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 sea creatures

**鯨**

Pronunciation: **jing** (Putonghua, 1st tone), **king** (Cantonese 4th tone)

Basic meaning: whale

鯨 (jing yu = whale-fish) means whales. Whales are mammals, not fish, so the radical 魚 (yu = fish) shows the pictogram-creator misconception.

鯨鬚 (jing xu = whale-whiskers) = baleen. 鯨肉 (jing rou) = whale meat. 鯨骨 (jing gu) = whalebone. 鯨油 (jing you = whale-oil/fat) = blubber. 藍鯨 (lan jing) = blue whales. 虎鯨 (hu jing = tiger-whale = 殺人鯨 sha ren jing = kill-person-whale = killer whale) = orca. 鯨仔 (jing zai = whale-young/baby) = whale calf.

捕鯨船 (bu jing chuan = catch-whale-ship = whaling-ship) = whalers. Melville’s *Moby Dick* is translated as 白鯨記 (bai jing ji = white-whale-story). 鯨吞 (jing tun = whale-swallow) describes a giant gulping down food/resources.

*by Diana Yue*