

# The Shang Dynasty

## Learning Objective:

To find out about the writing and calendar created during the Shang Dynasty.





Do you know what Chinese writing looks like?

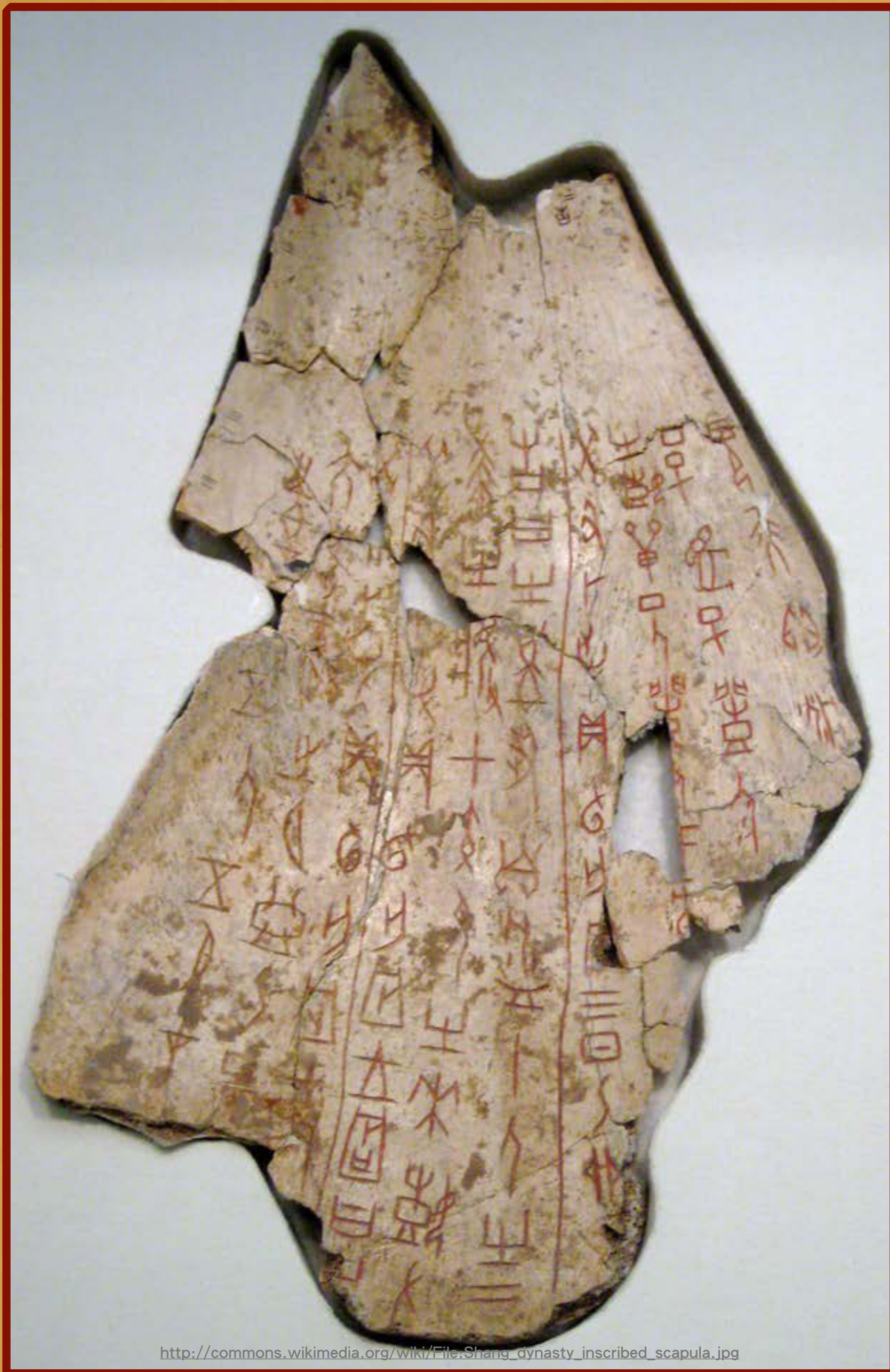
How is it different to your writing?



Chinese writing uses symbols for whole words, or part of a word, instead of an alphabet. It also runs from top to bottom instead of left to right. In China, writing was first invented during the Shang Dynasty.

Imagine writing had never been invented. How would our lives be different? What would we not be able to do?





[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shang\\_dynasty\\_inscribed\\_scapula.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shang_dynasty_inscribed_scapula.jpg)

The first evidence of writing was discovered on the oracle bones of the Shang Dynasty. They also wrote on bamboo and silk but these have not survived.

Can you remember what the oracle bones were used for?



The oracle bones were used by kings to divine the future. These were usually made from the shoulder blades of large animals, such as oxen, but were sometimes turtle shells.

A diviner would write the date and a question on the bone. Little holes were made on the other side with a stone or metal drill. A hot rod was then put in the holes until the bone cracked. The king or diviner would then interpret the cracks to see what the answer to the question was. The answer would then be written on the bones too.



The questions on the oracle bones have helped historians find out a lot about the Shang Dynasty. Questions about the weather, battles, farming, illnesses and many other things give us an insight into this society.

If we send 3,000 soldiers into battle, will we win?

Will the harvest be plentiful this year?

What is causing the king's illness?

Will it rain tomorrow?

Will the king have a son?

