

The National Consortium for Teaching about Asia

SPOTLIGHT on Karla Drake

Teaching East Asian Philosophy and Literature in Longmeadow, MA

Karla Drake teaches World Literature and Honors British Literature at Longmeadow High School in Massachusetts. In the spring of 2007, she deepened her understanding of Asia by participating in a NCTA seminar in nearby Deerfield. Spurred by newfound knowledge and resources, Karla then took part in the Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Program the following summer. Since studying Confucius' *The Analects* is suggested by the Massachusetts State Frameworks for literature, Karla Drake spends several class periods each year reading *The Analects*. During the seminar, she particularly enjoyed a lecture on Emperor Qianlong (1735-1796) who became very Confucian. He visited his mother every fifth day and gave her a gift every third day and wrote two poems a day. Such vivid details make history come alive for Karla and her students.

CLASS PROJECT: "NCTA seminars had a concrete impact on my teaching and curriculum. I started the school year with an entire unit on Japanese *tanka* poetry. In all five of my classes, my students studied medieval *tanka* poems and especially the poetry of Izumi Shikibu and Ono no Komachi. The students learned to appreciate the delicate and subtle balance between nature and emotions for which this poetry is so well known. They also learned to appreciate the strict form and elevated style of this poetry. After fully immersing ourselves in the medieval time period and learning about the various types of this verse form, I concluded this unit by having each student write and submit their own poetry portfolio. I received one hundred writing portfolios; each one contained two original *haiku*, two *tanka* emulating the traditional style, two modern *tanka* (with their own definitions of their poetic rules) and, finally, two group poems or *renga*. We shared this poetry in class and then collected the best of these poems and, ultimately, created one *tanka* poetry anthology entitled "Longmeadow's Modern 'Ten Thousand Leaves'." The students were bursting with pride and some have even submitted their poems to other student poetry publications!"



"It is fascinating to see the multiple ways in which we humans universally try to make sense of our world. The NCTA seminar gave me the knowledge and courage to teach two classes, thus far, in my district, entitled "Asia in Any Classroom I and II", respectively. I taught one course to twelve teachers in spring '07 and another course in fall '07, again to twelve teachers."