

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 sea creatures



Pronunciation: *bei* (Putonghua, 4th tone), *booi* (Cantonese 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: molluscs, seashells

貝 = 貝類 (*bei lei* = shells~species) = molluscs: 蚌 (*bang* = 蛤蜊 *ge li* = clams), 海螺 (*hai luo* = sea conch), 牡蠣 (*mu li* = 蠔 *hao* = oysters), 扇貝 (*shan bei* = fan~clams = scallops). 珠貝 (*zhu bei* = pearl~mollusc) means clams/oysters which produce pearls. 乾貝 (*gan bei* = sun-dried~scallop) is the flavorsome conpoy.

貝 also = 貝殼 (*bei he* = shell~cover) = seashells. 貝雕 (*bei diao* = shell~sculpture) means the art of shell-carving. Seashells were used as cash in ancient China, thus the radical 貝 means wealth/money, e.g. 財 (*cai* = wealth), 寶 (*bao* = treasure). 寶貝 (*bao bei* = precious~seashell) means a valuable gem/object, something with magical powers, or somebody's darling.

by Diana Yue