

# 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 policemen

賊

(radical 貝 *bei* = money)  
Pronunciation: *zei* (Putonghua, 2<sup>nd</sup> tone), *chaak* (Cantonese, 6<sup>th</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: thief, thug

賊 = 盜匪 (*dao fei* = robber~criminal). 做賊 (*zuo zei* = be~thief) is to 偷“呃” [Cantonese meaning] 拐騙 (*tou e guai pian* = steal~deceive~kidnap~cheat = commit theft/fraud), 殺人放火 (*sha ren fang huo* = kill~person~release~fire = commit homicide/arson).

賊贓 (*zei zang* = thief~loot) = loot, 小偷 (*xiao tou* = small~steal) = burglars, 扒手 (*pa shou* = sweep/grab~hand) = pickpockets. Bonnie and Clyde are 大賊 (*dai zei* = big~thieves = 大盜 *da dao* = big-robbers).

賊頭賊腦 (*zei tou zei nao* = thief~head~thief~brain) means suspicious-looking. Sighting burglars, we cry “有賊!” (*you zei* = has/there-is~thief). 賊喊捉賊 (*zei han zhu zei* = thief~yells~“catch~thief!”) describes a wrong-doer condemning others to shift suspicion/blame.

by Diana Yue