CHAPTER 7 | LESSON 2 Advances Under the Tang and Song

Literature

“A Farm-House on the Wei River” by Wang Wei

Scholars and aristocrats of the Tang period devoted time to the arts. They not only read poetry but wrote it. Tang poems are still printed in textbooks in China, and students are required to memorize them. Tang poets made use of set structures, such as poems of four or eight lines consisting of five or seven characters each. They also used specific rhyme schemes and tonal (or pitch) patterns. The best poems remain popular today because of their beauty and character-building sentiments. The following poem by Wang Wei celebrates country life.

In the slant of the sun on the country-side,
Cattle and sheep trail home along the lane;
And a rugged old man in a thatch door
Leans on a staff and thinks of his son, the herdboy.
There are whirring pheasants, full wheat-ears,
Silk-worms asleep, pared mulberry-leaves.
And the farmers, returning with hoes on their shoulders,
Hail one another familiarly
. . . No wonder I long for the simple life
And am sighing the old song, Oh, to go Back Again!

—from The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology, translated by Wilter Bynner.

MAIN IDEAS

1. What scene is the speaker of the poem watching?

2. How do we know it is the end of the day?

3. What image of the countryside does the poet create?

CRITICAL THINKING

4. Making Inferences Explain how you can tell where the speaker lives.

5. Drawing Conclusions from Sources What is the mood of the poem?