

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 Jonah and the whale

鯨

Putonghua pronunciation: *jing1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *king4*

Meanings: whale

鯨 (radical 魚 *yü2*, fish) = 鯨魚 (*jing1 yü2* = whale~fish): 藍鯨 (*lan2 jing1* = blue~whale), 殺人鯨 (*sha1 ren2 jing1* = kill~people~whale = orca/killer whale). 鯨飲 (*jing1 yin3* = whale~drink) = drinking alcohol voluminously. 鯨吞 (*jing1 tun1* = whale~swallow) describes aggressor's big takeover.

Melville's novel describes 捕鯨船 (*bu3 jing1 chuan2* = capture~whale~ship = whaler)'s pursuit of 白鯨 (*bai2 jing1* = white~whale) called 無比敵 (*wu2 bi3 di2* = in~comparable~enemy = "Moby Dick"-transliterated).

上帝 (*shang4 di4* = above~emperor = God) commanded prophet 約拿 (*yüe4 na2* = "Jonah"-transliterated) to preach in Nineveh. Jonah refused, boarded ship. God raised 風暴 (*feng1 bao4* = wind~violent = storm). Jonah was thrown overboard, 吞下 (*tun1 xia4* = swallowed~down) by whale.

by Diana Yue