

Character Builder 您好學？

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 National Day

Putonghua pronunciation: *nian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *nim6*

Meaning: idea, remember, memorize, memory, commemorate, recite

念 (radical 心 *xin1*, heart) means 念頭 (*nian4 tou2* = idea-head = idea/thought). Adults 懷念 (*huai2 nian4* = embrace-thoughts/memories-of) childhood. 一念之差 (*yi1 nian4 zhi1 cha1* = one-idea-s-difference/fault = one wrong decision/mis-step) can cause many mistakes. 念經 (*nian4 jing1* = reciting- scriptures/sutras) dispels 俗念 (*su2 nian4* = vulgar-thoughts).

Miser 念念不忘 (*nian4 nian4 bu4 wang2* = thought-thought-no-forget = cannot put aside) riches. Sage advises: Substitute 貪念 (*tan1 nian4* = greedy-thoughts), 惡念 (*er4 nian4* = malicious-thoughts) with 愛念 (*ai4 nian4* = loving/kind-thoughts).

Survivors 紀念 (*ji4 nian4* = mark-remember = commemorate) war heroes. 人民英雄紀念碑 (*ren2 min2 ying1 xiong2 ji4 nian4 bei1* = person-people-heroic-brave-mark-remember-stele = Monument to the People's Heroes) is in Beijing's Tian-an-men Square.

by Diana Yue