

BÓYÌ 博弈 · WEEK 13

dǎ cǎo jīng shé

打草惊蛇

Poke the grass and the snake moves.

In 133 BC, a Han army hid three hundred thousand men in the hills and waited. A trader from the border had sold one city to the Xiongnu chanyu, and the chanyu came south with a hundred thousand riders. A hundred li short of the city, he stopped: cattle and sheep everywhere, and not one herder. This week you'll learn to write four characters: 打, 草, 惊, 蛇.

Stratagem No. 13 of 36 · one story, one lesson, four characters.

本周学：打草惊蛇 · 练字：打、草、惊、蛇

A CITY FOR SALE



Animals in every direction. Not one herder.

In 133 BC, the Han court tried to end the raids from the north in one move. The Han general in charge had planned it for a year.

A trader from Mayi went out to the Xiongnu camps with an offer. He said: I can open the city for you. The stores inside are worth more than the city.

The chanyu believed him. He came south with a hundred thousand horsemen.

Along the road, in the hills, three hundred thousand Han soldiers lay down and waited. The plan was simple. Let them into Mayi. Close the door behind them.

A hundred li short of the city, the chanyu stopped. Animals in every direction. Not one herder. If a city sells itself, the seller is usually the trap.

《史记》卷110 匈奴列传

NOBODY CAME



He did not go on.

He did not go on. He sent men to attack a watchtower by the road. They took the clerk who had been posted there.

The clerk knew where the army was hiding. The chanyu put a sword to his neck. The clerk talked.

So that was the whole thing. The fields were the trap.

Three hundred thousand men waited all day in the cold. Nobody came. When the order to chase finally came, the road was empty.

One question — whose cattle are these? — undid a year. The man who asked the question went home with his army. The man who set the trap never even saw him.

《史记》卷110 匈奴列传

WHY IT WORKED

Step	Move	中文 · pinyin	Result
First	knock on it	叩 kòu	Ask one question
Second	look, then move	察 chá	Eyes before feet
Third	go back again	復 fù	The dark shows itself

觉得不对就敲一下，看清了再动；反复去试，暗处自己会露。打草惊蛇 dǎ cǎo jīng shé

THE ORIGINAL LINES

《三十六计·第十三计 打草惊蛇》

The Thirty-Six Stratagems, No. 13 — "Poke the grass and the snake moves"

1

yí yǐ kòu shí chá ér hòu dòng

疑以叩實，察而后動；

If something does not add up, knock on it. Look, then move.

2

fù zhě yīn zhī méi yě

復者，陰之媒也。

Going back again and again is how the dark shows itself.

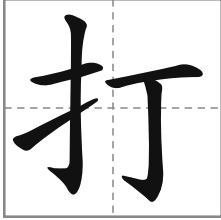
Fourteen characters in two lines, nothing more. The long commentary that follows in old editions is not part of this text.

原文只有这十四个字、两行。后面那段按语是老版本的注释，不进原文框。

PRACTICE · 打 Dǎ · 草 Cǎo

Follow the numbers. Write each stroke in order.

先描一遍分解格，再在田字格里写 5 遍。

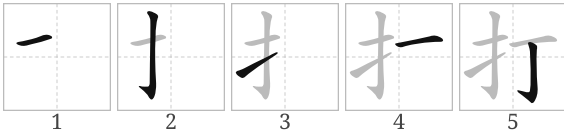


dǎ

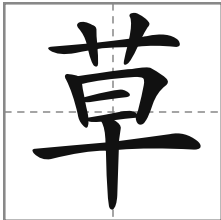
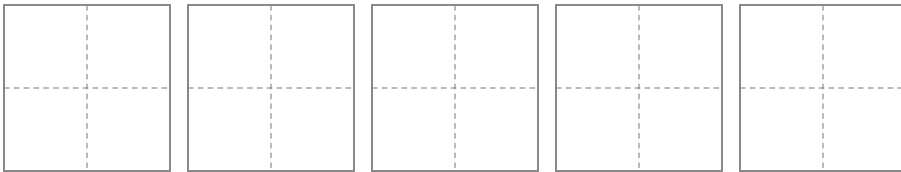
to hit; to strike

