

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 zoos



Pronunciation: *yu* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *yue* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: fish

Anglers 釣魚 (*diao yu* = dangle-hook~fish), fishermen 捕魚 (*bu yu* = trap/catch~fish). 鰻 (*man*, eel), 鯖 (*qing*, mackerel), 比目魚 (*bi mu yu* = pair-eyes~fish = flatfish), 石斑 (*shi ban* = stone~patches = garoupa) make delicious dishes. 魚米之鄉 (*yu mi zhi xiang* = fish~rice~'s~land) are rice-and-fish-rich regions.

鯨 (*jing*, whale), 鯊 (*sha*, shark), 海豚 (*hai tun* = sea-pig = dolphins), 金魚 (*jin yu* = gold~fish), 美人魚 (*mei ren yu* = beautiful-person~fish = mermaids) inspire art/literature.

Asked “子非魚，安知魚之樂？” (*zi fei yu, an zhi yu zhi le?* = You~are~not~fish, how~know~fish~'s~happiness?), philosopher 莊子 (*Zhuang-zi*) replied, “You’re not I, how do you know that I don’t know the fish are happy?”

by Diana Yue