Character Builder

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 fall colors

樹
Putonghua pronunciation: shu4
Cantonese pronunciation: sue6
Meaning: tree, shrub, plant, establish

樹 (radical 木, mu4 = wood) means trees/shrubs having 根 (shu4 gen1 = tree's-roots), 幹 (shu4 gan4 = tree-trunk), 枝 (shu4 zhi1 = tree's-branches), 叶 (shu4 ye4 = tree's-leaves).

Birds perch 樹上 (shu4 shang4 = tree-up/on = on trees). Hiker rests 樹下 (shu4 xia4 = tree-down/below = under a tree). 花樹 (hua1 shu4 = flowering-trees/shrubs) bloom in spring. 梧樹 (feng1 shu4 = maple-trees), 影樹 (ying3 shu4 = shadow-tree = flames of the forest) turn red in autumn.

Genius makes 建樹 (jian4 shu4 = build-tree = achievements), 樹立 (shu4 li4 = tree-stand = establishes) good example.


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