5 strokes

STROKE ORDER



YOUR TURN

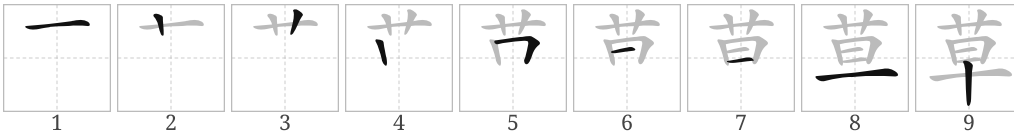


cǎo

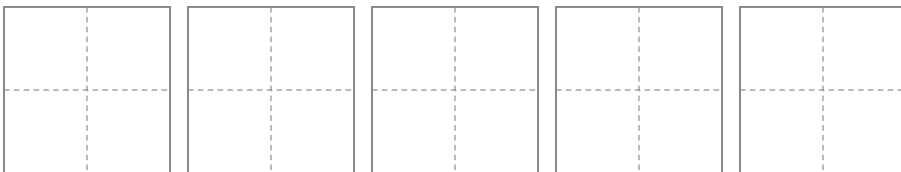
grass

9 strokes

STROKE ORDER



YOUR TURN



PRACTICE · 惊 JĪNG · 蛇 SHÉ

Same order again. Write slowly, and say the sound out loud.

写完 4 个字，再回到第 7 页连写整句。

惊

jīng
to startle
11 strokes

STROKE ORDER

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

YOUR TURN

蛇

shé
snake
11 strokes

STROKE ORDER

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

YOUR TURN

PRACTICE · 打草惊蛇 Dǎ Cǎo Jīng Shé

Trace the first row, then write the whole phrase four times. Say it out loud each time.

dǎ	cǎo	jīng	shé
打	草	惊	蛇

打草惊蛇 · Poke the grass and the snake moves.

THREE MORE WORDS

qiāo

1 敲

to knock; to tap.

jué de bú duì jiù qù qiāo yí xià

觉得不对，就去敲一下。

If something does not add up, knock on it.

One knock costs nothing.

shì

2 试

to try; to test.

zhǐ shì nǐ fù de qǐ de nà yí xià

只试你付得起的那一下。

Test only the edge you can afford.

Test the cheap thing, not the person.

kàn qīng

3 看清

to see clearly.

kàn qīng le zài dòng

看清了再动。

Look, then move.

Eyes first. Feet second.

SPOT IT · STOP IT 识破 · 防住

Same table, same three quotes. You ask one line before you sign: waterproofing, what is included? He answers in one sentence, too fast. You ask from another side, and now he says: that depends. You have not paid anything yet.

先问 <i>Ask first: one afternoon for the room</i> dā yí gè xià wǔ 搭一个下午 <i>One afternoon</i> mō qīng wū zi 摸清屋子 <i>You know the room</i> zài zǒu jìn qù 再走进去 <i>Then you step in</i> 	先付 <i>Pay first: you learn it from the invoice</i> xiān qiān xià qù 先签下去 <i>You sign first</i> dì èr gè yuè 第二个月 <i>Month two</i> cóng zhàng dān lǐ zhī dào 从账单里知道 <i>The invoice tells you</i>
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Two ways into any deal. Ask first: one afternoon, and you know the room. Pay first: you learn it from the invoice. The second is not faster. Just dearer.

走进一笔生意只有两条路。先问：搭上一个下午，摸清这间屋子。先付：你从账单里认识这间屋子。

SEVEN DAYS, SEVEN QUESTIONS

Day 1 What line in a quote did you never really understand? 看懂 kàn dǒng

Day 2 Which small thing did you test before you signed? 先试 xiān shì

Day 3 Who answered too fast — and what did that tell you? 太快 tài kuài

Day 4 What is invisible in your current deal, and what could it cost you? 看不见 kàn bú jiàn

Day 5 What cheap question would change your mind this week? 问一句 wèn yí jù

Day 6 Where did you pay first, and learn the room from the invoice? 账单 zhàng dān

Day 7 What will you poke at, gently, before you step in? 先敲 xiān qiāo

WEEK 13 REVIEW



The one-page summary of this week. 本周一图总结。

1. In one sentence: what made the chanyu turn back?

2. What does 打草惊蛇 mean, in your own words?

3. Which of this week's four characters can you write now without looking: 打, 草, 惊, or 蛇?

4. What did you sign last month without asking one line first — and what did it cost you?

Poke the grass before you walk through it.

走过去之前，先敲一敲草。

Zǒu guò qù zhī qián, xiān qiāo yì qiāo cǎo.