

Written on the Bones

What was the Shang system of writing like?

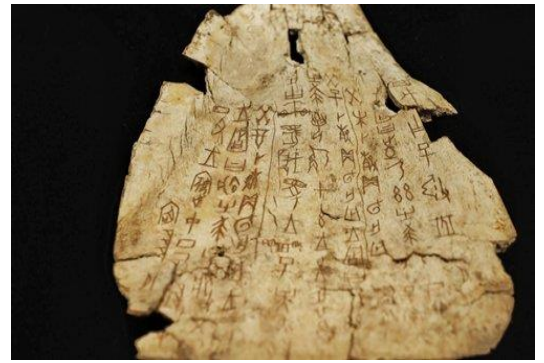
What would life be like if we could not write? What would the consequences be for the way we organise our society? Many societies from the time of the Shang Dynasty had not developed a system of writing. However, the Shang Dynasty was famous for creating one of the oldest writing systems in the world. It was based on a series of characters, called *ideograms*, that represented ideas or objects. Modern Chinese writing has evolved from this.

Task 1

Have a go at the symbols games from

http://www.ancientchina.co.uk/writing/challenge/cha_set.html to see if you can guess what some of the ideograms meant.

Ideograms were written on **oracle bones**. Here are some examples of the artefacts that have been uncovered.



Oracle bones were used by kings to predict the future or to make decisions by asking the gods questions like 'Should we go to war?' or 'Will we capture anything on our hunt?'. A priest would carve the king's question onto a bone or a tortoise shell using ideograms and then insert a heated rod onto it, causing it to crack. The priest would interpret the cracks to find an answer to the king's questions.

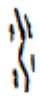
Task 2



子
zi
child



月
yuè
moon



水
shuǐ
water

These are examples of ideograms created by the Shang Dynasty to communicate in writing. Your task is to create ideograms from a range of words on the next page.

How close to the real thing will you be?

king	eye	sun
rain	fire	strength
knife	cow	tiger
earth	heart	field