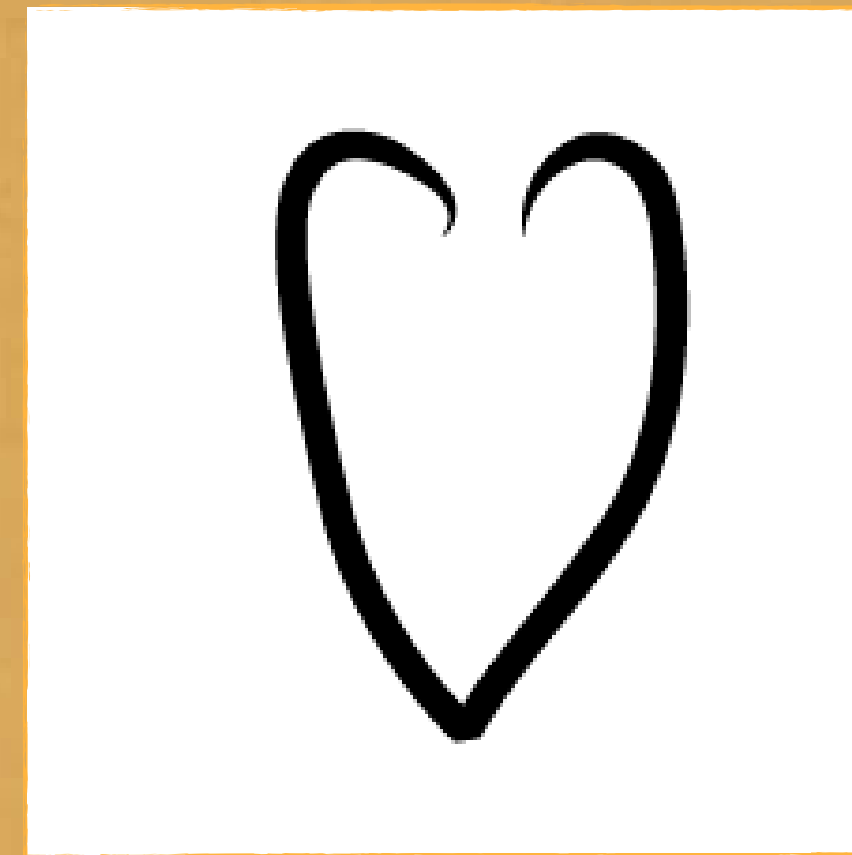
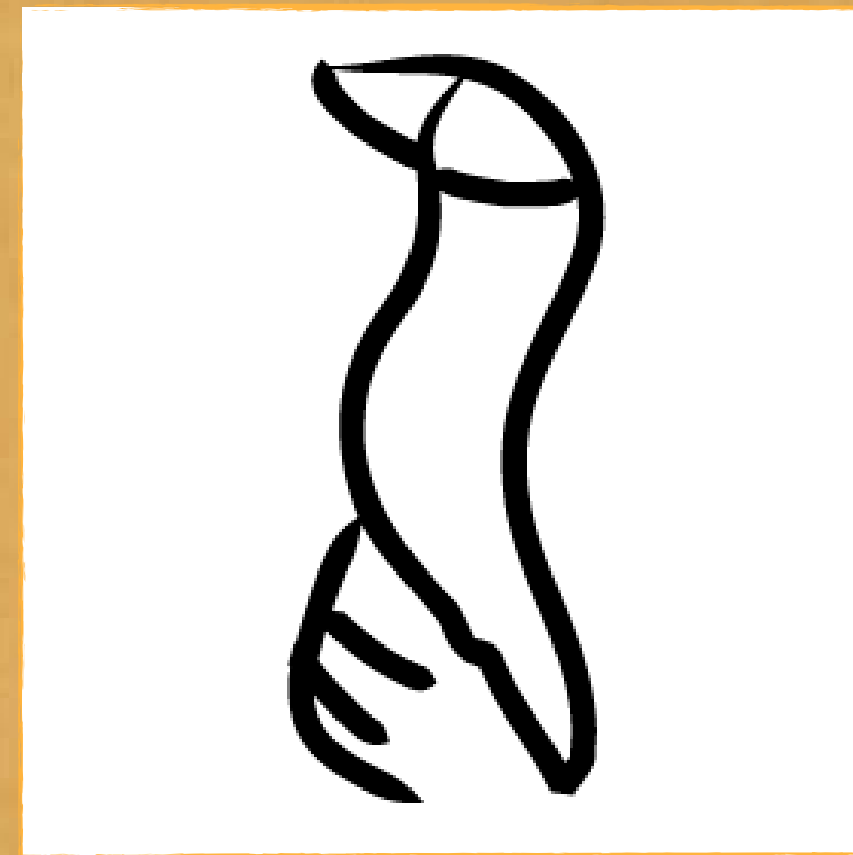
The Shang Dynasty also provides the first evidence of a calendar. It is possible that a calendar was developed because diviners needed an exact date in order to tell the future. Kings and religious officials also needed to know when to perform religious ceremonies and when to tell farmers to plant crops.



The calendar of the Shang was based on the cycle of the moon.

The calendar would have been developed by astrologers who studied the moon, sun and stars. Not much is known about the calendar but it is thought that a year was split into 12 months, with some months being 29 or 30 days long. Sometimes, an extra month was added if necessary.

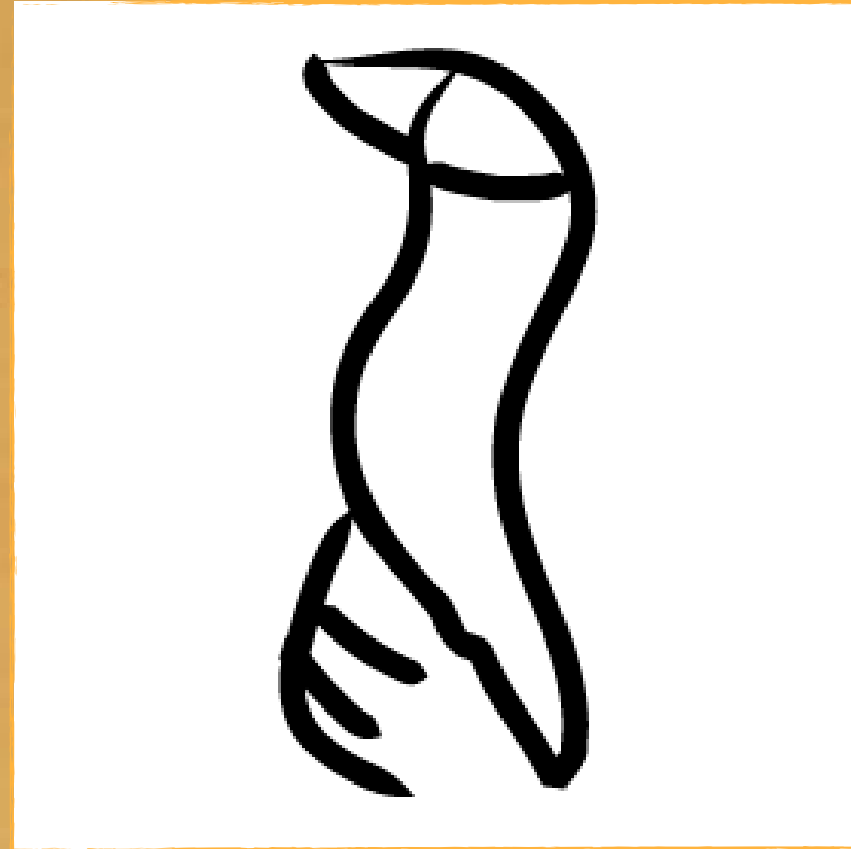
The writing developed during the Shang Dynasty contains pictographs, similar to those used in modern Chinese writing. Some characters clearly represent what they are describing whilst others are not so clear!



