

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 autumn

Pronunciation: *chong* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *chung* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: insect, bug, worm

蟲 = simplified form 虫. 昆蟲 (*kun chong* = elder~bug) = insect: 螞蟻 (*ma yi* = ants), 蜜蜂 (*mi feng* = honey~bees), 蠶 (*can* = silkworms), 毛蟲 (*mao chong* = hairy~worm = caterpillars). Farmers fear 蝗蟲 (*huang chong* = locusts). Housewives hate 蟑螂 (*zhang lang* = cockroaches), 蚊子 (*wen zi* = mosquitoes), 蛀蟲 (*zhu chong* = eat-away~bugs/worms, e.g. silver fish).

Chinese literature 以蟲鳴秋 (*yi chong ming qiu* = uses~insects~sing~autumn = describes autumn by insects' sounds), e.g. 蟋蟀 (*xi shuai* = cricket)'s chirping. 冬蟲草 (*dong chong cao* = winter~worm~grass/herb) is a medicinal herb containing a worm parasite.

Lazy/useless persons are 蛀米大蟲 (*zhu mi da chong* = eat~rice~big~worm = only eats, never works).

by Diana Yue