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 witches

迷 (mi2)
Cantonese pronunciation: mai4
Meanings: confused, confusing, unclear, infatuate, betwitch

迷 (radical 亻 = 走 zou3 = go/boat) means unclear/confused/lost. 迷糊 (mi2 hu2 = confuse-porridge) describes confused perception. 昏迷 (hun1 mi2 = faint-confused) = coma. Person inside 迷宮 (mi2 gong1 = confusing-palace = maze/labyrinth) 迷路 (mi2 lu4 = loses-way).

球迷 (qiu2 mi2 = ball-infatuated) = soccer/baseball fans. 影迷 (ying3 mi2 = shadow-infatuated) = movie fans. 迷人 (mi2 ren2 = confuse/charm-person) describes charming/enchanting person/scenery. Fox-fairies 迷惑 (mi2 huo4 = confuse-puzzle = bewitch) men. Anthony 迷戀 (mi2 lian4 = confuse-love = loved as if spell-bound by) Cleopatra.

Sage 指點迷津 (zhi3 dian3 mi2 jin1 = finger-point-lost-stream-source = advises disoriented/lost souls): Abandon 迷信 (mi2 xin4 = confused-belief = superstitions)! Don't 沉迷 (chen2 mi2 = sink-into-infatuated = indulge) in vices!

by Diana Yue