

# 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

Pronunciation: *fu* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *fuk* (Cantonese, 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: bat

蝠 = 蝙蝠 (*bian fu*). 蝠 (*fu* = bat) is pronounced exactly like 福 (*fu* = blessing), so Chinese folk art showing 五蝠 (*wu fu* = five~bats) flying means 五福臨門 (*wu fu lian men* = five~blessings~arrive-at~door = this house/family is abundantly blessed by Heaven).

Bats, having 翼 (*yi* = wings), 爪 (*zhao* = claws), are 捕食動物 (*bu shi dong wu* = catch~eat/food~moving~things/objects = hunting~animals = predators). Belief that bats 吸血 (*xi xue* = suck~blood = drink blood) gave rise to the 吸血殭屍 (*xi xue jiang shi* = suck~blood~stiffened~corpse = vampire) legend.

Kids keep bats as 寵物 (*chong wu* = dote/love~things/objects = pet animals) and watch 蝙蝠俠 (*bian fu xia* = bat~knight-errant = Batman) movies.

by Diana Yue