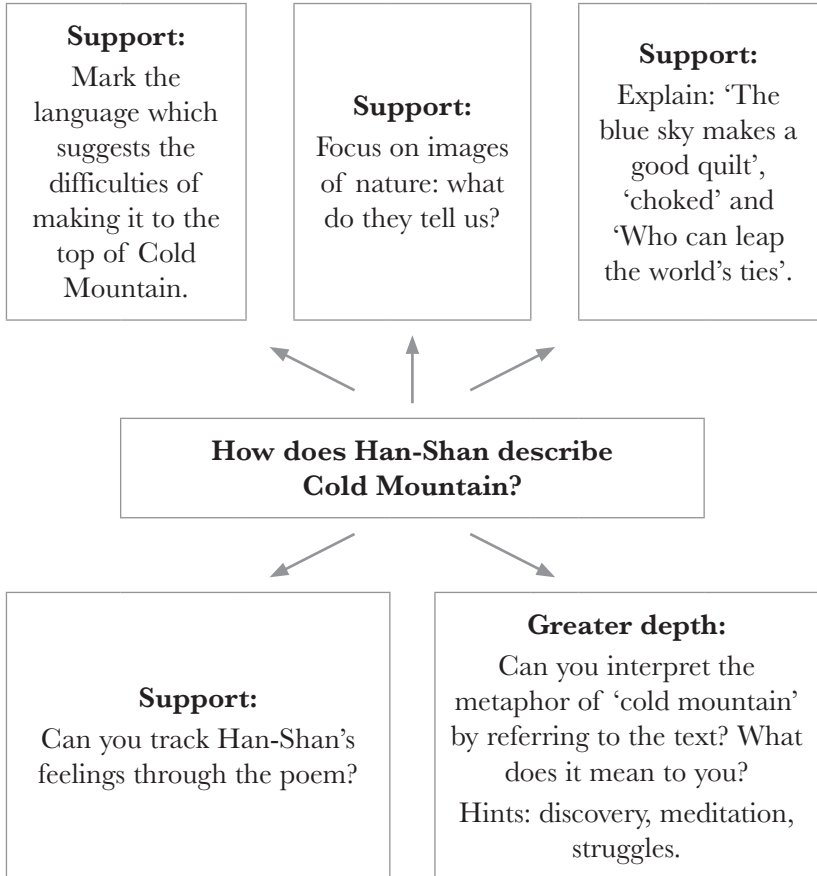
Clambering up the Cold Mountain path,
The Cold Mountain trail goes on and on:
The long gorge choked with scree and boulders,
The wide creek, the mist-blurred grass.
The moss is slippery, though there's been no rain
The pine sings, but there's no wind.
Who can leap the world's ties
And sit with me among the white clouds?

Choose appropriate **reading journeys** from the **radial questions** on page 63. Remember to engage with your pupils when gauging their level of difficulty.

Excellent responses will:

Key concept: extended metaphors

- ☛ Show understanding of how the images reflect a journey and explain this with reference to the text.
- ☛ Explore some detailed examples of the way the descriptions reflect harshness yet fulfilment.
- ☛ Demonstrate how an **extended metaphor** can lead the reader in their own interpretations.



The stanzas from Han-Shan have huge potential for dialogic talk, as well as **didactic teaching**, to introduce extended imagery in poetry. ‘Opening Doors’ questions are often set out in a radial way to give maximum flexibility and to encourage depth for all learners, rather than discrete pathways for set ‘abilities’. The questions work best when learning dialogues, talking partners and teacher explanations go hand in hand.

Bob says ...

It's the beauty of the writing that leads to a greater appreciation of the content. Pedagogy should be a tool to understand more about how pupils can access that beauty. Recommended pedagogies tend to change over time; the central impact of the text remains.

Beyond the limit – link reading

Many thematic links are possible, but we’ve chosen poems which extend ideas with a wide metaphorical application.

- ♥ ‘The Fish’ by Elizabeth Bishop
- ♥ ‘Eden Rock’ by Charles Causley
- ♥ ‘The Snowflake’ by Walter de la Mare
- ♥ ‘Valentine’ by Carol Ann Duffy
- ♥ ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ by Robert Frost
- ♥ ‘The Door’ by Miroslav Holub (Unit 1)
- ♥ ‘Mother to Son’ by Langston Hughes

🍷 ‘The Path’ by Edward Thomas (Unit 5 in *Opening Doors to Famous Poetry and Prose*)

🍷 ‘Fern Hill’ by Dylan Thomas

Pupils from Greenacres Primary Academy used the **link reading** (specifically ‘The Door’) to inspire these drafts:

As the hinges creaked open, a handful of dust flew in through the gap, which made me sneeze. A shining light blasted in, nearly making me blind. The door opened, a group of finger-pricking cacti could be seen in the distance.

In the foreground, I could see an arid desert. It was as dry as a pineapple, not cut or washed. Crabs’ and scorpions’ clicking claws could be heard. I could taste the fresh smell of dates hanging on palm trees.

I stepped out and the feet-burning sand burnt my feet. Looking closer, I saw old and enchanted bones laying on the sand. Huge temples stood with doors to enter.

Mehak Tahir

As the door loudly creaked open, a refreshing breeze came drifting through the entrance, carrying its fragrance with it. The smell filled the room with the scent it was holding.

In the foreground were fire ants, chimpanzees and pythons, roaming around the place. Gathering around the place were bamboo sticks. The spreading roots of the palm trees all

around the tree. In the distance, there were faint noises such as birds tweeting, snakes hissing, twigs snapping, fire cracking and lions roaring. There was a rock formation and inside were idols and a lost temple. Then, I knew they were ancient and from China or Italy. The rainforest was littered with a century of detritus: rubbish, moss, bark and leaves. I was a bit scared, so I walked across. Then, I saw the waterfall.

Mumina Hussain

Wings to fly

One option for sustained writing is to develop the taster draft ideas into metaphorical images inspired by the ‘Cold Mountain’ title itself. This could mean poems crafted around, for example:

- 🌹 The mountain as a journey to be undertaken.
- 🌹 The mountain as a spiritual retreat.
- 🌹 The mountain as a harsh place of struggle.
- 🌹 The mountain as a healthy challenge.

Another option is to apply what has been learnt from Han-Shan to new themes which have the potential for the children to practise the extended metaphor concept. Here are some possibilities:

- 🌹 A rose
- 🌹 A river
- 🌹 A briar

🍷 A mobile phone

🍷 Books

🍷 An onion

🍷 A crown

🍷 A bridge

Those pupils who excel can create lots of drafts or poems for their anthologies. If the option of an anthology is planned for regularly in your curriculum design, then pupils will get to experience much more poetry reading and writing across the school. The link reading will also help to immerse them in many different literary texts based around the key concept. For example, in this unit, if the children craft poems using a number of different metaphors, they are practising and improving in ever broader and deeper ways. There is also a huge personal investment in an anthology which many pupils enjoy.

You could use these questions to prompt expectations:

🍷 What other kinds of feelings can be expressed via different metaphors?

🍷 Can you extend the metaphor stage by stage, unravelling more meaning and taking unexpected turns en route?

In the ‘Cold Mountain’ poems, Han-Shan reflects on the feelings of calmness and strength that come from reaching a place to which there is no path. It could be that your pupils may, metaphorically, take a similar cognitive journey where unusual challenges and uncertain routes ahead may offer a greater fulfilment in the end.