

# 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 Easter

釘

(radical 金 *jin* = gold/metal)  
Pronunciation: *ding* (Putonghua, 1<sup>st</sup> tone), *deng* (Cantonese, 1<sup>st</sup> tone)  
Basic meaning: nail

釘 = 釘子 (*ding zi* = nail~diminutive): 釘錘 (*ding cui* = nail~hammer), 掛釘 (*gua ding* = hanging~nails), 螺絲釘 (*luo si ding* = conch/spiral~thread~nail = screws). 碰釘 (*peng ding* = meet/collide~nail) means get rejected.

釘牢 (*ding lao* = nail-in~firmly). Defense teams 人釘人 (*ren ding ren* = person/player~nails/pins/marks~person/player). Nailing on the Cross, ancient Roman death-penalty, is 釘十字架 (*ding shi zi jia* = nail-on~“ten/十”~character~rack, “十” is cross-shaped).

Facetiously, 釘蓋 (*ding gai* = nail~lid = coffin-lid nailed/sealed) means die. 釘書機 (*ding shu ji* = nail~book~machine) = stapler. 打書釘 (*da shu ding* = hit~books~nail) means browsing in bookstores without buying. Shorties are nicknamed “三寸釘” (*san cun ding* = three-inch~nail).

by Diana Yue