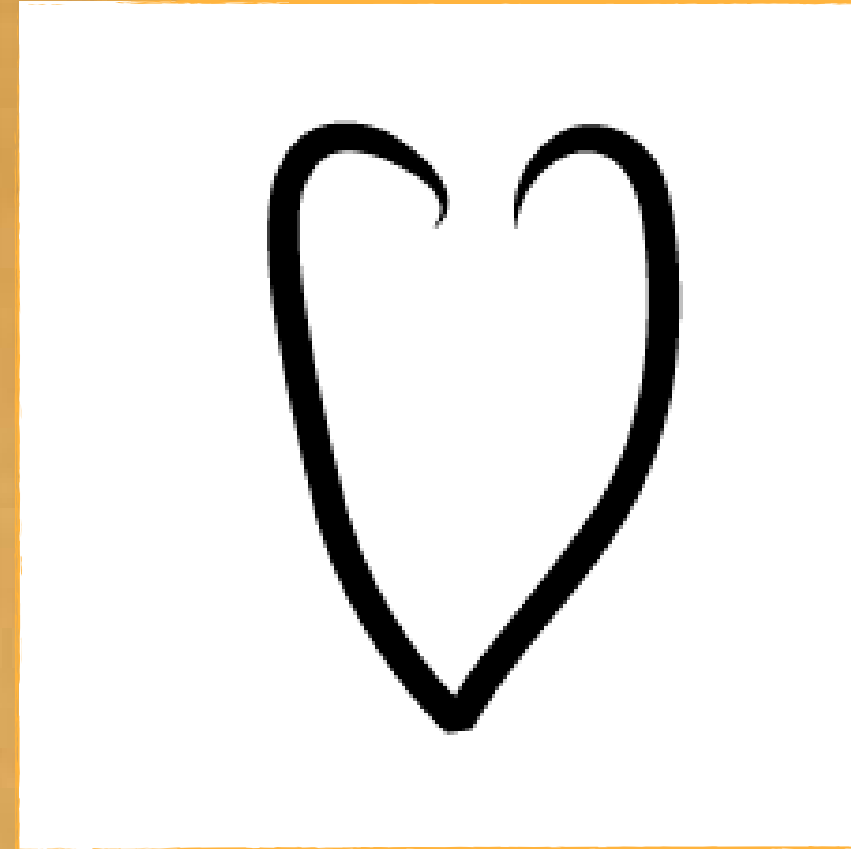
Have a look at these pictographs from the oracle bones. What do you think they might mean?



