

Character Builder

您好嗎? 呀

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 Flaming Mountains

Putonghua pronunciation: *shan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sin3*

Meanings: fan

扇子 (*shan4 zi0* = fan-diminutive) = fan: 摺扇 (*zhe2 shan4* = foldable-fans), 團扇 (*tuan2 shan4* = circular-shaped-fans). Verb 搵 (*shan4*) means 搖扇 (*yao2 shan4* = wave fan). 搵涼 (*shan4 liang2* = fan-cool) means waving fan to cool somebody/something. 電風扇 (*dian4 feng1 shan4* = electric-wind-fans) = electric fan.

搵風點火 (*shan4 feng1 dian3 huo3* = fan-up-wind-ignite-fire) means stirring up anger/clashes among people. 秋後扇 (*qiu1 hou4 shan4* = autumn-later-fan = fan after autumn) describes person dumped after being exploited.

牛魔王 (*niu2 mo2 wang2* = Bull-Demon-King) ruled Flaming Mountains. His wife 鐵扇公主 (*tie3 shan4 gong1 zhu3* = Iron-Fan-Princess)'s magic 芭蕉扇 (*ba1 jiao1 shan4* = Banana-Fan) could 搵熄 (*shan4 xi1* = fan-and-extinguish) the flames.

by Diana Yue