

# 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 earthquakes

活

Pronunciation: *huo* (Putonghua, 4<sup>th</sup> tone), *woot* (Cantonese 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: live, alive, living

Adjective 活 (radical 氵 = water) means alive/vibrant: 活水 (*huo shui* = alive~water = fresh running water), 活魚 (*huo yu* = live~fish), 靈活 (*ling huo* = spirited~alive = alert/adaptive).

Verb 活 = 生活 (*sheng huo* = born~live) = 過活 (*guo huo* = pass~living) means living. 活著 (*huo zhao* = live~continuous) means staying alive. 活得精彩 (*huo de jing cai* = live~achieve~essence~splendour) means leading a colourful/meaningful life.

Premier Wen Jiabao consoled a young earthquake victim: “你們倖存活下來，就要好好活下去” (*Ni men xing cun huo xia lai, jiu yao hao hao huo xia qu* = You~plural~fortunately~survived~live~down~come, so~should~good~good~live~down~go = You have lived through it fortunately, you must live on seriously/courageously.)

by Diana Yue