

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 sea creatures

Pronunciation: *long* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *lung* (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: dragon

龍, the Chinese dragon, has bulging eyes, horns, a long scaled body and claws. 龍王 (*long wang* = dragon-king) is the mythological ruler of oceans. 龍 and 鳳 (*feng* = phoenix) are feudal symbols for emperor and empress or noble, powerful, handsome people. 龍袍 (*long pao* = dragon-robe), embroidered with dragons, is the emperor's attire.

龍 and 虎 (*hu* = tiger) symbolize heroes. 龍虎鬥 (*long hu dou* = dragon-tiger-battle) means a fight between equally fierce opponents.

鱈龍 (*xun long* = sturgeon-dragon) = sturgeon. 變色龍 (*bian se long* = change-color-dragon) = chameleon. 長龍 (*chang long* = long-dragon) means a long queuing-up. 追龍 (*zui long* = chase-dragon) means smoking heroin (putting your pipe to the rising heroin smoke and inhaling it).

by Diana Yue