

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

撐

Putonghua pronunciation: *cheng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chaang1*

Meanings: stretch out, prop up, support

Verb 撐 (radical 扌 = 手 *shou3* = hand/arm) means stretch/push up: 撐開 (*cheng1 kai1* = flare-open) umbrella, 撐杆跳高 (*cheng1 gan1 tiao4 gao1* = push-pole-jump-high = pole vault), 撐腰 (*cheng1 yao1* = support-waist = voice/give support for someone).

After 煉石補青天 (*lian4 shi2 bu3 qing1 tian1* = burn/refine-stones-mend-blue-sky), 女媧 (*Nu3 Wa1* = Nu-wa) must find 支柱 (*zhi1 zhu4* = supporting-pillars) for sky.

Nu-wa broke off 神龜 (*shen2 gui1* = god-tortoise = sacred tortoise)'s four legs, used them to 撐起 (*cheng1 qi3* = support/prop-up) sky's 四極 (*si4 ji2* = four-ultimates = four edges/corners): 東極 (*dong1 ji2* = east-pole), 南極 (*nan2 ji2* = south-pole), 西極 (*xi1 ji2* = west-pole), 北極 (*bei3 ji2* = north-pole).