

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

蟻

Pronunciation: *yi* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *ngai* (Cantonese, 5th tone)
Basic meaning: ant

蟻 (= 螞蟻 *ma yi*) are 昆蟲 (*kun chong* = insects) living in 蟻穴 (*yi xue* = ant-hole), 蟻丘 (*yi qiu* = ant-hill). 蟻后 (*yi hou* = ant-queen) mates with 雄蟻 (*xiong yi* = male-ants = drones) and lays eggs. 工蟻 (*gong yi* = worker-ants) gather food, feed young.

蟻路 (*yi lu* = ants-road) = ants' trail. 蟻咬 (*yi yao* = ant-bite) means ant's bite or itchy/gnawing feeling. 滅蟻組 (*mi yi zu* = destroy-ants-team) are pest control squads tackling nuisance ants.

蟻民 (*yi min* = ants-people) describes the poor masses trampled on/oppressed by cruel rulers. 螻蟻尚且偷生 (*lou yi shang qie tou sheng* = crickets-ants-even-also-steal-life) means all creatures will struggle hard to survive.

by Diana Yue