water



bird



heart



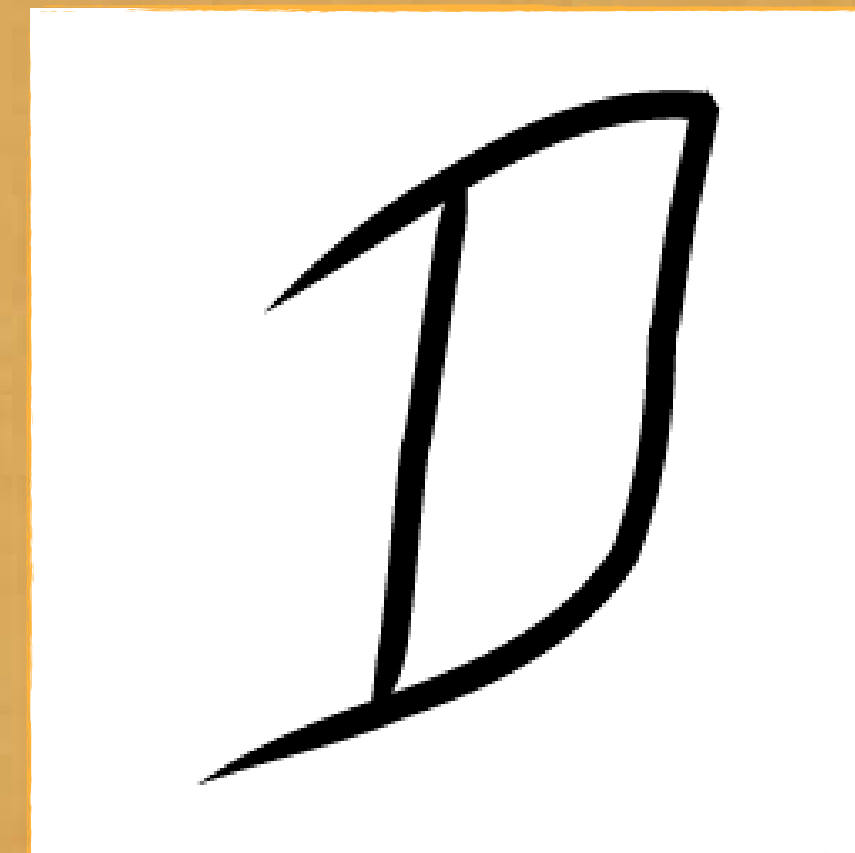
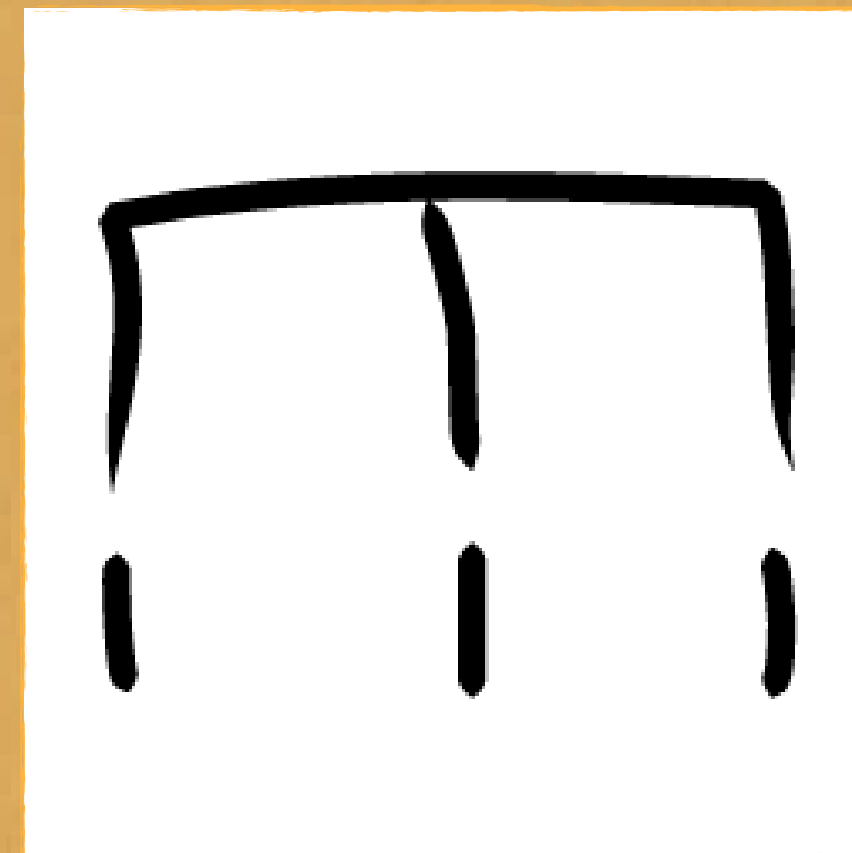
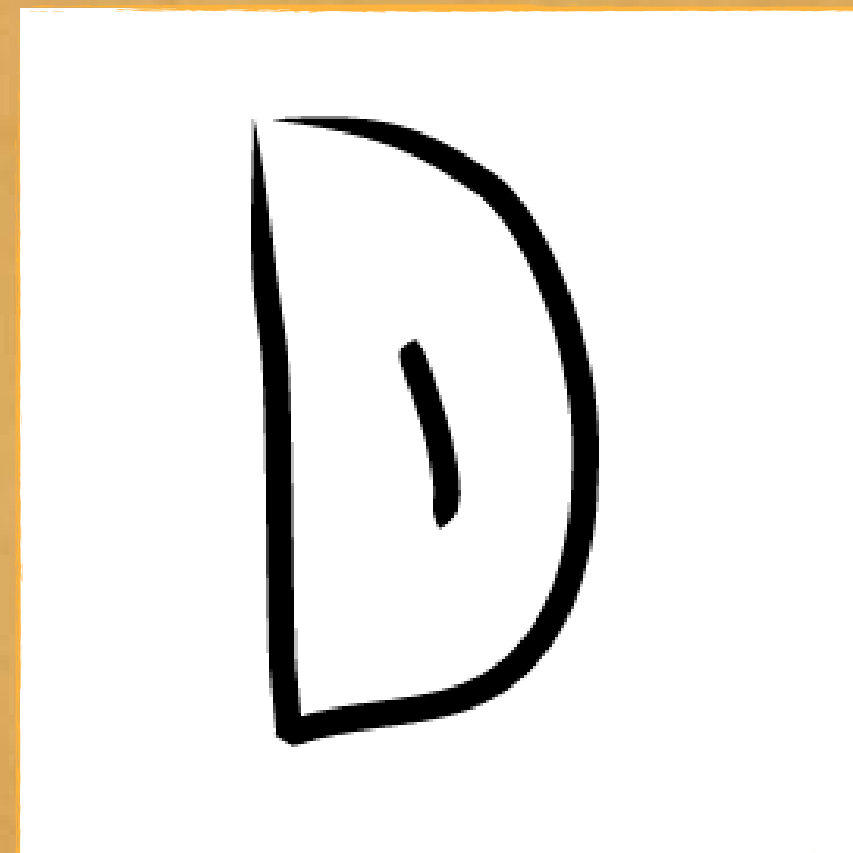
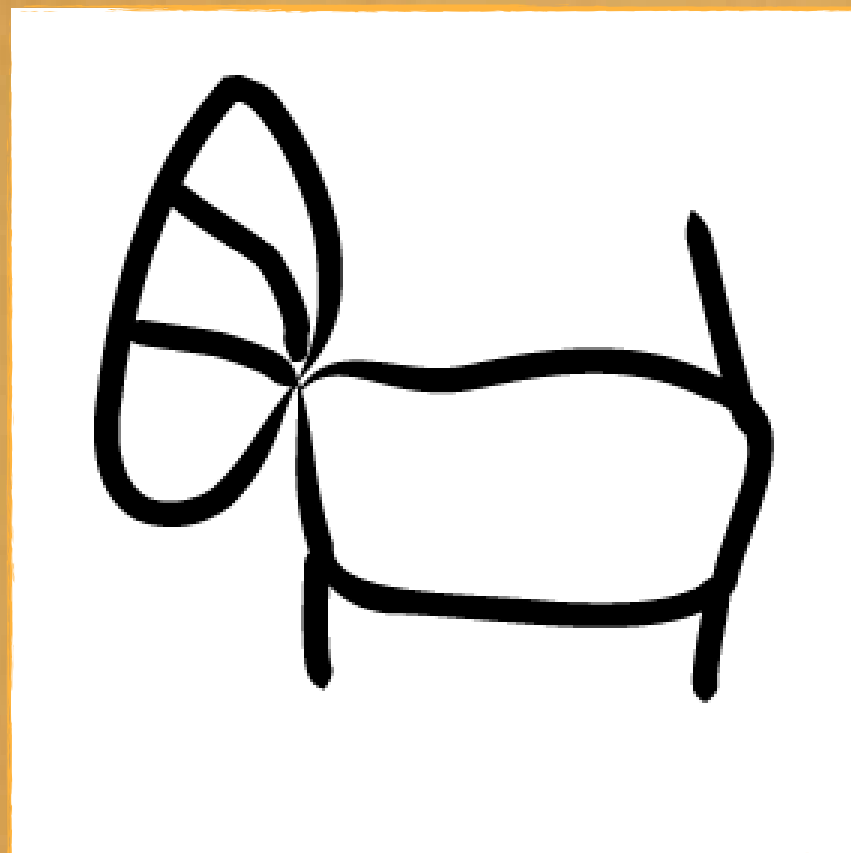
woman

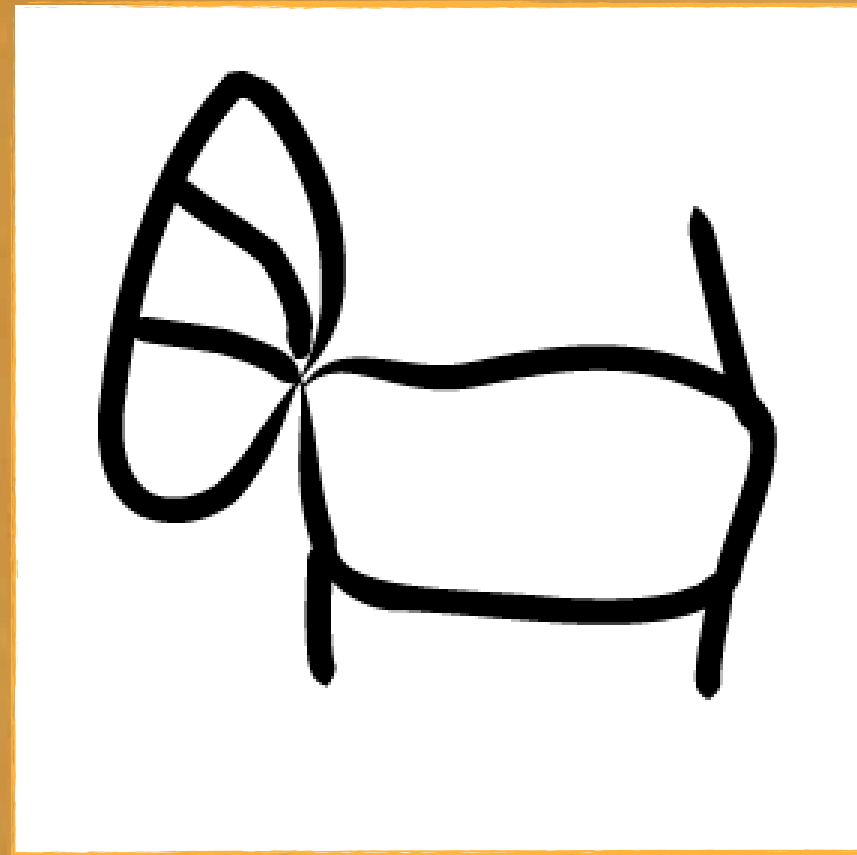
Did you guess any of those correctly?  
Now that you know what they are, can  
you see what they represent?



