

# 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 The Water Margin

浪

Putonghua pronunciation: *lang4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *long6*

Meanings: waves, surf

浪 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) = 波浪 (*bo1 lang4* = waves~waves). 海浪 (*hai3 lang4* = sea~waves) have 浪花 (*lang4 hua1* = wave~flower = spray).

衝浪 (*chong1 lang4* = rush~waves) = surfing. 浪潮 (*lang4 chao2* = wave~tide) = tide/surge or social trend. 無風不起浪 (*wu2 feng1 bu4 qi3 lang4* = no~wind~won't~rise~wave) means “There’s got to be a reason!”

浪漫 (*lan4g man4* = wave/unrestrained~overflow) = “romantic”-transliterated. Tramps 流浪 (*liu2 lang4* = flow~unrestrained = drift around). Among bandits of The Water Margin, 燕青 (*Yan4 Qing1*) was nicknamed 浪子 (*lang4 zi3* = unrestrained~son/young-man = drifter/roamer), 張順 (*Zhang1 Shun4*) was nicknamed 浪裡白條 (*lang4 li3 bai2 tiao2* = waves~in~white~line = white/naked figure in waves = adept/clever swimmer).

by Diana Yue