

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

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

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

4<sup>th</sup> 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 narcissism

憐

(radical ↑ = 心)

Putonghua pronunciation: *lian 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lin 4*

Meanings: pity, care for

憐 = admiring/loving/pitying/caring/protective/tender feeling. 可憐 (*ke3 lian2* = can~pity) means pitiable. Charity-workers 憐愛 (*lian2 ai4* = pity~love) orphans. Alms-givers 憐憫 (*lian2 min3* = pity~sympathize-with) beggars. Maestro 憐才 (treasures~talent), helps young prodigy join academy.

Similar ailments/problems make people 同病相憐 (*tong2 bing4 xiang1 lian2* = same-illness~mutual~pity = pity/care-for each other).

Many nymphs/women 憐惜 (*lian2 xi1* = loved~treasured) and wooed 美少年 (*mei3 shao4 nian2* = lovely~few~years = handsome lad) Narcissus, but he only 顧影自憐 (*gu4 ying3 zi4 lian2* = look-at-reflection~self~admire = admired his own reflection in the lake), died of 憂鬱 (*you1 yu4* = sad~dense = melancholy/melancholia), became a narcissus (Chinese name 水仙花 *shui3 xian1 hua1* = water~fairy~flower). 真可憐 (*zhen1 ke3 lian2* = Really/How~pitiable/sad)!

by Diana Yue