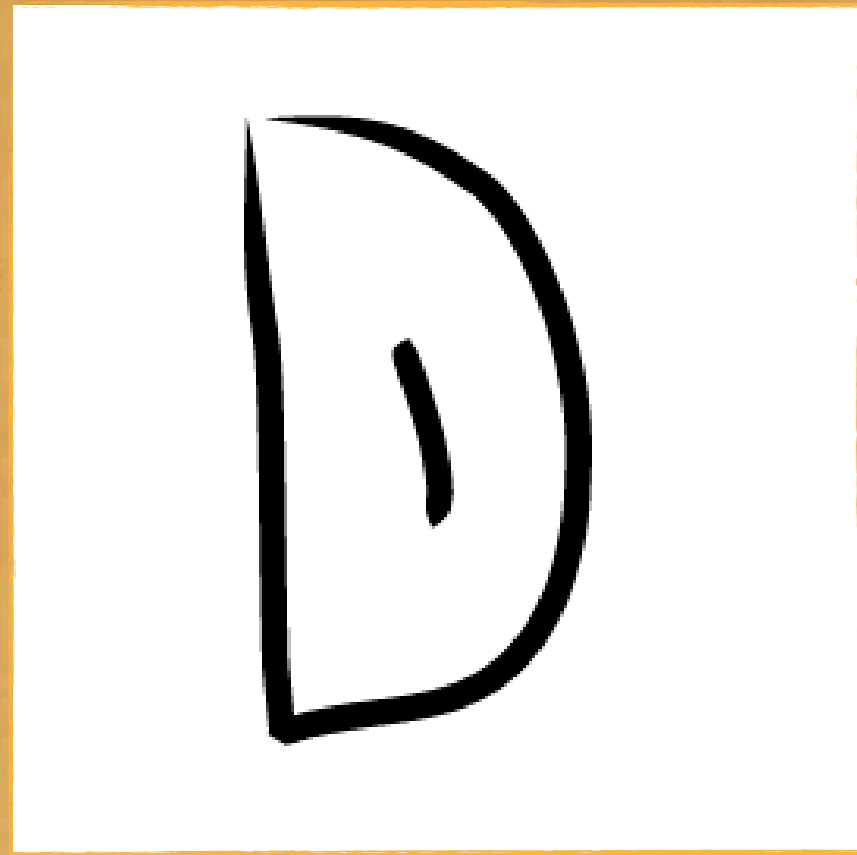


Now try these ones! Can you guess what these pictographs mean?

