

# Character Builder

# 您好學? 呀

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 donations

贈

Putonghua pronunciation: *zeng4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jang6*

Meanings: give, donate, bestow, endow

贈 (radical 貝 *bei4*, seashe/money) = 贈送 (*zeng4 song4* = give-as-present). Painter's collection 贈與 (*zeng4 yu3* = is-given/donated-to) museum. Shoppers get 贈品 (*zeng4 pin3* = gift-object = free gifts), 贈券 (*zeng4 qian4* = gift-tickets/coupons) from store's 大贈送 (*da4 zeng4 song4* = big-give-as-present = giveaway sale).

Under-privileged schoolchildren need 贈醫捐藥 (*zeng4 yi1 juan1 yao4* = give-doctor-donate-drugs = free medical care/drugs), 贈閱課本 (*zeng4 yue4 ke4 ben3* = free-read-lesson-texts = free copies of textbooks).

Retiring tycoon gives 臨別贈言 (*lin2 bie2 zeng4 yan2* = upon-departure-give-words = farewell speech): He gave 饋贈 (*kui4 zeng4* = offer-food-gift = gifts/donations) to 回饋社會 (*hui2 kui4 she4 hui4* = return-gift-society = in return for what he gained from society).

by Diana Yue