

Character Builder 您好學？

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 eggs

黃

Putonghua pronunciation: *huang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *wong4*

Meanings: yellow, yolk, earthen color, indecent activity

黃 is color of 黃金 (*huang2 jin1* = yellow-gold = gold). Autumn leaves 轉黃 (*zhuan3 huang2* = turn-yellow). 黃熟 (*huang2 shu2* = yellow-ripen) describes ripened crops. 黃昏 (*huang2 hun1* = yellow-dim) = evening tinted by setting sun.

Chinese are 黃種人 (*huang2 zhong3 ren2* = yellow-species/race-people = yellow-people). 黃土 (*huang2 tu3* = yellow-earth) = earth/soil. In northern-central China, 黃河 (*Huang2 He2* = the Yellow-River) deposits silt, forming 黃土高原 (*huang2 tu3 gao1 yuan2* = yellow-earth-high-plain = loess plateau).

蟹黃 (*xie4 huang2* = crab-yellow) = crab's golden-colored roe. 蛋黃 (*dan4 huang2* = egg-yellow) = egg yolk. Harbors display artist Florentijn Hofman's 30-metre model of 小黃鴨 (*xiao3 huang2 ya1* = little-yellow-duck = yellow rubber duckling, kids' common plaything).

by Diana Yue