

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 witches

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhou4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jau3*

Meanings: curse, spell, abuse, swear, revile

咒 (radical 口 *kou3*, mouth) originally meant 祝 (*zhu1*, bless), now means curse. Irritated person 咒罵 (*zhou4 ma4* = curses~blames) weather/traffic. Bitter person 咒詛 (*zhou4 zu3* = curses~condemns) enemy.

咒語 (*zhou4 yu3* = curse~words) means magical utterances bearing blessing/curse. Priests/shamans 唸咒 (*nian4 zhou4* = chant~blessing/curse = pronounce magical utterances) to 驅魔 (*qu1 mo2* = expel/exorcise~demons), 治病 (*zhi4 bing4* = cure~diseases).

符咒 (*fu2 zhou4* = charm~curse = magical charms) are 符 (*fu2*, paper charms) written with magical 咒語 (*zhou4 yu3* = blessing/curse~words/symbols). 下咒 (*xia4 zhou4* = descend/cast~curse) means casting magical spell on person/place. Victim of 毒咒 (*du2 zhou4* = poisonous/vicious~curse) gets 咒死 (*zhou4 si3* = cursed~to-death) unless he can 解咒 (*jie3 zhou4* = untie~curse = undo the curse).