

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

腹

Putonghua pronunciation: *fu4*
Cantonese pronunciation: *fuk1*
Meanings: abdomen, stomach

腹 (radical 月 = 肉 *rou4*, flesh/meat) = 腹部 (*fu4 bu4* = abdomen~part) or 胃 (*wei4*, stomach). When 空腹 (*kong1 fu4* = empty~stomached), we eat to 裹腹 (*guo3 fu4* = stuff/fill~stomach). 腹瀉 (*fu4 xie4* = stomach~flush) = diarrhoea. 腹語 (*fu4 yu3* = stomach~talk) = ventriloquism.

剖腹 (*pou1 fu4* = cut-open~stomach) = caesarian operation. 切腹 (*qie4 fu4* = cut~stomach) = seppuku/hara-kiri, Japanese suicide by disembowelment with sword. 葬身魚腹 (*zang4 shen1 yu2 fu4* = buried~body-in~fish's~stomach) = disappeared/died in sea/river.

Whale swallowed prophet 約拿 (*yu4e4 na2* = “Jonah”-transliterated). Jonah prayed to God inside 鯨腹 (*jing1 fu4* = whale's~stomach). Whale spat out Jonah. Jonah and the Whale is popular 木偶戲 (*mu4 ou3 xi4* = wooden~dolls~drama = puppet show).

by Diana Yue