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 Mid-Autumn Festival

Putonghua pronunciation: huai 2
Cantonese pronunciation: waai 4
Meanings: bosom, contain, reminisce

懷 (radical ▲ = 心 xin1, heart) means bosom. Women 懷孕 (huai2 yun4 = contain-pregnancy = get pregnant). Baby sleeps in 母親懷裡 (mu3 qin1 huai2 li3 = mother-parent-bosom-inside = mother’s bosom). Teachers 關懷 (guan1 huai2 = concern/care-bosom = care for) students. Youths 滿懷理想 (man3 huai2 li2 xiang3 = full-bosom-ideals = are full of ideals).

懷念 (huai2 nian4 = bosom-remember) = sentimental reminiscences: 懷鄉 (huai2 xiang1 = reminisce-homeland = yearn for homeland/hometown), 懷舊 (huai2 jiu4 = recall/cherish-old/past-things = feel nostalgic). Visitors to ancient sites/battlefields 懷古 (huai2 gu3 = recall-ancient/historical-events). Paranoiacs 懷疑 (huai2 yi2 = contain-suspicion = suspect) everyone/everything.

Poets 對月抒懷 (dui4 yue4 shu1 huai2 = face-moon-express-bosom = pour out sentimental thoughts to the moon).

by Diana Yue