

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 zoos



Pronunciation: *kun* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *kwan* (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: confinement, imprisonment

Pictogram 困 shows confinement in square. In 動物園 (*dong wu yuan* = moving~things~garden = zoos), birds/animals/fish 被困 (*bei kun* = are~confined) in 鳥籠 (*niao long* = bird~cages = aviaries), 獸籠 (*shou long* = beast/animal~cages), 水族館 (*shui zu guan* = water~species~pavilion = aquariums).

困難 (*kun nan* = confinement~hardship = difficulties) make us 困擾 (*kun rao* = confined/trapped~disturbed = depressed). However, 困獸猶鬥 (*kun shou you dou* = surrounded/cornered/jailed~animal~still~fight). Conquering 困境 (*kun jing* = confined~state = difficult situation) brings 自由 (*zi you* = self/autonomy~let-do = freedom/liberty).

系 (*xi*, silk/thread/rope) + 困 = 網 (*kun*, tie/bundle). Mao Ze-dong's famous dictum: “網縛不夫妻” (*kun bang bu fu qi* = tie~bundle~no~husband~wife = forced marriages don't work).

by Diana Yue