

Character Builder

您好嗎? 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:

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 winter grandchildren

孫

Putonghua pronunciation: *sun1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *suen1*

Meaning: grandchild

孫 (radical 子 *zi3*, son/fruit) means offspring two generations down: 孫兒 (*sun1 er2* = grand-child), 孫子 (*sun1 zi3* = grand-son), 孫女 (*sun1 nü3* = grand-daughter), 內孫 (*nei4 sun1* = internal/son's-children), 外孫 (*wai4 sun1* = external/daughter's-children), 重孫 (*chong2 sun1* = double-grandchild) = grandchild's child.

Couple 抱孫 (*bao4 sun1* = hold/carry-grandchild = become grandparents) when son/daughter has a baby. Grandparents 含飴弄孫 (*han2 yi2 nong4 sun1* = taste-candy-toy-grandchild = enjoy fondling grandchild). Baby-sitting grandma jokes: "I'm 孫傭 (*sun1 yong1* = grandchild's-servant/maid!)"

In patriarchic society, king passes throne to 長子嫡孫 (*zhang2 zi3 di2 sun1* = eldest-son-direct-line-grandson = eldest son and his eldest son), wants 子子孫孫 (*zi3 zi3 sun1 sun1* = son-son-grandson-grandson = family lineage) to rule forever.

by Diana Yue