



My MEP Projects: Y9

Y9 Project: Oracle Bones

Name: _____

When, more than a century ago, Wang Yirong went to his local chemist shop in Beijing to get some medicine, he never imagined that the 'dragon bones' he was prescribed would lead him to discover the earliest known examples of Chinese writing. In this project you'll share some of Wang's excitement in trying to decipher the bones, you'll step back even further into China's past and encounter the brutal, mysterious world of China's first dynasty, the Shang, and you'll have some fun sketching and recreating what are now known as 'oracle bones'.

Go for it!

Task 1: All about oracles

Here are a few questions for you to research to set you off on this project. See if you can find the answers without using Wikipedia! 😊



1. What does the word 'oracle' mean?

2. List two examples of 'oracles' from other parts of the ancient world besides China. Write a few sentences about how these 'oracles' were consulted.

Now watch this short clip about how the 'oracle bones' of China were discovered and how they were made. Then answer the questions below.

<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/how-do-we-know-story-of-china/how-do-we-know-story-of-china/#.XfedCS2cai4>

3. What disease was professor Wang suffering from when he went to his pharmacy and made his astounding discovery? In what year did this happen?

4. In which town were the 'dragon bones' being dug up?

5. From which animals did the bones come?

6. Briefly describe the process used by the Shang priests to consult the bones

7. Give one example of the kind of questions asked on the bones

Another word in English for asking questions of the gods is 'divination'. In the box below is Chinese character zhān meaning 'divination'). Now you know about how the bones were cracked you can probably guess why the character looks like this:



Here are three characters that you probably already know that also have 卜 as their radical. In the box below, write the pinyin, the English meaning and an example of a two or three character Chinese word that the character appears in:

中文	Pinyin	English	Example of a Chinese word that contains the character
站			
卧			
卡			

★	Task 1 complete	
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Task 2: Reading the bones

Ever since Wang Yirong's remarkable discovery, scholars have been hard at work trying to decipher the bones. About 5,000 oracle bone characters have been found and some of the characters are sufficiently similar to modern Chinese characters that they could be quickly identified.

Task 2.1

You probably saw some of these examples when you first started learning Chinese. Draw a line linking the oracle bone character to the modern character.

甲骨文		中文
𠂇		山
𠂇		人
𠂇		日
𠂇		月
𠂇		水

Careful analysis has revealed the meaning of many of the characters, but almost 3,000 characters still remain a mystery. In fact, in 2017, the National Museum of Chinese Writing in Anyang, offered 100,000 yuan for a definitive explanation for each uninterpreted character!

Most of the inscriptions follow a standard formula stating the date of the divination, and the question asked. Here’s an example (read each column downwards, starting from the left)



In modern characters this would read: 辛卯贞今日辛亦雨不雨

辛卯 (xīn mǎo) is the date; 贞 ‘to divine, ask the gods’; 亦 ‘also’

The rough translation is:

“on day xin mao, it is divined on this day xin that it will rain or not rain”

Task 2.2 Have a go at writing in Oracle Bone script

You may have already used the following website in other projects. It shows all the different versions of characters found in various ancient Chinese scripts. Notice that the first ones listed are those from the oracle script.

<https://hanziyuan.net>



Simply type in a Chinese character and it will show you all the early forms of that character that have been discovered so far.

1.

Think up a sentence in modern Chinese, it can be as simple as 'my house is not big' 我家不大。 Look up the characters in oracle script and write the sentence in that script in the box below. (Some characters, of course, will not have ancient versions so hunt for ones that do).

★	Task 2 complete	
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Task 3: The story of Wang Yirong

