

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 pine-trees

青

Putonghua pronunciation: *qin1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ching*

Meanings: blue, green

青 (生 *sheng1*, grow + 月 = 肉 *rou4*, flesh/body) = blue/green/youthfulness: 青天 (*qing1 tian1* = blue-sky), 青山 (*qing1 shan1* = bluish-green~hills), 青草 (*qing1 cao3* = green-grass). 青絲 (*qing1 si1* = blue/dark~silk) means beautiful black hair, poetically.

In 青春 (期) (*qing1 chun1 qi1* = green-spring-period = puberty/adolescence) some 青年人 (*qing1 nian2 ren2* = green~years~people = young people) become 憤青 (*fen4 qing1* = angry~youngsters). 青黃不接 (*qing1 huang2 bu4 jie1* = green-crop~yellow-crop~un~bridgeable) means grain shortage between two crops, or competence gap between two generations.

Pine-trees are 常綠樹 (*chang2 lu4 shu4* = constant/ever-green-tree = evergreens), hence described as 青松 (*qing1 song1* = green~pines). 長青樹 (*chang2 qing1 shu4* = long~green-tree) means man/woman who looks perennially young.

by Diana Yue