

Chinese Characters: Radicals 21–30

Learn the basic meaning of each radical and use it as a clue when you meet a new character.

No pinyin needed!

A. Radical Detective

A radical (部首) is a recurring part of a Chinese character. It can provide a clue about meaning or category. Some radicals change form inside characters—for example, 水 → 氵 and 示 → 礻.

#	Radical	Basic meaning	Example characters
21	月	moon	明 (bright)、服 (clothing)
22	木	wood	林 (woods)、校 (school)
23	水	water	河 (river)、海 (ocean)
24	火	fire	炒 (to stir-fry)、灯 (lamp)
25	田	field	男 (male)、留 (to stay)
26	目	eye	眼 (eye)、睛 (eyeball)
27	示	show	神 (spirit)、祝 (to wish)
28	糸	fine silk	紙 (paper)、紅 (red)
29	言	speech	語 (language)、話 (to speak)
30	貝	cowrie shell	買 (to buy)、貴 (expensive)

Try it: Circle the radical in each character:

明 林 河 炒 男 眼 神 紙 語 買

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Look for the radical first. Then ask: What kind of meaning might this part suggest?

#	Radical	Basic meaning	Example characters
31	衣	clothing	被 (quilt)、裳 (clothing)
32	耳	ear	聞 (to hear)、聽 (to listen)
33	走	walk	起 (to get up)、超 (to exceed)
34	足	foot	跑 (to run)、跳 (to jump)
35	金	gold	銀 (silver)、錢 (money)
36	門	door	開 (to open)、問 (to ask)
37	雨	rain	雪 (snow)、雲 (cloud)
38	食	eat	飯 (cooked rice/meal)、餃 (dumpling)
39	隹	short-tailed bird	集 (to gather)、難 (difficult)
40	馬	horse	騎 (to ride)、驗 (to examine)

B. What Does the Radical Suggest?

1. Which radical would you look for in a character connected with **water**? _____
2. Which radical might give you a clue that a character is connected with **speech or language**? _____
3. Look at 河. Which part gives you a useful meaning clue? _____
4. Look at 語. Which part gives you a useful meaning clue? _____

C. Make Your Own Radical Connections

Choose three radicals. Write the radical, its basic meaning, and one character containing it.

Radical	Meaning	Character
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Remember: A radical is a clue, not a complete definition. The meaning of the whole character may be much more specific.