

# 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:

- 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 ancient fables

Putonghua pronunciation: *chan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sin4*

Meanings: cicada

蟬 (radical 虫, *chong2*, insect/bug) = cicada. 蟬鳴 (*chan2 ming2* = cicada's-buzzing) announces summer. 薄如蟬翼 (*bo2 ru2 chan2 yi4* = thin-as-cicada's-wings) describes extremely thin/ light fabric. 噤若寒蟬 (*jin4 ruo4 han2 chan2* = silenced-like-chilled/shivering-cicada) describes scared-stiff/speechless person.

Predator 緊跟 (*jin3 gen1* = tightly-follow = stalks) prey. 蟬 is stalked by 螳螂 (*tang2 lang2* = praying-mantis), which is stalked by 黃雀 (*huang2 que1* = yellow-bird), which is stalked by boy with 彈弓 (*tan2 gong1* = bounce-bow = sling).

Fable 螳螂捕蟬，黃雀在後 (*tang2 lang2 bu4 chan2, huang2 que1 zai4 hou4* = praying-mantis-hunts-cicada, yellow-bird-is/stalks-behind) describes predator-prey relationship in food-cycle, or strategy of 後發制人 (*hou4 fa1 zhi4 ren2* = later-start-capture-people = post-emptive) strike.

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