

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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: *lie4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lit6*

Meaning: fiery, raging, violent, staunch, unyielding, sacrificed, martyr

烈 (radical 灬 = 火 *huo3*, fire) = 強烈 (*qiang2 lie4* = strong-violent/raging), 剛烈 (*gang1 lie4* = strong/unswerving-brave): 烈日 (*lie4 ri4* = hot/harsh-sun), 烈風 (*lie4 feng1* = violent-wind), 烈火 (*lie4 huo3* = powerful-flames), 烈酒 (*lie4 jiu3* = strong-liquor), 烈馬 (*lie4 ma3* = powerful/untamable-stallion), 烈士 (*lie4 shi4* = sacrificed-man/martyr). Tennis is 劇烈運動 (*ju2 lie4 yun4 dong4* = dramatic-violent-rotate-move = strenuous sport).

War-epic describes heroes and heroines' 熾烈 (*chi4 lie4* = fiery-burning) passion, 熱烈 (*re4 lie4* = heated-strong) patriotism, 激烈 (*ji1 lie4* = stirred-up-agitated) debates, 轟烈 (*hong1 lie4* = blast/deafening-strong = high-key/heroic) resistance.

忠烈祠 (*zhong1 lie4 si2* = patriots' martyrs' temple/shrine) houses 革命先烈 (*ge2 ming4 xian1 lie4* = change-fate-previous-sacrificed = revolutionary martyrs)'s remains.

by Diana Yue