

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 the myth of mending the sky

Putonghua pronunciation: *ta4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *taap3*

Meanings: collapse, cave-in

Chinese mythology describes 水災 (*shui3 zai1* = water~disaster = floods/deluge), 火災 (*huo3 zai1* = fire~disaster), 地震 (*di4 zhen4* = earth~quakes).

水神 (*shui3 shen2* = water~god, called 共工 *Gong4 Gong1*) rebelled, was defeated by 火神 (*huo3 shen2* = fire~god, called 祝融 *Zhu1 Rong2*). Gong-gong angrily rammed his head against 不周山 (*Bu4 Zhou1 Shan1* = Bu-zhou Mountain) which 支撐 (*zhi1 cheng1* = supported~propped-up) the Western World. 天塌地陷 (*tian1 ta4 di4 xian4* = sky~collapsed~earth~crumbled)! People yelled: 天塌了! (*tian1 ta4 le0* = sky~fall~ed = The sky has fallen!) 世界末日! (*shi4 jie4 mo4 ri4* = world~territory~last~day = It's the end of the world!)

塌方 (*ta4 fang1* = collapse~area) means landslide or buildings/ mines caving-in.