

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

桃

Pronunciation: tao (Putonghua, 2nd tone), to (Cantonese 4th tone)
Basic meaning: peach

桃 (radical 木 mu = wood/woody plant) = 桃樹 (tao shu = peach tree) or 桃子 (tao zi = peach~diminutive = peach fruit).

According to Chinese mythology, someone who eats a 仙桃 (xian tao = fairy~peach) from the peach tree growing in the Western Paradise can live forever. The longevity fairy (壽星公 shou xing gong = longevity~star~grandpa) is pictured holding a 壽桃 (shou tao = longevity~peach). 壽包 (shou bao = birthday~buns), Chinese-style birthday feast dessert, are pink, peach-shaped steamed buns.

桃色事件 (tao se shi jian = peach~colour~event~piece = misconduct involving girls) fuels scandals. 世外桃源 (shi wai tao yuan = world~outside~peach~stream~source) is a hamlet hidden by peach groves and forgotten by the world, an escapist's paradise.

by Diana Yue