

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 witches



Putonghua pronunciation: *wu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mo4*

Meanings: shaman, witch, wizard, medium, witchcraft, sorcery

Character 巫 shows two 人 (*ren2*, person) mediating between heaven (upper horizontal stroke) and earth (lower horizontal stroke). 神巫 (*shen2 wu1* = gods'/spirits'~witches) are 靈媒 (*ling2 mei2* = spiritual-mediums).

巫師 (*wu1 shi1* = witch~master = mediums/shamans) perform 祭祀 (*ji4 si4* = sacrifice~sacrificial-site = sacrificial ceremonies), predict 吉凶 (*ji2 xiong1* = fortunes and misfortunes). 巫醫 (*wu1 yi1* = witch/voodoo~doctors) use 巫術 (*wu1 shu2* = witch~craft) to treat diseases.

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, 男巫 (*nan2 wu1* = male~wizard/sorcerer) Prospero 呼風喚雨 (*hu1 feng1 huan4 yu3* = call~winds~beckon~rains = raised tempest). Party-goers wear 女巫 (*nu3 wu1* = female~witch) costume on night of Halloween (= Hallows' Eve), i.e., eve before 萬聖節 (*wan4 sheng4 jie2* = ten-thousand-saints-festival = All Saints Day).

by Diana Yue