

STRAW

cǎo

SHEN YUN SERIES
FUN WITH CHINESE CHARACTERS
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WHAT IS SO EXCITING ABOUT STRAW, you ask? Good question! Well, straw has many uses. You can use straw to make hats, baskets, and roofs. You can use straw to stuff a mattress or a scarecrow. And, of course, you can use straw boats to catch arrows! If you haven't heard of that, read the story on the next page.



Grass

+



Early

In Chinese, the word, the word for straw also means grass. So when someone says “草” (cǎo) you don't know for sure if they mean straw or grass. But don't say: “The straw is always greener on the other side.” That just doesn't make any sense...

SPEAK IT

“ts” + “ow” = cǎo

ts-ow, ts-ow, ts-ow = 草

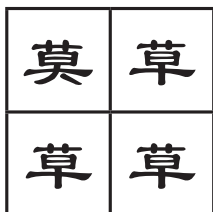
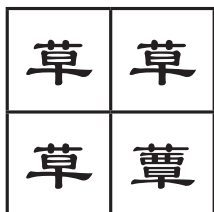
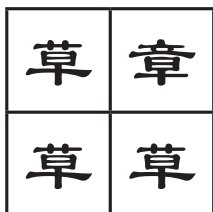
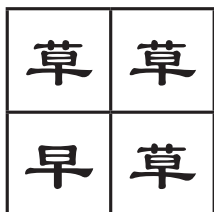
The **c** in **cao** is more like the sound of “ts,” like when you say “hats.” The **ao** is like when you say “ow” if you hurt yourself.

The bottom part 早 is said zǎo, which is pronounced dz-ow. It means early, and it also means morning.

So if you meet a Chinese person in the morning, you can just say: “dz-ow” (“Morning!”).

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Some Chinese words look alike.
Which are NOT 草?

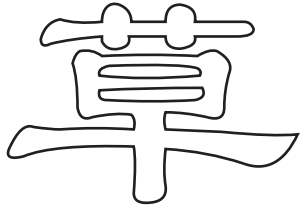


Answers: #1 早 (zǎo) means early, or morning. #2 章 (zhāng) means stamp. #3 藁 (gǎo) is a mushroom. #4 莫 (mò) means nothing; no, it really means “nothing.”

FOUR IN A ROW

How many four in a row can you find? Look for any of the Chinese words we have mentioned so far:

莫	莫	莫	莫	早	忠	藁	藁	幸	草	辛	四	幸
早	早	早	早	中	早	藁	七	藁	心	草	章	五
莫	草	辛	船	草	藁	早	神	韻	藁	章	草	言
莫	草	一	草	章	二	藁	早	借	章	藁	早	草
莫	草	草	章	章	六	幸	藁	章	藁	八	早	九
莫	草	章	辛	章	幸	箭	詩	藁	三	寺	早	十
章	章	辛	幸	章	草	草	草	草	辛	幸	早	辛



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草船借箭

Capturing Arrows with Boats of Straw



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There is a famous story about a man who lived in China a long time ago by the name of Zhuge Liang. Liang was very smart and had a lot of good ideas for solving problems. But China was at war and three kingdoms were fighting each other. Liang hoped to bring peace to China, so he joined one of the armies to help them.

Liang's army was camped on one shore of the Yangtze River. The enemy army was on the other shore. The two sides were ready to go to battle.

One day, one of the military generals said to Liang: "We need some arrows. Not just some arrows, A LOT of arrows. One hundred thousand arrows, to be exact."

Liang thought about it and said: "No problem, I can get you one hundred thousand arrows. Just give me three days." Everyone couldn't believe it. How could Liang make that many arrows in only three days? It was impossible!

Liang went to work. Not making arrows, though. Instead, he got twenty little boats. And on each boat he put a few soldiers. Around those real soldiers he put a bunch of pretend soldiers made of straw. He made boats with scarecrow soldiers!

On the third day, Liang led his boats across the great Yangtze River toward the enemy shore. He told his soldiers to bang drums and shout very loudly. On the other side, the enemy was caught by surprise. There was heavy fog so the enemy couldn't see clearly. They just saw many boats and heard loud noise. Immediately they started shooting arrows at Liang's boats.

But all the arrows just landed on the scarecrows and got stuck in them. The enemy kept shooting arrows and the scarecrows kept catching them. Finally, when they caught enough arrows, Liang turned his boats around and went back to his army. Just like that, he had one hundred thousand arrows, like he promised. And he did it thanks to the humble straw (草, cǎo).

Do you know who the leader of the enemy army was? His name was Cao Cao. But no, his name doesn't mean Straw Straw, or Grass Grass, or Straw Grass. In Chinese, a lot of words just sound the same.

And do you know what the name Liang (亮) means? It means bright. Now that's a good name!