

Character Builder

您好學? 呀

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 circuses

熊

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiong2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hung4*

Meanings: bear

熊 (radical 火 *huo3*, fire) means bears: 棕熊 (*zong1 xiong2* = brown-bears), 黑熊 (*hei1 xiong2* = black-bears), 灰熊 (*hui1 xiong2* = grey-bear = grizzlies), 北極熊 (*bei3 ji2 xiong2* = north-extreme-bear = polar bears), 樹熊 (*shu4 xiong2* = tree-bear = koalas). 虎背熊腰 (*hu3 bei4 xiong2 yao1* = tiger's-back-bear's-waist) describes burly chap.

Kids love 熊貓 (*xiong2 mao1* = bear-cat = pandas), 泰迪熊 (*tai4 di2 xiong2* = "teddy"-transliterated-bear = teddy bears). 熊市 (*xiong2 shi4* = bear/bearish-market) is opposite of 牛市 (*niu2 shi4* = bull/bullish-market).

熊抱 (*xiong2 bao4* = bear-embrace) = bear-hug. Circus bears can 人立 (*ren2 li4* = man-stand = stand up like humans), 騎單車 (*qi2 dan1 che1* = ride-single-cart = ride bicycles).

by Diana Yue