

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 Narcissus

湖

Putonghua pronunciation: *hu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *woo4*

Meanings: lake

湖 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 泊 (*po1* = lake). England's 湖區 (*hu2 qu* = Lake~District) is famous for 湖光山色 (*hu2 guang1 shan1 se1* = lake~brilliance~hill~colors = shimmering lakes nestling among verdant hills). 尼斯湖怪 (*ni2 si1 hu2 guai4* = “Ness”-transliterated~lake~strange) = Scotland's Loch Ness monster.

People from 五湖四海 (*wu3 hu2 si4 hai3* = five~lakes~four~seas = all regions/sectors) join popular movement. 江湖人物 (*jiang1 hu2 ren2 wu4* = river~lake~person~thing) means characters with shady/outlaw background/connections.

Handsome hunter Narcissus 獵鹿 (*lie4 lu4* = hunted-for~deer), rested at 湖畔 (*hu2 pan4* = lake~side), sipped 湖水 (*hu2 shui3* = lake's~water), 臨湖自照 (*lin2 hu2 zi4 zhao4* = overlooking~lake~self~reflect = looked at himself in the lake).

by Diana Yue