

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: *mò*4

Cantonese pronunciation: *mak*6

Meaning: silent, tacit, quiet, hushed, secretly

默 (radical 黑 *hei*1, black) means 靜默 (*jìng*4 *mò*4 = quiet-silent). Students 默記 (*mò*4 *jì*4 = silently-memorize) text, 默書 (*mò*4 *shū*1 = silent-write = write out memorized/dictated passage). Teacher 默許 (*mò*4 *xǔ*3 = gives unspoken-consent to) using dictionaries. 默默無聞 (*mò*4 *mò*4 *wú*2 *wén*2 = silent-silent-no-hear/fame = unheard-of) starlet envies celebrities. 默劇 (*mò*4 *jù*2 = silent-drama = mime) actors have 默契 (*mò*4 *qì*4 = unvoiced/tacit mutual understanding). Eye-witness 打破沉默 (*dǎ*3 *pò*4 *chén*2 *mò*4 = hit-break-sunken-silence = breaks silence), testifies. Criminal 默然 (*mò*4 *rán*2 = silent-indeed = is speechless), 默認 (*mò*4 *rèn*4 = silently-admits) he committed crime.

Lent is season for 默禱 (*mò*4 *dǎo*3 = silent-prayer), 默哀 (*mò*4 *āi*1 = silent-mourning) for death of Christ.

by Diana Yue