## Character Builder 您好參? 终

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 colours



Pronunciation: hei (Putonghua, 1st tone), hak (Cantonese 1st tone) Basic meaning: black 黑 describes 黑種人 (hei zhong ren = black~species ~people = negroes). 墨黑 (mo hei = ink~black), 漆黑 (qi hei = tar/jet~black) mean total blackness/ darkness. 黑夜 (he ye = black~night) = dark/deep night.

黑暗 (hei an = black~dark/unlit) describes corrupt/evil environments. Chinese 三合會 (san he hui = three~ joined~society = "triad societies") are 黑社會 (hei she hui = black~community~society = illegal/underground gangster groups).

黑著臉 (hei zhuo lian = black--ing-face) describes a harsh/ominous facial expression. 頭頭碰著黑 (tou tou peng zhuo hei = head-head-clash-with-black) means having ill-luck everywhere. Evil-doers are 黑心 (hei xin = black-hearted). 厚黑學 (hou hei xue = thick-black--ism), a selfish philosophy, advocates unblushing ("thick face-skin") cruel ("black-hearted") behaviour to others.