



Portland Classical Chinese Garden The Five Elements: ROCKS

Rocks are Mountains Inside the Garden

Inside the Portland Classical Chinese Garden tall rocks are seen everywhere near plants and buildings. Most often there is one rock standing alone. Against the north wall there are many rocks piled together. In Chinese gardens, all the rocks are more than just rocks. The Chinese say that the garden rocks are supposed to be viewed as the mountains in nature. People who walk in the garden can feel as if they are hiking on trails around tall mountains in the country of China. In China there are five special mountains. Stories from long ago explain that these mountains are like a bridge between heaven and earth. People who visit the Portland Chinese Garden feel that they are in peaceful mountains and forests, instead of in the middle of a big city.

Explain how rocks can be more than rocks in a Chinese Garden.

Finding Dragons in the Rocks

Portland's Chinese Garden was designed and hand-made by people in Suzhou, China, a sister city to Portland, Oregon, before being transported and created in Portland. Suzhou is in southern China. Not far away from Suzhou is a very large and special lake called Lake Tai. The garden rocks were once part of the stones at the bottom of Lake Tai. Over time, the moving waters wore holes and cracks into the hard stone turning the rock into strange shapes. People like to look at the rocks and imagine animals are hiding in the rocks. People like to see tigers or Chinese dragons peeking out of the holes. Some people see clouds floating inside the mountain. Some Chinese say that the holes are also like the eyes of a mountain that can see in all directions. For these reasons, the Chinese believe that rocks are alive with the energy of living beings. The Chinese call this energy "Qi." (said "chee")

*Explain why Lake Tai rocks can be seen as "animation in stone."
(Hint: Animation—like cartoons—means that something comes alive.)*

Clouds in Rock — Music In Stone

The rocks in the Portland Chinese Garden often have Chinese characters (words) carved into them. At the entrance to the garden is a stone with characters that translate into English as ‘Half a Cloud.’ The artists who carved their calligraphy (Chinese writing) in this stone chose these words in friendship. They brought this beautiful Lake Tai rock to Portland, Oregon from Suzhou. People in Suzhou said that they imagine a cloud-like mountain floating over them in China to remind them of their friends in Portland. Just like people in Portland view the rock and think of the friends in Suzhou who helped build this beautiful garden.



‘Half a Cloud’



‘Music in Stone’

Explain how the rock called ‘Half a Cloud’ brings together people in Portland and people in Suzhou, China.

There is another Lake Tai rock that visitors see inside the Chinese Garden as soon as they step through a flower-shaped gate. This rock has carved Chinese characters that say *Music in Stone*. Maybe this is because the wind whistles through the holes and cracks in the stone playing nature’s music. Maybe there is another way to think about this idea. A Chinese teacher who has taught classes in the garden, Professor Wu, once said that rocks are like a record of time because they have been on earth for hundreds of thousands of years. Prof. Wu also said that if people can learn to make their minds become as still and quiet as the rocks standing in the Chinese garden, then people might be able to hear the melody of time recorded in stone. What do you think the ‘Music in Stone’ might be telling us?

Applying what you have learned:

Describe at least 3 important reasons that rocks are found in the Portland Classical Chinese Garden.