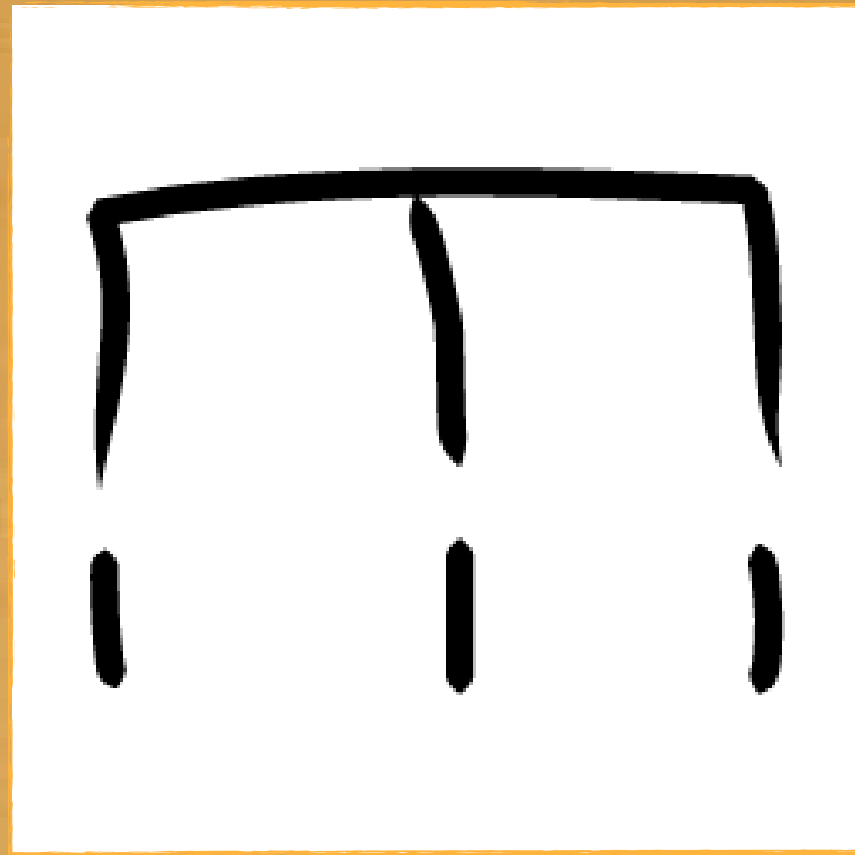




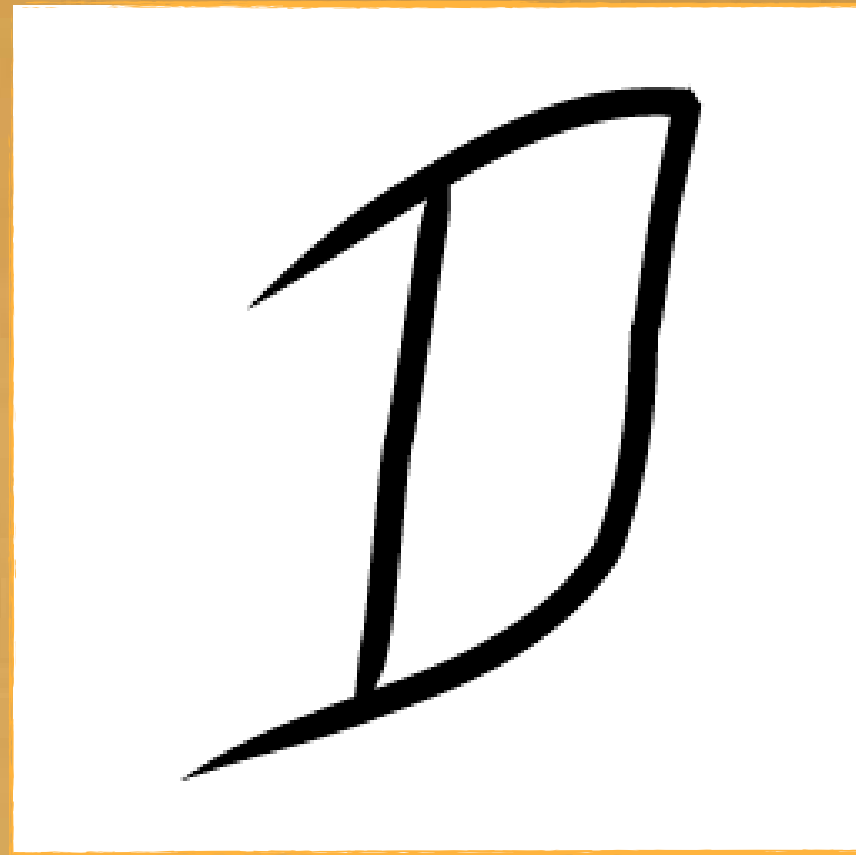
rabbit



moon



rain



meat



Did you guess any of those correctly?  
Which pictograph do you think most  
looks like the thing it is describing?



The pictographs on the oracle bones and other objects found from the Shang Dynasty tell us information that would have been lost forever if it had not been written down.



# Plenary



vegetable

fish

chair



Which word do you think this pictograph represents?



= FISH

Well done if you guessed  
correctly!





fire

flood

teeth



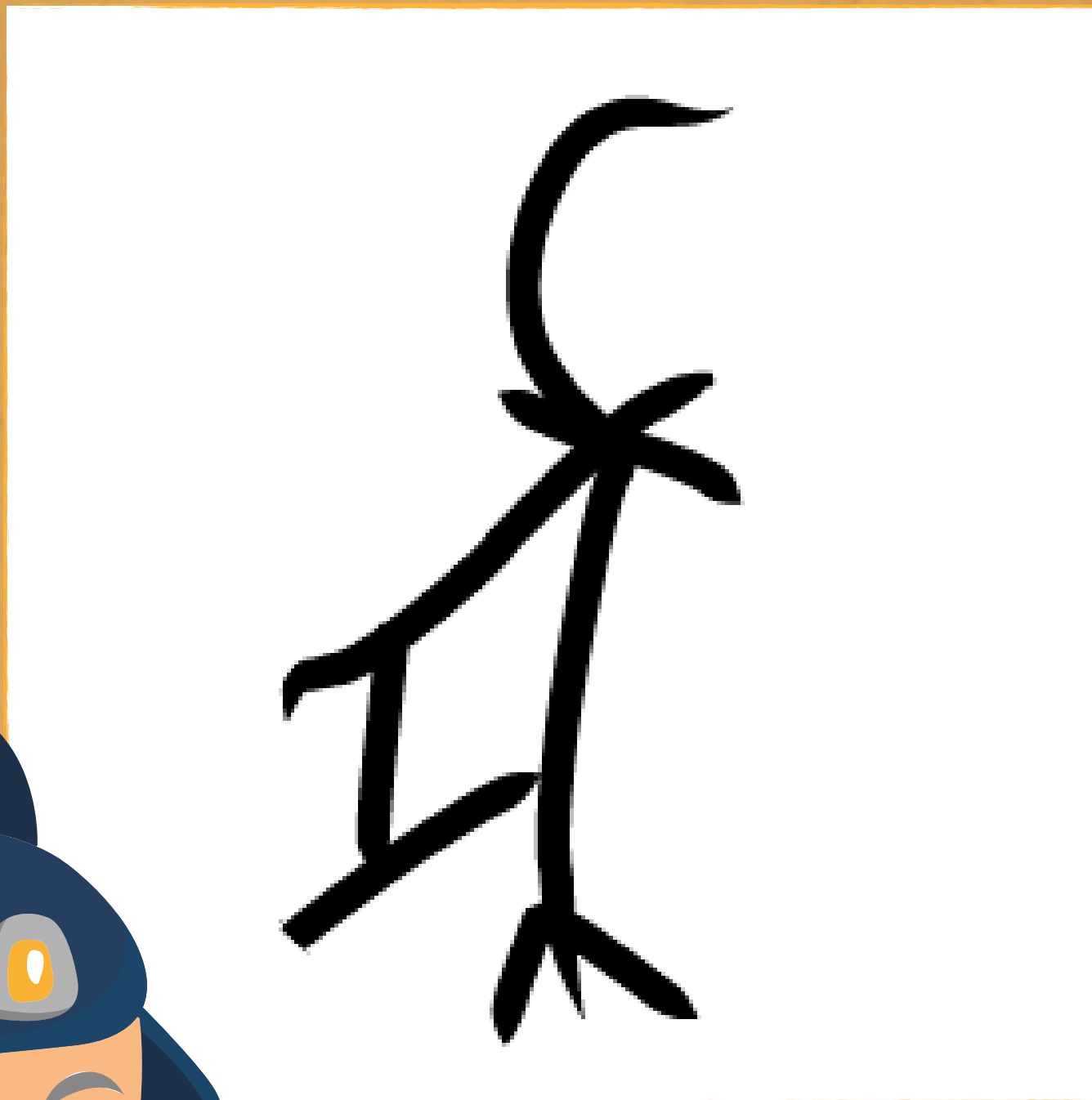
Which word do you think this pictograph represents?

