

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 Lent

Putonghua pronunciation: *ku3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *foo2*

Meaning: bitter, sad, sorrow, suffering, tortuous

苦 (radical 艹 = 草 *cao3*, grass) means 苦味 (*ku3 wei4* = bitter-taste) or 辛苦 (*xin1 ku3* = spicy-hot-bitter = difficult-stressful). Underdog 吃苦 (*chi1 ku3* = eat-bitter = leads a hard life), 苦笑 (*ku3 xiao4* = bitter-smile/laugh = smile sorely).

Young Werther has 苦惱 (*ku3 nao3* = frustrations/sorrows). Wounds/misunderstandings inflict 痛苦 (*tong4 ku3* = pain-bitterness/sorrow). War causes 苦難 (*ku3 nan4* = grief-calamities). Buddhists say 苦海無邊 (*ku3 hai3 wu2 bian1* = suffering-ocean-has-no-edge = life is endless sorrow).

Carrying his cross, Jesus Christ 受苦 (*shou4 ku3* = receive-pain/ agony = suffered, was harshly treated) on his road to crucifixion. Hence Christians observe Lent by 拜苦路 (*bai4 ku3 lu4* = worship-bitter-road = walking the Way of Sorrows, Latin: Via Dolorosa).

by Diana Yue