

Wing Tek Lum

A VILLAGE BURIAL

Four bodies lie slumped over
at the pond's edge
one prone, the others on their sides curled up.
They are wearing soldier's uniforms,
ragged and caked with mud,
shorn of their belts, one without shoes.
They have been decapitated,
the spaces above their necks
where their heads should have been now empty,
the feeling of something missing,
unnerving like a small pin boring through
to prick the heart.
The heads are soon discovered,
floating, half submerged, in shallow waters
—no doubt dumped or kicked in.
They are waterlogged, rapidly decomposing,
one still with spectacles.
Each body is laid out on the bank,
turned over onto its back,
and heads are pressed on top of the necks
to see which fits.
It is hard to determine
which matches are correct
—the long, thin face perhaps
goes with the one with slender fingers,
or maybe another set can be paired
because of the same darker complexion.
They look like they belong, and yet do not.
Together they are loaded onto a two-wheeled cart
and pulled up to the mountains
to a burial pit dug in the hard earth
for all the recent dead
But it does not seem right
to cast these four so haphazardly
among the other corpses,
though some are also maimed, with severed arms,
their bellies blown out.
So one last attempt is made
to set them down gently,
to rejoin each head to its rightful body.
Hopefully then one of them at least
might be reborn whole,
to re-enter this desecrated world again,
to seek revenge for himself and his comrades,

rending apart these invaders,
hacking limbs, ripping out entrails,
crushing bone, and shredding flesh,
splattering every drop of their blood
across this wide, perverted face of hell.

*Wing Tek Lum is a Honolulu businessman and poet. The poems in this teacher's guide were originally published in his collection of poetry, *The Nanjing Massacre: Poems* (Bamboo Ridge Press, 2012).*

1. Who decapitated the four soldiers? Why did they do something so horrifying?
2. Who are the people trying to put the bodies together? Why?
3. Terrorists in the Middle East have also decapitated prisoners in the past few years, including journalists. Why do you think they did it?