النار

= FIRE

Well done if you guessed  
correctly!





hair

pot

elephant

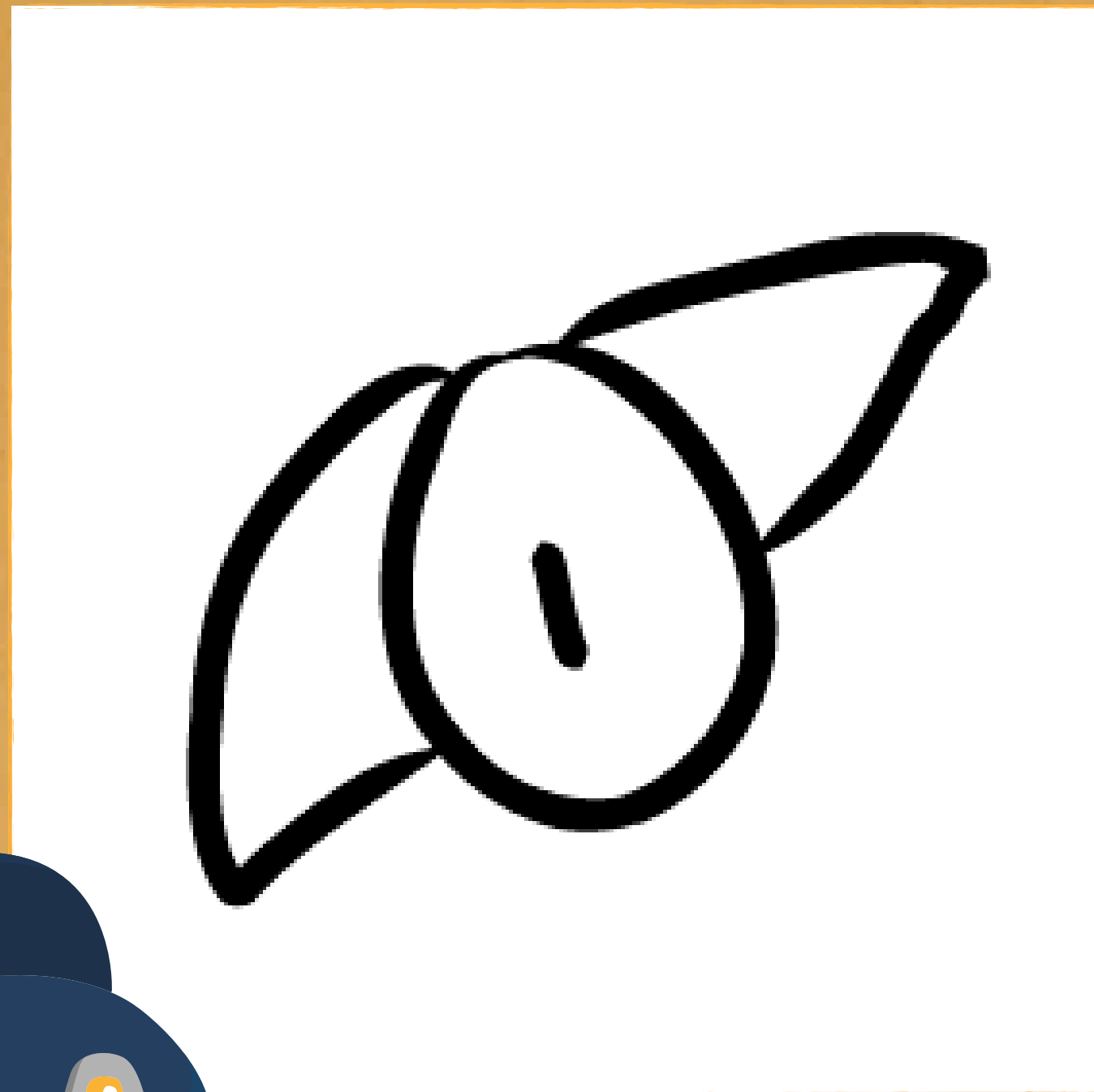
Which word do you think this pictograph represents?



= ELEPHANT

Well done if you guessed  
correctly!





eye

ear

nose



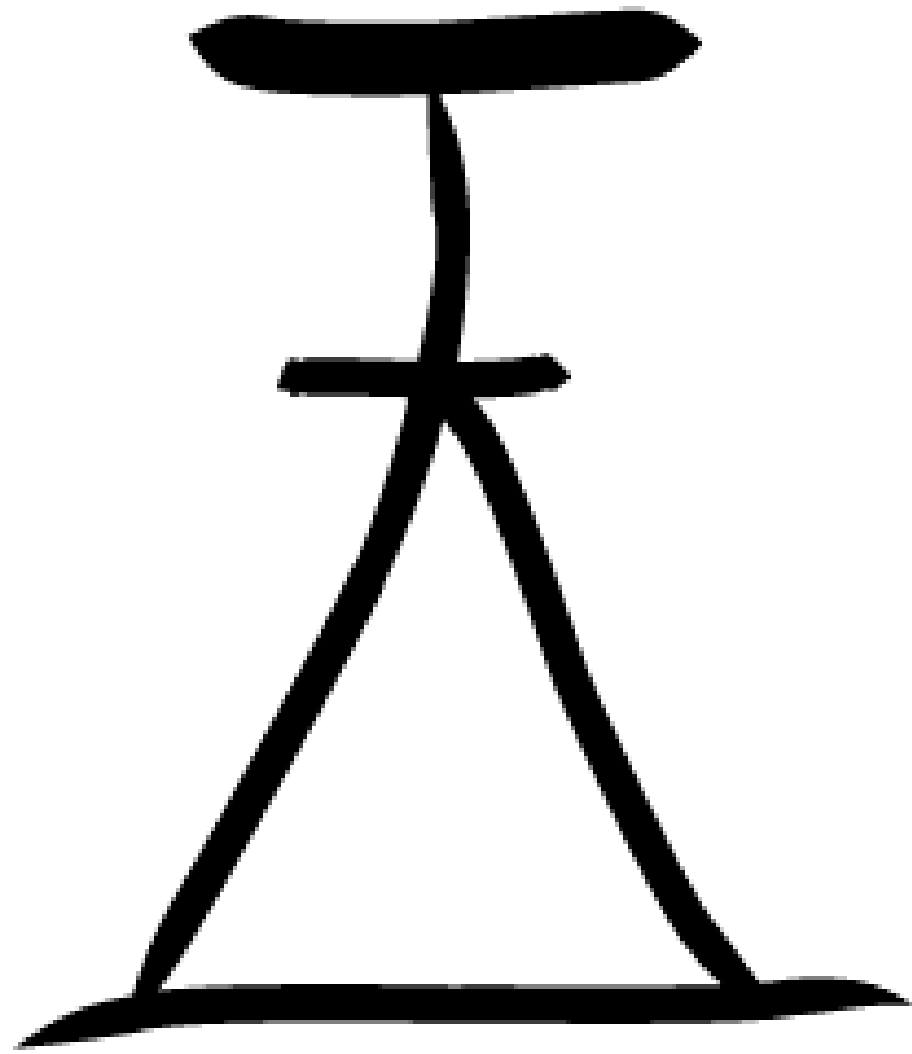
Which word do you think this pictograph represents?



