

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 sleep

枕

Pronunciation: *zhen* (Putonghua, 3rd tone), *jam* (Cantonese, 2nd tone)

Basic meaning: pillow, cushion, use as pillow

枕頭 (*zhen tou* = pillow~head = pillow), 枕頭套 (*zhen tou tao* = pillow~wrap-over = pillow-case). Ancient Chinese used 瓷枕 (*ci zhen* = porcelain~head-rests), 硬枕 (*ying zhen* = hard-pillows). Today we prefer 羽絨枕 (*yu rong zhen* = feather~down~pillows = down pillows), 軟枕 (*ruan zhen* = soft-pillows). 繡枕 (*xiu zhen* = embroidery~pillow) are embroidered pillow-cases.

枕木 (*zhen mu* = pillow~wood = sleepers) are used on 路軌 (*lu gui* = road~track = tracks) of 鐵路 (*tie lu* = iron~road = railways).

枕臂談心 (*zhen bi tan xin* = use-as-pillow~arm~talk~heart) describes intimate chat between friends resting against each other's arm. 枕戈待旦 (*zhen ge dai dan* = pillow~spear~wait~dawn) describes warriors, weapons-ready, waiting round-the-clock for action at daybreak.

by Diana Yue