

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 younger generation

夢

Putonghua pronunciation: *meng 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mung 6*

Meanings: dream

Teenagers 做夢 (*zuo4 meng4* = do/have~dreams = dream): 荳芽夢 (*dou4 ya2 meng4* = pea-young-shoot-dream = budding/innocent dreams), 升學夢 (*sheng1 xue3 meng4* = elevate~study~dream = aspiration for higher studies). Lads have 綺夢 (*qi3 meng4* = romantic/sexually-arousing~dreams), 夢遺 (*meng4 yi2* = dream~spermatorrhoea = ejaculate sperms in sleep).

Fairy/angel 報夢 (*bao4 meng4* = report~dream = appears in dream, announces message). Fortune-teller 解夢 (*jie3 meng4* = unravels/explains~dream). 佛洛伊德 (*fo2 luo4 yi1 de2* = “Freud”-transliterated) said 顯夢 (*xian3 meng4* = shown~dream = manifest dream-content) conceals 隱夢 (*yin3 meng4* = occult~dream = latent dream-thought).

美國夢 (*Mei3 Guo2 meng4* = A “me”rica-transliterated-dream) = the American Dream. Escapists 醉生夢死 (*zui4 sheng1 meng4 si3* = drunken~live~dream~die = self-indulge, dismiss reality).

by Diana Yue