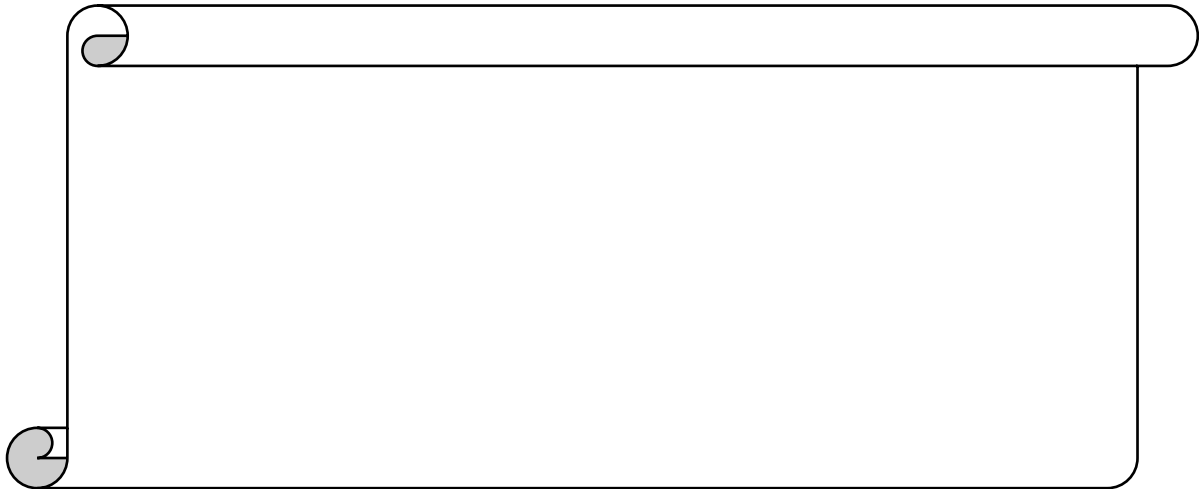
Now you are going to listen to Wang Yirong's story in Chinese in an article from The Chairman's Bao. Tick each step as you complete it on the table below. Remember, **repetition, repetition, repetition** is a key trick for successful language learners. You'll listen to the short audio five times (don't worry it's only fifty-four seconds long!) *but don't skimp on it!*

<http://bit.ly/TCB-OracleBones>

Tick each step as you complete it:

Tasks	✓
Listen to the audio without looking at the text. Jot down in pinyin any words you recognize in the scroll below.	
Listen to the audio again while reading the text	
Listen to it again while reading the text	
Hover your mouse over the words you don't know, the website will give you the translation	
Listen to it again while reading the text	
Click on the small green scholar's hat at the top left hand corner of the picture. This will take you to some matching and missing word exercises. Do these exercises.	

Choose five Chinese characters that are new to you in this article. Click on each character. This will take you to the Stroke Order and Writing Tool. Use this to check and practice stroke order for those characters.	
Listen to the audio one more time without reading the text. Enjoy how much better you understand it now!	



★	Task 3 complete	
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Task 4: Drawing the bones

Many museums around the world post 3D graphics of their oracle bone collections on line. Two important collections of oracle bones in the UK are in Cambridge University Library and The British Library in London. Here are the links to their collections. Take a little while to explore these resources, then choose a bone you find interesting and sketch it in the scroll below:

<http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-CUL-00001-00155/1>

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/chinese-oracle-bone>

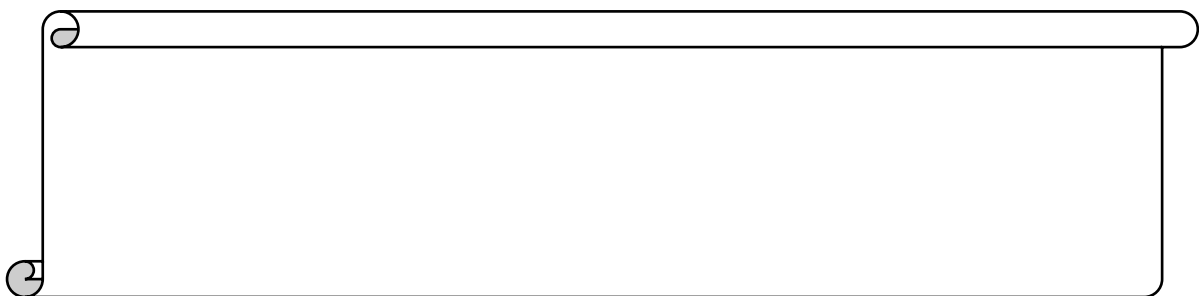


Task 4.2 Finding some oracle bones near you.

In this task, you'll track down the museum nearest to you that has oracle bones in its collection. Here's a site that lists all the museums in the UK. Use the map to find museums close to you:

<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryMagazine/DestinationsUK/Museums/>

Once you've found some museums, follow the links to their websites. Most museums will have on their website menu 'Explore the Collection' or something similar. Search for Oracle Bone or Oracle Bones. Jot down where your research led you in the scroll below:



Task 4.3 Optional challenge...visit that museum!

