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 younger generation**

<table>
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<th>孫</th>
<th>Putonghua pronunciation: meng 4</th>
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Meanings: dream

Teenagers 做夢 (zuò meng4 = do/have-dreams = dream): 萌芽夢 (dōu1 ya2 meng4 = pea-young-shoot-dream = budding/innocent dreams), 升學夢 (shēng1 xué3 meng4 = elevate-study-dream = aspiration for higher studies). Lads have 綺夢 (qǐ3 meng4 = romantic/sexually-arousing-dreams), 夢遺 (mèng4 yì1 = dream-spermatorrhea = ejaculate sperms in sleep).


美國夢 (Měi3 Guò2 meng4 = A“me”rica-transliterated-dream) = the American Dream. Escapists 酉生夢死 (zhuī1 shēng1 meng4 sì3 = drunken-live-dream-die = self-indulge, dismiss reality).

by Diana Yue