

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

Pronunciation: *xiao* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *chiu* (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: resemble, animal sign in Chinese zodiac

肖 = resemble. 形肖 (*xing xiao* = form~resemble = outwardly resembling), 神肖 (*shen xiao* = spirit~resemble = expression-wise resembling) describe portraits/acting. A不肖子 (*bu xiao zi* = un~alike~son = unlike his dad) means a bad/wayward son.

The Chinese zodiac has twelve 生肖 (*sheng xiao* = birth-resemblance = zodiac animal signs) rotating in a 12-year cycle. Each person is affiliated to the animal of his/her birth-year: 屬鼠 (*shu shu* = affiliation~rat), 牛 (*niu* = ox), 虎 (*hu* = tiger), 兔 (*tu* = rabbit), 龍 (*long* = dragon), 蛇 (*she* = snake), 馬 (*ma* = horse), 羊 (*yang* = ram), 猴 (*hou* = monkey), 雞 (*ji* = rooster), 狗 (*gou* = dog), 豬 (*zhu* = pig) and has that animal's attribute, e.g. gentle, fierce, sly.

by Diana Yue