

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.

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 spring weather



Putonghua pronunciation: *wen1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wan1*

Meanings: disease, epidemic, plague, pestilence, feverish, foolish

瘟 (radical 疒 *ne4* = 病 *bing4*, illness) means 急性傳染病 (*ji2 xing4 chuan2 ran3 bing4* = urgent-nature~pass-on~stain~illness = acute contagious disease). 瘟疫 (*wen1 yi4* = epidemics~plagues) include 鼠疫 (*shu3 yi4* = rats~epidemic = bubonic plague), 天花 (*tian1 hua1* = sky~flower = smallpox), 登革熱 (*deng1 ge2 ri4* = “dengue”-transliterated~fever), 流感 (*liu2 gan3* = flow/contagious~infect = influenza).

Farmers fear 豬瘟 (*zhu1 wen1* = pig~fever = hog cholera), 雞瘟 (*ji1 wen1* = chicken~pest), a kind of 禽流感 (*qin2 liu2 gan3* = bird~influenza = bird/avian flu).

Stupid guys are 瘟頭瘟腦 (*wen1 tou2 wen1 nao3* = fever~head~fever~brain = dense). 送瘟神 (*song4 wen1 shen2* = send-off~epidemic~god) means exorcising/banishing epidemic demon or much-hated person.

by Diana Yue