

# 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:

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 the myth of the ten suns



Putonghua pronunciation: *jiao1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jju1*

Meanings: parched, scorched, charred

Character 焦 has radical 灬 (= 火 *huo3*, fire). 十日并出 (*shi2 ri4 bing4 chu1* = ten~suns-together~out/shining) heated 大氣層 (*da4 qi4 ceng2* = big~air/gas~layer = the atmosphere), 燒焦 (*shao1 jiao1* = burnt~charred) 土地 (*tu3 di4* = soil~land = the land). Wood/bodies became 焦炭 (*jiao1 tan4* = burnt~charcoal).

In 旱災 (*han4 zai1* = dry~disaster = drought), 饑荒 (*ji1 huang1* = hunger~waste = famine), people 心焦 (*xin1 jiao1* = heart~scorched = felt anxious/desperate), begged for help until 唇焦舌爛 (*chun2 jiao1 she2 lan4* = lips~parched~tongue~scathed).

Officials 焦頭爛額 (*jiao1 tou2 lan4 e2* = scorched~head~broken~forehead = were totally defeated).

Archer 后羿 (*Hou4 Yi4* = Hou-yi) became 焦點 (*jiao1 dian3* = scorched~spot = focus) of everyone's attention.