If it's not too far away, plan a visit to the museum. Write a blog post or record a video that you can share with your class about your visit.



Task 5: Who were the Shang?

The Shang dynasty is generally recognized as the first historically verified dynasty to rule China. The dates are approximately from the 16th century BCE to the 11th century BCE, spanning some of the period of Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Greek civilizations in the West.

Task 5.1

Watch the following seven-minute video and take notes in English on the topics listed in the table below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxjP0CymIjc>

Topic	Your notes from the video
Famous Shang rulers and their deeds	
Metal technology in the Shang	
Shang burials	
Shang beliefs	

Task 5.2

The Mandate of Heaven

The 'right to rule', the so-called 'Mandate of Heaven' is really key to understanding the rise and fall of dynasties throughout Chinese history. The more Chinese history you study, the more you'll come across it

天命

tiān mìng

The character 命 (mìng) means 'fate' or 'command'. You'll find it in several more commonly-used words. Look up the following words in the dictionary and write the English meaning in the table below:

中文	pinyin	English meaning
命运	mìng yùn	
革命	gé mìng	
人命	rén mìng	
救命!	jiù mìng!	

Task 5.3 The fearsome tao tie mask

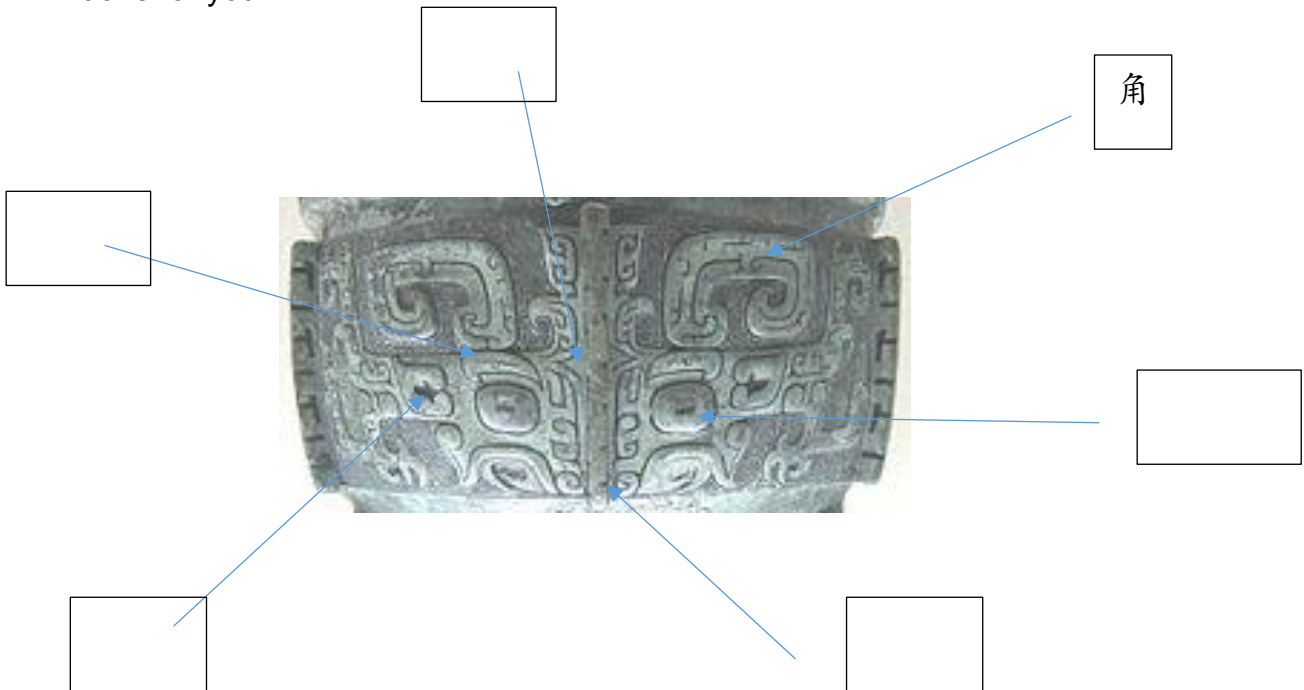
As you will have gathered from the video, the Shang rulers relied on weaponry and fear to control the people and keep their enemies away. Ritual bronze vessels from that time often bore the stylized image of a fierce mask, known as the 'tao tie' mask



Here is a list of Chinese words for features on the mask. You probably know these words already. If you don't, look them up.

