

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 bridges

橋

Putonghua pronunciation: *qiao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kiu4*

Meanings: bridge

橋 (木 *mu4*, wood + 喬 *qiao2*, big tree) = 橋樑 (*qiao2 liang2* = bridge~beam) = bridge: 橋拱 (*qiao2 gong3* = bridge~arch), 木橋 (*mu4 qiao2* = wooden~bridge), 石橋 (*shi2 qiao2* = stone~bridge), 吊橋 (*diao4 qiao2* = suspension~bridge). 天橋 (*tian1 qiao2* = sky~bridge) = crossover/flyover. 過橋抽板 (*guo4 qiao chou1 ban3* = cross~bridge~pull~plank) means using someone then dumping him. 橋 invokes poetic/mythical imagination. Magpies form 鵲橋 (*que1 qiao2* = magpies~bridge) enabling separated lovers' annual rendezvous. Dead people cross 奈何橋 (*nei4 he2 qiao2* = tolerate~how~bridge = "Helpless Bridge") and leave world/memories behind.

Famous poetic line 小橋流水人家 (*xiao3 qiao2 liu2 shui3 ren2 jia1* = little~bridge~flowing~water~person's~home) = "A cottage facing bridge on rippling brook — someone's abode".

by Diana Yue