

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 plant symbolism

竹

Pronunciation: *zhu* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *juk* (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: bamboo

竹 = 竹子 (*zhu zi* = bamboo~diminutive) = bamboo.
竹林 (*zhu lin*) = bamboo grove. Chinese cuisine uses 竹筍 (*zhu sun* = bamboo~young~shoot).

We use 竹筷 (*zhu kuai* = bamboo~chopsticks), 竹簾 (*zhu lian* = bamboo~blinds), 竹籬 (*zhu li* = bamboo~fence). Builders in Hong Kong use 竹棚 (*zhu peng* = bamboo~scaffolding). Overseas-born Chinese living in ghettos are called 竹升 (*zhu sheng* = bamboo~pole): like a section of bamboo with both ends blocked, they are cut off from both local culture and Chinese culture.

竹 grows fast and symbolizes academic/career ascent. Students all know the motto “百尺竿頭，更進一步” (*bai che gan tou, geng jin yi bu* = hundred~feet~bamboo~pole~tip, further~advance~one~step), i.e. do even better.

by Diana Yue