

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 animal symbolism

猴

Pronunciation: *hou* (Putonghua, 2nd tone), *hau* (Cantonese, 4th tone)
Basic meaning: monkey

猴 (radical 犛 = 狗 = dog/animal) = 猴子 (*hou zi* = monkey-diminutive). 猿猴 (*yuan hou* = gibbons-monkeys), like 猩猩 (*hei xing xing* = apes/chimps/gorillas), 人 (*ren* = humans), are 靈長目動物 (*ling zhang mu dong wu* = intelligence-top-type-animals = primates).

猴 symbolizes intelligence/playfulness. In 西遊記 (*xi you ji* = west-travel-record = novel *Journey to the West*), Monkey King 孫悟空 (*Sun Wu Kong*) escorted 唐三藏 (*tang san zang* = Tang-Dynasty-[Monk]-Tripitaka) to India, conquering demons all the way, and brought back 佛經 (*fo jing* = Buddhist sutras/scriptures).

猴急 (*hou ji* = monkey-impatient) means cannot wait, eager to grab. 樹倒猴孫散 (*shu dao hu sun san* = tree-falls-macaques/monkeys-scatter) describes dependents abandoning toppled leader/regime.

by Diana Yue