

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 Prometheus

肝

Putonghua pronunciation: *gan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gon1*

Meanings: liver

肝 (= 肝臟 *gan1 zang4* = liver-internal-organ = liver) is internal 器官 (*qi4 guan1* = instrument-control/manage = organ).

Patients with 肝癌 (*gan1 ai2* = liver-cancer), 肝炎 (*gan1 yan2* = liver-infection = hepatitis) need 換肝 (*huan4 gan1* = exchange-liver = liver transplantation).

心肝 (*xin1 gan1* = heart~liver) = darling. Sworn brothers 肝膽相照 (*gan1 dan3 xiang1 zhao4* = liver~gall-bladder~mutual~shine/reflect = pledge loyalty/life to each other). 動肝火 (*dong4 gan1 huo3* = move~liver~fire) = get angry. 肝腸寸斷 (*gan1 chang2 cun4 duan4* = liver-intestines~inch~break) = terrible heartbreak.

Zeus punished Prometheus: 網縛 (*kun2 bang3* = bundle~tie = tied) him up, let eagle 啄食 (*zhuo2 shi2* = peck-eat) his liver everyday forever. 鵝肝醬 (*er2 gan1 jiang4* = goose~liver~pâté).

by Diana Yue