

# 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:

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 winter grandchildren

肖

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiao4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chiu3*

Meaning: look like, resemble

肖 (radical 月 = 肉 *rou4*, flesh/meat) means resembling. 拿破崙肖像 (*Na2 Po4 Lun2 xiao4 xiang4* = "Na-po-leon"-transliterated-resemblance-image) = Napoleon's portrait. Actor plays Chaplin 維肖維妙 (*wei2 xiao4 wei2 miao4* = very-alike-very-lively): 形肖 (*xing2 xiao4* = form-resemble = resembles Chaplin's appearance/figure/outfit), 神肖 (*shen2 xiao4* = spirit-resemble = captures Chaplin's expressions/movements/airs).

Chinese zodiac designates one of 十二生肖 (*shi2 er4 sheng1 xiao4* = ten-two-born/birth-resemble = twelve "birth-likeness of animals" in twelve-year cycle), to everyone according to his/her birth-year, e.g. Richard (born 1950), Tony (born 1986) both 肖虎 (*xiao4 hu3* = have-birth-likeness-of-tiger).

Twins 酷肖 (*ku4 xiao4* = very-much-resemble) each other. Angered/disappointed father calls bad/disobedient son "不肖子!" (*bu4 xiao4 zi3* = no-resemblance-son = "Can't match your father/ancestors!")

by Diana Yue