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

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.

Pronunciation: fu (Putonghua, 2nd tone), fuk (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: bat

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