

# 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 Peach Blossom Fount

桃

Putonghua pronunciation: *tao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *to4*

Meanings: peach tree, peach

桃 (radical 木 *mu4*, wood) = 桃樹 (*tao2 shu4* = peach~tree). 桃李爭春 (*tao2 li3 zeng1 chun1* = peach~plum~vie-for~spring) describes glorious springtime with blossoming peach-trees and plum-trees. 桃花 (*tao2 hua1* = peach~blossom) symbolizes ill-fated woman. 桃色事件 (*tao2 se1 shi4 jian4* = peach~color~event~item) means scandal involving women.

桃子 (*tao2 zi3* = peach~diminutive) = peach fruit. 桃李 (*tao2 li3* = peaches-and~plums) means teacher's successful students. Fairy-tales say eating 仙桃 (*xian1 tao2* = fairy~peaches) brings longevity, hence Chinese birthday banquets serve peach-shaped 壽包 (*shou4 bao1* = longevity~buns), also called 壽桃 (*shou2 tao2* = longevity~peaches). Daoist exorciser uses 桃木劍 (*tao2 mu4 jian4* = peach~wood~sword) to vanquish demons.

Fisherman rowed upstream, admiring 桃花林 (*tao2 hua1 lin2* = peach-tree~blossom~forest/grove).

by Diana Yue