



Ask a Mandarin Teacher FAQ

1. *Is there a high frequency words list for Mandarin like there is a sight words list in English?*

- a. We do have a vocabulary word list for each level of Level Learning. These vocabulary words are in Quizlet and Arch Chinese. This is the best way for students to practice their vocabulary.
- b. Additionally, Participate Learning (the partner organization that supports our immersion program) has leveled vocabulary lists for each grade level. The vocabulary lists include vocabulary for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teachers use this list for instructional planning purposes.

2. *What is Pinyin? When do students start learning Pinyin?*

- a. Pinyin is a Mandarin syllable that uses the Roman alphabet to express sounds. Mandarin also has four tones that are expressed by pinyin. The tones and these syllables help kids pronounce Chinese characters correctly. Pinyin also helps students' reading fluency (since immersion students are advanced in listening and speaking compared to reading and writing). Pinyin is used when students type Chinese characters, so it helps them write.
- b. There are different opinions about when to learn pinyin. Some programs have kids learn at first. Some programs have kids learn after one to two years of immersion. In China, all children will learn Pinyin from grade 1. According to our Mandarin teachers' experience, students will master Pinyin faster if they already have some Mandarin characters.
- c. At Stough, students learn their letter sounds in English first, then begin to learn the sounds for pinyin at the end of 1st grade. Students learn in this order so they don't mix letter sounds from the two languages.



- d. In Stough's immersion program, Kindergarten students start learning tone and phonemic awareness to prepare them for learning pinyin. 1st grade students learn initials and vowels. 2nd grade students learn blends and pinyin is a big part of the curriculum. In 3rd through 5th grade, students use pinyin to help them type Chinese characters.
- 3. Can you explain what radicals are? Is there any emphasis on stroke sequence and radicals in K-5? Does the Participate curriculum take radicals into account?**
- a. Radicals are the base components of Chinese characters. Each radical holds information about sounds and meaning. There are around 200 radicals in Mandarin. Teachers teach radicals as they become important to teaching new characters.
 - b. Students do learn stroke order when they learn to write new characters. This begins in Kindergarten. Stroke order and radicals help students memorize the characters.
- 4. Are there any standardized testing points in Mandarin along the K-12 path?**
- a. Starting at the end of their Kindergarten year, students will take the Level Learning (formerly Level Chinese) assessment. This assessment will be taken at the beginning, middle, and end of each school year to help track student progress in Chinese reading comprehension.
 - b. Mandarin immersion students take the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) proficiency test at the end of their 2nd and 5th grade years. In 2nd grade, they take the Interpersonal Listening and Speaking test. In 5th grade, students take all parts of the test, including: Interpersonal Listening/Speaking, Presentational Writing, Interpretive Listening and Interpretive Reading.
 - c. Stough opted not to have 2nd grade students last year (the 2020-21 school year) to opt for increased instructional time for students. We will have both



2nd grade and 3rd grade students take the ACTFL Interpersonal Listening and Speaking test this school year.

d. Test results will be shared with parents when they are received this year.

5. *Are you seeing a major deficit in the children's Mandarin language proficiency in general, (compared to children from previous years in this program) due to COVID? Any ideas on things that we can do at home to help close the deficit gap?*

- a. We are seeing deficits in all students in all subject areas compared to previous years. This does include a drop in Mandarin language proficiency for our immersion students. Stough Mandarin teachers are adjusting their whole and small group instruction accordingly. Additionally, we have introduced Mandarin intervention for our lowest students. During intervention time, students who are struggling receive additional small group support from teachers and teacher assistants. These supports are regularly reviewed and adjusted based on the needs we see in our classrooms and across the school.
- b. As parents, you can support by making sure your child completes any homework or additional practice sent home from the teachers, especially basic vocabulary in Quizlet, Gimkit, Arch Chinese, and Level Learning. Read Chinese books in Level Learning on a regular basis. Some teachers are sending extra practice in their family communications. For example, Ms. Ma has a work choice board with extra practice for word work.
- c. It is also important that students read in English at home due to the reduced time spent in English Language Arts compared to their peers in the traditional classroom.

6. *Are you aware of any opportunities to have a "Zoom pen pal" with Native Chinese speakers for additional language practice?*



- a. Due to the time difference, we do not currently have any partnerships with schools in China. We do, however, have a partnership with Union County Public School's immersion classrooms. Through this partnership, Stough teachers and students can practice their speaking skills through a classwide digital pen pal program. We are continuing to think through ways to have students partner with other Mandarin speakers.

7. Can you recommend some resources to help our children with homework?

- a. We suggest that parents use the video links (including songs, stories, cartoons and books reading) we upload on Google classroom to practice the pronunciation of vocabulary and sentences at home.
- b. The application Level Learning is a really good resource for students to read books at home.
- c. We also use Quizlet and Arch Chinese to help students to practice word study and writing skills by playing online games.
 - i. For example: Supervise your student using Quizlet. Have them listen to the audio in English first and practice their answer in Chinese before flipping the card to compare the recorded answer to your student's answer. Students can also use the matching games.
- d. Have your students practice writing characters in a fun way- like drawing with chalk on a sidewalk or using a whiteboard.

8. Can you recommend any Mandarin character games or apps?

- a. We really want students to focus on the work they are doing in class.
- b. Most of the kids-friendly Mandarin character apps are made for native Chinese speakers, not second language learners. And you also need to pay for more lessons. There are several APPs you can find in the Apple store:
 - 1. Wukongshizi 悟空识字
 - 2. Hongenshizi 洪恩识字



3. 2 kids shi zi 2kids识字

4. Kantushizi (free, but not a lot of games) 看图识字

5. bao bao xue hanzi 宝宝学汉字

5. KaDa gushi (KaDa story) KaDa故事, Chinese story reading APP, recognize character reading version need to pay.

9. How can I help you as a parent?

- a. Parents could ask students what they learn after school and let them be a little teacher to teach you at home.
- b. Parents could monitor students to play educational games and assist them to practice singing songs, reading books at home everyday.

10. Can you share some of the key differences between Chinese and American culture that we should be aware of? Any major Chinese holidays and traditions that are important for us to understand?

- a. In China, students do not have carpet time. Most kids sit at their own table. Mandarin learning emphasizes building basic character skills, reading fluency, and writing habits. There is a lot of memorizing compared to English.
- b. The most important holidays are the Spring festival and Mid-autumn festival.