

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 吔

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 Flaming Mountains

Putonghua pronunciation: *xī*

Cantonese pronunciation: *sik1*

Meanings: die, extinguish, wither away, put out

Ideogram 熄 (火 *huo3*, fire + 息 *xī*, cease/rest/die) indicates fire's extinction: hearth's flames 熄滅 (*xī mie4* = die-exterminate/extinct = die out). Transitive verb 熄 means extinguishing fire/light: 熄爐 (*xī huo3* = turn-off-stove), 熄燈 (*xī deng1* = switch-off-light).

Rain 淋熄 (*lin2 xī* = pour-extinguish = drenches) forest fire. Wind 吹熄 (*cuī xī* = puff-extinguish = blows out) candle. Fire-squad 撲熄 (*po4 xī* = pounce-on-extinguish = attacks and puts out) big fire.

Monkey takes Iron Fan Princess's magic 芭蕉扇 (*ba1 jiao1 shan4* = Banana-Fan), 揮扇 (*hui1 shan4* = waves-fan), 搨三下 (*shan4 san1 xia4* = waves-fan-three-times), 搨熄 (*shan4 xī* = fan-and-extinguish = puts out) flames of 火焰山 (*Huo3 Yan4 Shan1* = fire-flame-mountain-range = Flaming Mountains).

by Diana Yue