

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 king planning revenge

膽

Putonghua pronunciation: *dan3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *daam2*

Meanings: gall-bladder

膽 (= 膽囊 (*dan3 nang2* = gall~bladder) has 膽汁 (*dan3 zhi1* = gall~juice = bile), 膽石 (*dan3 shi2* = gall~stones). Chinese believe eating 蛇膽 (*she2 dan3* = snake's~gall-bladder) boosts body energy.

膽大 (*dan3 da4* = gall-bladder~big) = brave. 膽小 (*dan3 xiao3* = gall-bladder~small) = timid. 膽色 (*dan3 se1* = gall~color) = bravery/mettle. However, 色膽包天 (*se1 dan3 bao1 tian1* = lust-for-women~gall-bladder~wrap~sky) describes womanizer's outrageous act.

Yü's king planned 報仇 (*bao4 chou2* = repay~wrong = revenge), 臥薪嘗膽 (*wo4 xin1 chang2 dan3* = slept-on~firewood~tasted~gall-bladder), used 忠肝義膽 (*zhong1 gan1 yi4 dan3* = loyal~liver~righteous~gall = loyal) ministers, offered beauty 西施 (*Xi1 Shi1*) to Wu's king, finally 復國 (*fu2 guo2* = resume/revive~state = re-established sovereign kingdom).

by Diana Yue