耳朵 眼睛 鼻子 眉毛 脸 角(jiǎo 'horn')

Write the correct characters by the arrow pointing to that feature. One has been done for you



The Chinese characters for the word tāo tiè are almost as fearsome as the mask itself!.....

饕餮

Use your knowledge of stroke order to try to figure out how you would write it correctly. Write the characters in the box below:

1. How many strokes does 饕 tāo have?
2. How many strokes does 餮 tiè have?
3. What radical do they both share?

★	Task 5 complete	
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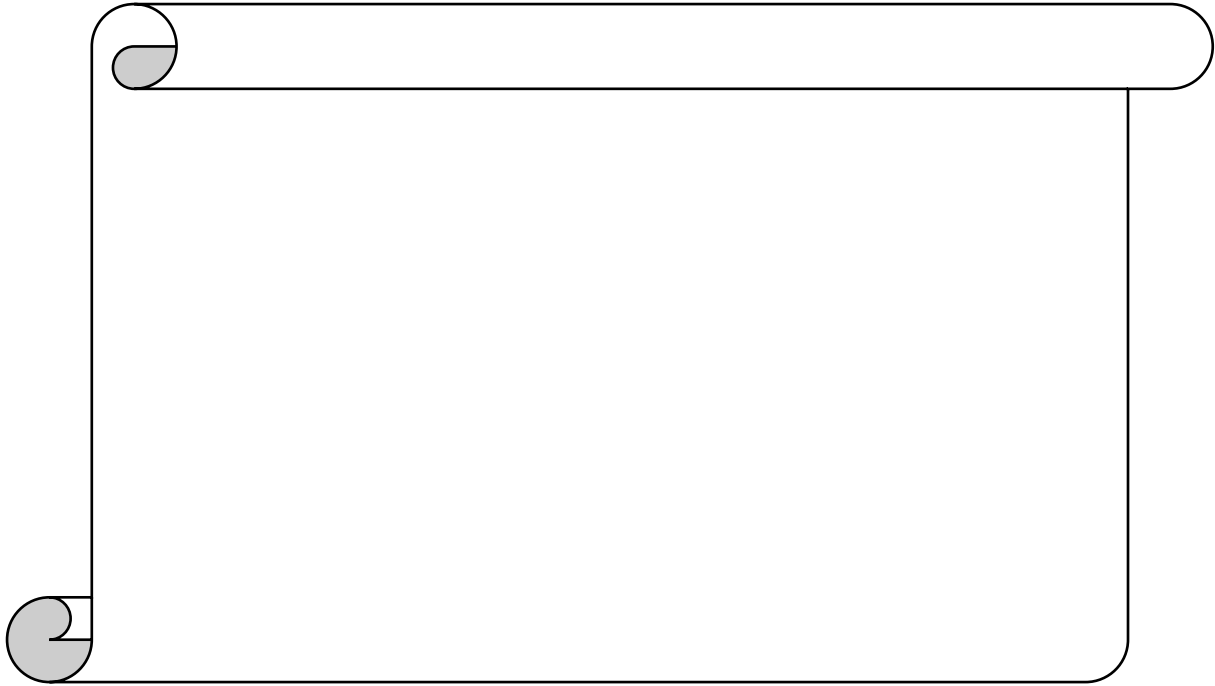
Task 6: A modern chariot burial?

The Shang rulers buried horses, chariots and even their servants in their tombs. Here's a really interesting article from The Chairman's Bao about a man who loved his car so much he asked to be buried in it! Click on the link below and take the following steps to ensure that you get the most out of this important learning resource.

