

# Character Builder 您好學嗎?

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:

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 storytelling

Putonghua pronunciation: *shu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sue1*

Meaning: book, letter, document, writing

書 (radical 日 *yüel1*, say) means book/writings/document: 書店 (*shu1 dian4* = book-shop), 閒書 (*xian2 shu1* = leisure-reading), 禁書 (*jin4 shu1* = banned-books), 兵書 (*bing1 shu1* = army-books = military writings), 書生 (*shu1 sheng1* = bookish/scholarly-men) 讀書 (*du2 shu1* = read/study-books).

書呆子 (*shu1 dai1 zi0* = book-idiot-diminutive = 書蟲 *shu1 chong2* = book-worm/nerd) loves 看書 (*kan4 shu1* = reading/flipping-through-books): 古書 (*gu3 shu1* = ancient-books/records), 故事書 (*gu4 shi4 shu1* = old-event-book = story books), 畫書 (*hua4 shu1* = picture/art-books),

Chinese kids read 小人書 (*xiao3 ren2 shu1* = little-people-books = palm-size story books with sequential drawings). 聽說書 (*ting1 shuo4 shu1* = hear-say/speak-book = listening to storytellers recite traditional novels in dialect) is popular past-time.

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