= EYE

Well done if you guessed  
correctly!





house

legs

king



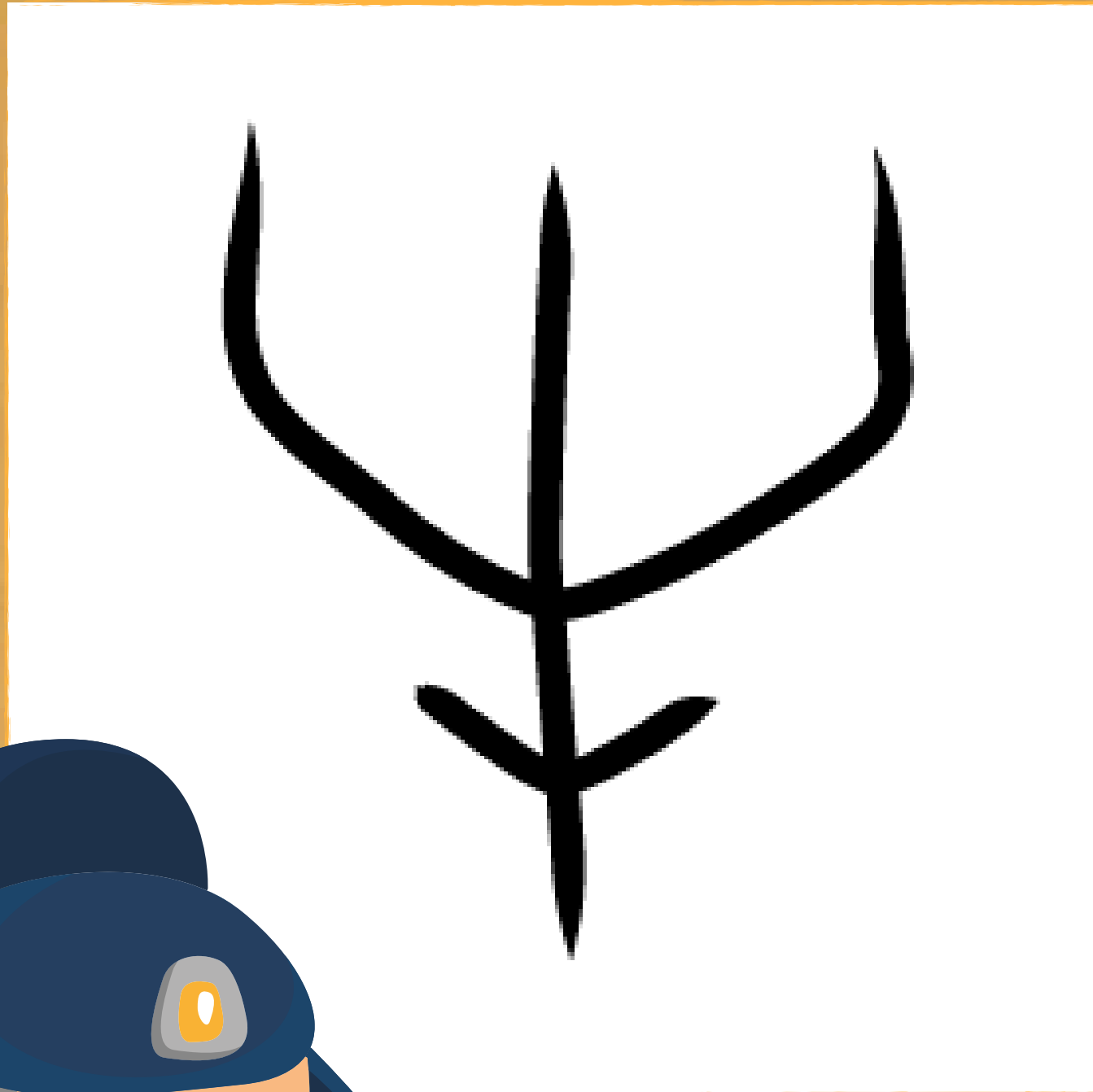
Which word do you think this pictograph represents?

天

= KING

Well done if you guessed  
correctly!





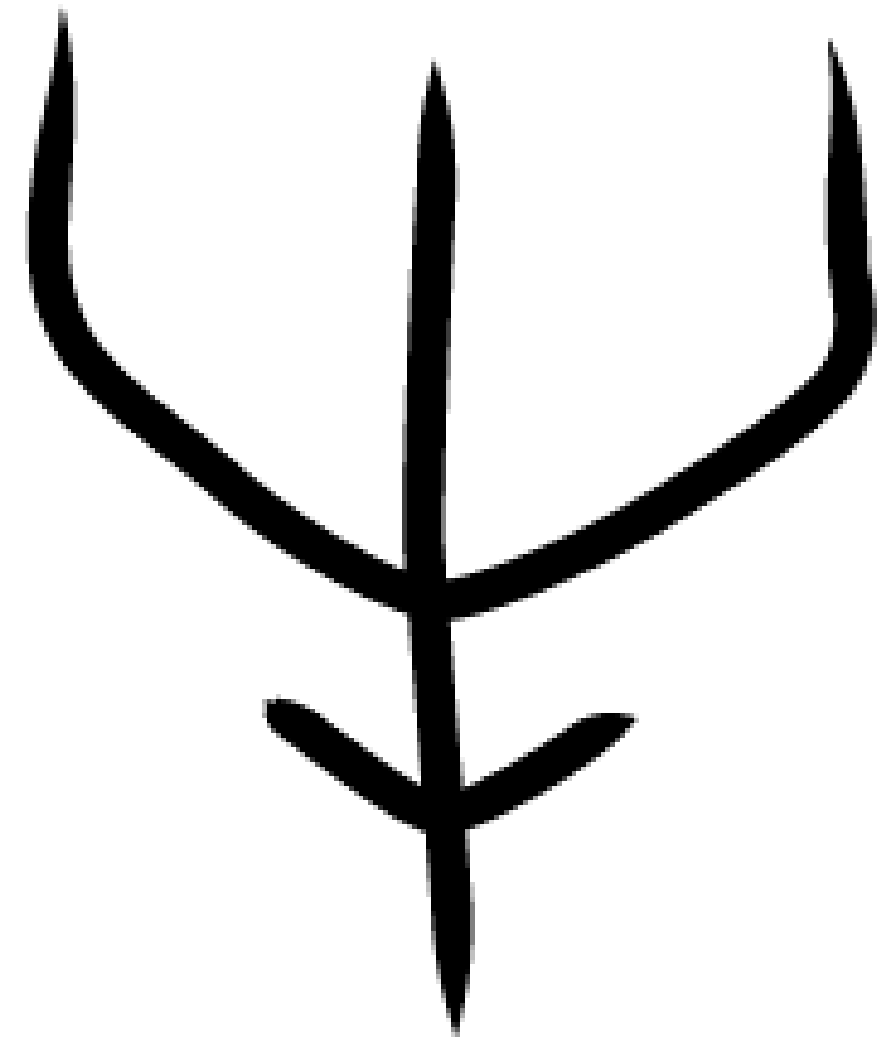
COW

road

middle



Which word do you think this pictograph represents?



= COW

Well done if you guessed  
correctly!

