

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 more the sky



Putonghua pronunciation: *niao3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *liu6*

Meanings: bird

鳥, 禽 (*qin2*), 雀 (*que1*) all mean bird. 雛鳥 (*chu2 niao3* = young-birds = fledgelings) stay in 鳥巢 (*niao3 chao2* = bird's-nest). 家禽 (*ji1 qin2* = home-bird) = domestic fowl.

Lovely woods have 鳥兒 (*niao3 er2* = bird~diminutive = endearing term for birds), 鳥聲 (*niao3 sheng1* = bird~sound = birdsong). Poets praise 雲雀 (*yun2 que1* = cloud~bird = skylark), 翠鳥 (*cui4 niao3* = emerald-green~bird = kingfisher). Children love 放紙鳶 (*fang4 zhi3 yao2* = release~paper~kite = kite-flying). 飛鳥 (*fei1 niao3* = flying~birds) cross the sky, take in 鳥瞰 (*niao3 kan4* = bird's~eye-view) of landscape below. 良禽擇木而棲 (*liang2 qin2 ze2 mu4 er2 qi1* = good~bird~selects~wood/tree~to~perch) means decent/talented people will insist on serving respectable/well-established employer/organization.