

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 the Foolish Old Man

Putonghua pronunciation: *yu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue6*

Meanings: inform, comparison, allegory

喻 = comparison. Writers use 明喻 (ming2 yu4 = clear/lit-up~comparison = comparisons), 暗喻 (an4 yu4 = dark/un-lit~comparison = metaphors), 象喻 (xiang4 yu4 = image~comparison = images).

Thinkers tell 故事 (gu4 shi4 = cause~events = stories), 寓言 (yu4 yan2 = imply~words = fable), 比喻 (bi3 yu4 = compare~inform = allegories/parables). Listeners learn 教訓 (jiao4 xun4 = teach~lecture = lesson/moral).

Aesop's fable 龜兔賽跑 (gui1 tu4 sai4 pao3 = tortoise~hare~compete~run = Hare and Tortoise Race), Chinese fable 愚公移山 (Foolish Old Man Removed Mountains) both stress importance of 毅力 (yi4 li4 = courage~strength = courage). Mao Ze-dong extended 愚公移山's moral: "China must remove 兩座大山 (liang3 zuo4 da4 shan1 = two~blocks-of-big~mountains): feudalism, imperialism!"

by Diana Yue