

Reading and Thinking

Explore the Chinese writing system

- 1 Look at the title and picture below. Predict what the text will be about.
- 2 Read the text quickly to find the main idea of each paragraph.

THE CHINESE WRITING SYSTEM: CONNECTING THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

China is widely known for its ancient **civilisation** which has continued all the way through into modern times, **despite** the many ups and downs in its history. There are many reasons why this has been possible, but one of the main **factors** has been the Chinese writing system.

At the beginning, written Chinese was a picture-based language. It dates back several thousand years to the use of *fanggu*—animal **bones** and shells on which **symbols** were **carved** by ancient Chinese people. Some of the ancient symbols can still be seen in today's *hanzi*.

By the Shang **Dynasty** (around 1600–1046 BC), these symbols had become a well-developed writing system. Over the years, the system developed into different forms, as it was a time when people were divided geographically, leading to many **varieties** of dialects and characters. This, however, changed under Emperor Qinshihuang of the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BC).



Emperor Qinshihuang united the seven **major** states into one unified country where the Chinese writing system began to develop in one direction. That writing system was of great importance in uniting the Chinese people and culture. Even today, no matter where Chinese people live or what dialect they speak, they can all still communicate in writing.

Written Chinese has also become an important **means** by which China's present is connected with its past. People in modern times can read the **classic** works which were written by Chinese in ancient times. The high **regard** for the Chinese writing system can be seen in the development of Chinese **characters** as an art form, known as Chinese **calligraphy**, which has become an important part of Chinese culture.

Today, the Chinese writing system is still an important part of Chinese culture. As China plays a greater role in **global affairs**, an increasing number of international students are beginning to **appreciate** China's culture and history through this amazing language.

- 3 Scan the text to find the words and phrases that describe a time. Then write down what happened at each of those important times.



Scan

Scanning is looking at the text quickly to find **specific** information, such as dates or numbers.

- 4 Read the text again and discuss the questions.

- 1 How did written Chinese unify Chinese people divided by geography and dialects?
- 2 How does written Chinese connect Chinese people today with those of the past?
- 3 According to the writer, the Chinese writing system is one factor that has helped the Chinese language and culture survive. What do you think are some of the other factors?

- 5 Complete the passage with the correct words and phrase below.

system carving means
dates back classic civilisation

Chinese calligraphy has developed along with China's _____. It is difficult to say when exactly calligraphy started. Chinese writing was first done by _____ symbols onto bones and shells, but as it developed into a writing _____, it also developed as a form of art done with a brush. It is believed that Chinese calligraphy _____ to at least the Han Dynasty (202 BC–220 AD). Soon after that, the idea developed that calligraphy was not only a beautiful art form but also a _____ of showing the character of the “man behind the brush”. Today, anyone from small children to old people can enjoy practising the _____ art of Chinese calligraphy.



- 6 Guess the meaning of the underlined words in the sentences. Then look in the text for the words they are related to.

- 1 Many Chinese characters symbolise their meanings, unlike English words which are spelt out according to how they sound.
- 2 The basic forms of the English writing system are known as letters.
- 3 A unified writing system is considered to be an important part of civilised society.
- 4 Learning Chinese calligraphy will increase your appreciation of Chinese culture.