

# 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:

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 kindergartens



Putonghua pronunciation: *yüan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen4*

Meaning: garden, park, plantation

園 (radical 囗 *wei2*, surround) means planted/leisure area: 果園 (*guo3 yüan2* = fruit-garden/orchard), 茶園 (*cha2 yüan2* = tea-plantation), 動物園 (*dong4 wu4 yüan2* = animal-garden/ zoo), 公園 (*gong1 yüan2* = public-park), 園林 (*yüan2 lin2* = park's-woods/vegetation). 園丁 (*yüan2 ding1* = garden-er) knows 園藝 (*yüan2 yi4* = gardening-art = horticulture), designs 花園 (*hua1 yüan2* = flower-gardens).

Milton's 失樂園 (*shi1 le2 yüan2* = lose-blissful-garden = Paradise Lost) describes 伊甸園 (*yi1 dian4 yüan2* = "Eden"-transliterated-garden = Garden of Eden). British-French invaders burnt down Qing Emperor's 圓明園 (*Yüan2 Ming2 Yüan2* = round/perfect-clear/wise-garden = Yuan-ming Garden).

兒童樂園 (*er2 tong2 le4 yüan2* = son/child-children-blissful-garden) means fun/browsing-corner/place for kids. 幼稚園 (*you4 zhi4 yüan2* = young-small-garden) = kindergarten.

by Diana Yue