

POETRY at ANGEL ISLAND

AFTER TRAVELING FOR WEEKS ABOARD CROWDED, disease-ridden ships, Chinese immigrants wanted nothing more than to start their new lives in America. Unfortunately, one thing stood in their way: the immigration officers at Angel Island. Often immigrants would be detained for months at Angel Island, waiting to hear if they would be admitted to the country or deported back to China.

While they waited, some of the Chinese immigrants decided to channel their feelings of discouragement, fear, anger and abandonment into poetry. They carved their words into the walls, ceilings and floors, desperate for their voices to be heard.

Many of the immigrants wrote their poems with five Chinese characters per line. This was an ancient Chinese form of poetry called wu-yan-li-shi.

~Try writing your own wu-yan-li-shi poem with five syllables per line instead of five Chinese characters.

Blank lines for writing a wu-yan-li-shi poem, with faint background text in Chinese characters.

