

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 colours

紫

Pronunciation: *zi* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *ji* (Cantonese 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: purple

紫 symbolizes power/Taoism. Beijing's Forbidden City is 紫禁城 (*zi jin cheng* = purple~forbid~city). Purple mist overhead accompanied ancient philosopher 老子 (*Lao-zi*) when he travelled westward and wrote the Taoism classic 道德經 (*Dao De Jing* = Word/Ethos~Morality~Classic), hence 紫氣東來 (*zi qi dong lai* = purple~air/mist~from-east~come) means a fairy/guru's auspicious visit.

紫晶 (*zi jing* = purple~crystal) = amethyst. 紫貂 (*zi diao* = purple~sable) = sable fur. Hardwood 紫檀 (*zi tan* = purple~sandalwood) furniture is expensive/rare. 紫河車 (*zi he che* = purple~river~cart) is dried human placenta, used in Chinese medicine.

Ultra-violet rays = 紫外線 (*zi wai xian* = purple~external~lines/rays). 紅得發紫 (*hong de fa zi* = so red it looks purple) describes stars/singers' stunning popularity.

by Diana Yue