

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about Jesus' crucifixion

荆

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ging1*

Meanings: thistle, bramble, thorns

荆 (艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass + 刑 *xing2*, torture) + 棘 (double 束 *ci4*, prickle) = 荆棘 (*jing1 ji2* = thistles~brambles) having 刺 (*ci4*, prickles/thorns) on branches/leaves. 洋紫荆 (*yang2 zi3 jing1* = foreign~purple~thistle = bauhinia) is Hong Kong's 市花 (*shi4 hua1* = city's~floral-emblem).

棘手 (*ji2 shou3* = prick-hands) describes thorny issue/problem. 披荆斬棘 (*pi1 jing1 zhan3 ji2* = split-thistles~chop~brambles) = clearing/conquering obstacles. General who committed error 負荆請罪 (*fu4 jing1 qing3 zui4* = carry~thistle-branch~beg-blame), i.e. begged to be punished/lashed with 荆條 (*jing1 tiao2* = thorny/prickly~branch/whip).

荆棘滿途 (*jing1 ji2 man3 tu2* = thistles~brambles~fill~path) describes difficult venture. Jesus, nailed on the cross, wore 荆棘冕 (*jing1 ji2 mian3* = thistles~brambles~coronet = crown of thorns).

by Diana Yue