

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 Solomon's wisdom

智

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ji3*

Meanings: intelligent, clever, smart, wise

智 (知 *zhi1*, knowledge + 日 *ri2*, sun) means 才智 (*cai2 zhi4* = talent/wit~cleverness), 智慧 (*zhi4 hui4* = wise~clever = wisdom). 智商 (*zhi4 shang1* = intelligence~quotient) = I.Q.

弱智 (*ruo4 zhi4* = weak~clever) = mentally retarded.

智多星 (*zhi4 duo1 xing1* = clever~plenty~star) = guy with abundant smart ideas. 智囊團 (*zhi4 nang2 tuan2* = clever~bag~group) = think tank.

所羅門王 (Suo3 Luo2 Men2 wang2 = "So~lo~mon"-transliterated~king = King Solomon) is 智者 (*zhi4 zhe3* = wise~person = sage). When two women 爭嬰 (*zheng1 ying1* = fought~for~baby = claimed to be same baby's mother), he ordered: 劈為兩半! (*pi3 wei2 liang3 ban4* = Chop~into~two~halves!) False mother's assent is 不智 (*bu4 zhi4* = not~wise = unwise/foolish)!