Tick each step as you complete it on the table below. Remember, **repetition, repetition, repetition** is a key trick for successful language learners. You'll listen to the short audio five times (don't worry it's only one minute and twenty-seven seconds long!) *but don't skimp on it!*

<https://www.thechairmansbao.com/video-of-man-being-buried-in-car-gains-online-attention/>

Tasks	✓
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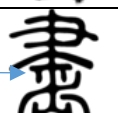



☆	Task 6 complete	
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Task 7 Exploring other types of Chinese script

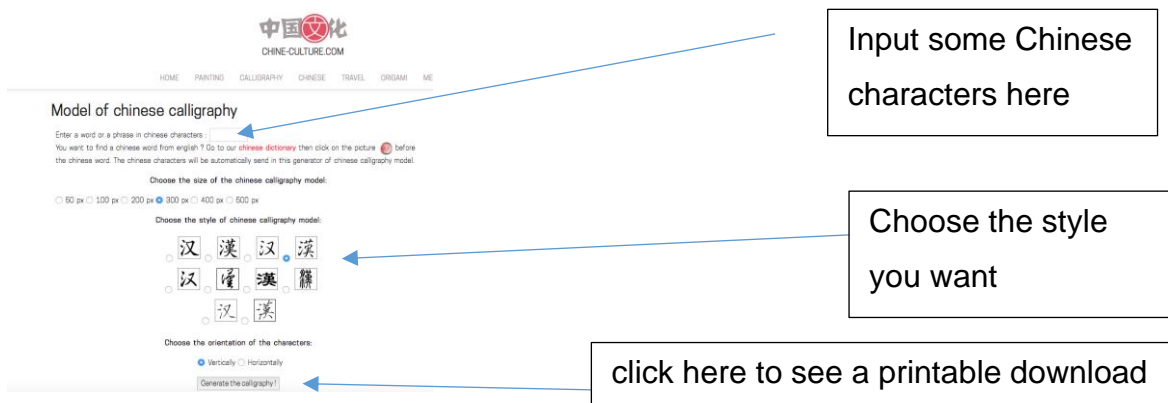
From the angular shapes of characters carved into bones to the swooping strokes of characters written with a brush on paper, Chinese characters have evolved with the instruments used to write them. There are five major styles of script and some of these are difficult even for Chinese native-speakers to read!

The table below lists the English names of the five scripts. Research on the internet or in books to correctly link the style name in English to its Chinese name and the example of the writing style. One has been done for you. (note that the word 书 appears in the script names. That's because although it means 'book' now, it used to be the verb 'to write')

English names	Chinese name	Example of the character 書 (书) in the script
Seal script (small seal)	行书 xíng shū	
Clerical script (official script)	楷书 kǎi shū	
Semi-cursive script (running script)	草书 cǎo shū	
Cursive script (sloppy script)	篆书 zhuàn shū	
Regular script (standard script)	隶书 lì shū	

It takes a very long time to learn to write some of these scripts. Fortunately, technology can help. Go to the following website:

<http://www.chine-culture.com/en/chinese-calligraphy/model-of-chinese-calligraphy.php>



The screenshot shows the website interface for 'Model of Chinese Calligraphy'. It includes a navigation bar with 'HOME', 'PAINTING', 'CALLIGRAPHY', 'CHINESE', 'TRAVEL', 'ORGAN', and 'ME'. The main content area has a search box for Chinese characters, a 'Generate the calligraphy' button, and options to choose the size (50px to 500px), style (seal, clerical, semi-cursive, cursive, regular), and orientation (vertically or horizontally). Annotations with arrows point to these features: 'Input some Chinese characters here' points to the search box; 'Choose the style you want' points to the style selection options; and 'click here to see a printable download' points to the 'Generate the calligraphy' button.

Have a go at printing your Chinese name in different styles of calligraphy. Print out your favourite version and attach it to this project.

★ Task 7 complete

Task 8: Reviewing this project

Which tasks in this project did you find most interesting and why? Which tasks were the hardest? Which task did you not enjoy doing and why?

Complete the following three sentences **in Chinese characters**. You'll find some useful vocabulary in the box below:

1. 我觉得最有意思的练习是 task number..... 因为

.....

2. 我觉得最难的练习是 task number..... 因为

.....

3. 我不喜欢 task number..... 因为

.....

Language Tips!

练习	<i>liàn xí</i>	“task/exercise”
难	<i>nán</i>	“difficult”
有意思	<i>yǒu yì si</i>	“interesting”
没意思	<i>méi yì si</i>	“boring”



Your Achievements

Congratulations on completing 1 MEP Project!

- You've delved into the very distant past and learnt about the origins of the Chinese script
- You have learnt about the first historical Chinese dynasty, the Shang, about its beliefs and about some of its rulers.
- You've looked closely at examples of the bones and hopefully found some in a museum near you.
- And you've learnt to recognize the five main styles of Chinese calligraphy.

***If your teacher
signs you off,
you will collect 1
Badge!***