

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about slavery

解

Pronunciation: *jie* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *gai* (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: untie, unwrap, break, decode, dissolve

解 suggests release/freedom. Strip-tease dancers 解衣 (*jie yi* = untie/take-off~clothes). Spokesmen 解釋 (*jie shi* = open~release = explain) situations. Secret messages need 解碼 (*jie ma* = break-code = decoding). Bankrupt companies are 解散 (*jie san* = break~disperse = dissolved). Drinkers say drinking can 解愁 (*jie chou* = dissolve/alleviate~sorrow).

林肯 (*Lin Keng* = "Lincoln"-transliterated) 解放黑奴 (*jie fang hei nu* = untie~free~black~slaves = liberated slaves). The Chinese Communists fought 解放戰爭 (*jie fang zhan zheng* = untie-free~war~conflict = war of liberation) against the Kuomintang.

To pessimists, death is 大解脫 (*da jie tuo* = big~release~escape = the ultimate liberation). However, in classical Chinese 大解 (*da jie* = big~solution) means stooling, 小解 (*xiao jie* = small~solution) means urinating.