

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 Water Margin

Putonghua pronunciation: *yü3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue5*

Meanings: rain

雨, meaning rain, is radical in 雲 (*yün2*, cloud), 霧 (*wu4*, mist/fog), 雪 (*xüe3*, snow). 下雨 (*xia4 yü3* = down/fall-rain) = to rain. 雷雨 (*lei2 yü3* = thunder-rain) = thunderstorm. 和風細雨 (*he2 feng1 xi4 yü3* = mild-wind-small-rain) = breezy, drizzly. 傾盤大雨 (*qing1 pan2 da4 yü3* = pour-pot-big-rain) = pouring rain.

Cautious people 未雨籌謀 (*wei4 yü3 chou2 mou2* = not-yet-rain-arrange-plan = plan way ahead). Poetic landscape description 空山靈雨 (*kong1 shan1 ling2 yü3* = empty-mountain-soul-stirring-rain) also describes words bringing spiritual awakening.

In The Water Margin, 宋江 (*Song4 Jiang1*), leader of the 108 bandits, was called 及時雨 (*ji2 shi2 yü3* = reach-time-rain = timely rain) because he gave generous, timely help to many people.

by Diana Yue