

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.

This week: Words about death

哀

Pronunciation: *ai* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *oi* (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: bitter sorrow, mourn, mourning, mournful

哀 = sorrow/grief: poor man's 悲哀 (*bei ai* = sadness~sorrow), sentimentalist's 哀愁 (*ai qiu* = sorrow~dejection), debtor's 哀求 (*ai qiu* = desperate~begging), banished patriot's 哀歌 (*ai ge* = grief-stricken~song = lamentations). 哀莫大於心死 (*ai mo da yu xin si* = sorrow~no-more~greater~than~heart~dead) = loss of heart/hope/dreams is the greatest tragedy.

哀鴻遍地 (*ai hong bian di* = sorrowful~birds/refugees~all-over~land) describes war/famine victims wandering/crying everywhere. Survivors 哀悼 (*ai dao* = sorrowfully~mourn) soldiers killed. War strategists say 哀兵必勝 (*ai bing bi sheng* = mourning~army~certain~win = grief-boosted, we shall overcome).

Mourning family 哀泣 (*ai qi* = bitterly/painfully~weep). We console them: “節哀順變!” (*jie ai shun bian* = limit~sorrow~follow/accept~change = get over it, look ahead).

by Diana Yue