

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 birthdays

歲

Pronunciation: *sui* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *sui* (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: year, age

歲 means year. 歲數 (*siu shu* = year~number) = someone's age. A minor comes of age at 十八歲 (*shi ba sui* = ten~eight-years/age). 歲入 (*siu ru* = year~in) means annual income.

“三十而立” (*san shi er li* = three~ten~so~erect/establish) means at age thirty a man should become independent. “四十不惑” (*si shi bu huo* = four~ten~no~confused) means at age forty a man no longer has illusions. 歲月催人 (*siu yue cui ren* = years~months~hurry~people) laments how fast people age and deteriorate.

千歲 (*qian sui* = thousand~years/age) is address for a prince. 萬歲爺 (*wan sui ye* = ten-thousand~years/age~grandpa) means the Emperor.

by Diana Yue