

# Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 blossoming trees

櫻

Putonghua pronunciation: *ying1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ying1*

Meaning: cherry-blossom tree, cherry-blossom, sakura

櫻 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood/tree) means 櫻花樹 (*ying1 hua1 shu4* = cherry-blossom-tree, aka 櫻樹 *ying1 shu4* = cherry-[blossom]-tree, Japanese sakura), not 櫻桃樹 (*ying1 tao2 shu4* = cherry-peach-tree = cherry-bearing cherry-tree).

東京 (*Dong1 Jing1* = east-capital = Tokyo), 華盛頓 (*Hua2 Sheng4 Dun4* = "Wa-shing-ton"-transliterated), 武漢 (*Wu3 Han4* = Wuhan) celebrate 賞櫻 (*shang3 ying1* = viewing-cherry-blossoms = Japanese 花見 *hua1 jian4*/hanami) season, March-April. TV reports 早櫻 (*zao3 ying1* = early-blooming-cherry-blossoms), 野櫻 (*ye3 ying1* = countryside-cherry-blossom-trees), 垂櫻 (*cui2 ying1* = hanging-cherry-blossom-branches), 櫻海 (*ying1 hai3* = cherry-blossom-sea = mass of blooming cherry-blossom trees), 櫻雨 (*ying1 yu3* = cherry-blossom-rain = falling cherry-blossoms).

Japanese eulogize sakura's 刹那光輝 (*cha4 na4 guang1 hui1* = moment-light/bright-glory = momentary/short-lived splendor).

by Diana Yue