

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

戲

Putonghua pronunciation: *xi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei3*

Meanings: play, drama, sport, joke, show, make fun of

戲 (radical 戈 *ge1*, spear) = play/sport/fun/drama. 玩遊戲 (*wan2 you2 xi4* = play-roam -game) = play games. 手機遊戲 (*shou3 ji1 you2 xi4* = hand-machine-game) = mobile games. 兒戲 (*er2 xi4* = child/childish-play) describes frivolous attitude/behavior.

戲劇 (*xi4 ju2* = play-drama) = dramas/plays. 戲曲 (*xi4 qu3* = drama-songs) = Chinese operas. Actors/liars 演戲 (*yan3 xi4* = perform-drama = act/perform/pretend). Sage warns: Never trust liar's 戲言 (*xi4 yan2* = frivolous/false-words/jokes/lies).

馬戲班 (*ma3 xi4 ban1* = horses-drama-troupe = circus) performs 連場好戲 (*lian2 chang2 hao3 xi4* = successive- stage/act-good-drama = great shows in a row). However, cynic sighs: "人生如戲!" (*ren2 sheng1 ru2 xi4* = human-life-resembles-drama = As Shakespeare said: "All the world's a stage!")

by Diana Yue