

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 children

Putonghua pronunciation: *tong 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *tung 4*

Meanings: child

童 = 兒童 (*er2 tong2* = children): 嬰兒 (*ying1 er2* = infant/baby~child), 幼童 (*you4 tong2* = young~child), 小童 (*xiao3 tong2* = small~child). 童年 (*tong2 nian2* = child~years) = childhood. Hans Andersen wrote 童話 (*tong2 hua4* = child~talk = children's tales/fairytales).

Toddlers 牙牙學語 (*ya2 ya2 xue2 yu3* = “ya”~“ya”~learn~speech = try uttering speech sounds). 童言無忌 (*tong2 yan2 wu2 ji4* = child's~words~have-no~taboo) means children's innocent/honest/unrestrained words/comments are pardonable. 童心猶在 (*tong2 xin1 you2 zai4* = child's~heart~still-there) describes fun-loving adult/oldster with kid's temperament.

童子 (*tong2 zi3* = child~son) = boy/man without sex experience. Chinese medicine uses 童子尿 (*tong2 zi3 niao4* = virgin~boy's~urine). 變童 (*luan2 tong2* = lovely/loved-child/lad) = boy-lover molested/kept by older man.