

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 animal symbolism

蛇

Pronunciation: *she* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *se* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: snake

蛇 are 爬蟲類動物 (*pa chong lei dong wu* = crawl~worm~type~animal = reptiles). Being 涼血 (*liang xue* = cool~blood = cold-blooded), they 冬眠 (*dong mian* = winter~sleep = hibernate). 眼鏡蛇 (*yan jing she* = eye~mirror~[spectacles]~snake) = cobras.

蛇羹 (*she geng* = snake~soup/broth) and 蛇宴 (*she yan* = snake~banquet = dinners using snake meat as ingredient) are autumn specialties in southern China.

蛇 symbolizes 魔鬼 (*mo gui* = evil~devil~ghost = the Devil) or evil/cruel/sly people. 蛇蠍心腸 (*she xie xin chang* = snake~scorpion~heart~intestines) describes evil-hearted people. 蛇蠍美人 (*she xie mei ren* = snake~scorpion~beautiful~person) are attractive women with evil motives/plans. 蛇鼠一窩 (*she shu yi wo* = snake~rat~one~nest) describes bad people teaming/colluding together.

by Diana Yue