

# 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 the myth of Prometheus

放

Putonghua pronunciation: *fang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fong3*

Meanings: release, free, liberate

放 = release: 放下 (*fang4 xia4* = release/put-down) load, 放開 (*fang4 kai1* = release~open = loosen) grip/hold. 放大鏡 (*fang4 da4 jing4* = release~big~mirror) = magnifying glass. Vacationers 放鬆 (*fang4 song1* = release~loose = relax). Protected people feel 放心 (*fang4 xin1* = free/put-down~heart = secure/relieved). Nuclear reactors' 放射性 (*fang4 she4 xing4* = release~shoot~nature = radioactive) emissions make inhabitants 放棄 (*fang4 qi4* = give-up~abandon) homes.

In Shelley's drama Prometheus Unbound, Zeus was 放逐 (*fang4 zhu2* = sent-off~chased-away = banished), Prometheus was 釋放 (*shi1 fang4* = untied~released). Lincoln 解放黑奴 (*jie3 fang4 hei1 nu2* = untied~released~black~slaves = freed slaves). China's 人民解放軍 (*ren2 min2 jie3 fang4 jun1* = person~people~untie~release~army) = People's Liberation Army = PLA.

by Diana Yue