

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 animal stories



Putonghua pronunciation: *tu4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *to3*

Meanings: rabbit

兔子 (*tu4 zi0* = rabbit~diminutive = rabbit) has 大耳朵 (*da4 er3 duo1* = (big~ears), 短尾巴 (*duan3 wei3 ba1* = short/stubby~tail). Chinese believe 玉兔 (*yü4 tu4* = jade~rabbit) accompanies 嫦娥 (*Chang2 Er2* = Moon Lady/Goddess) on the moon.

狡兔三窟 (*jiao3 tu4 san1 ku1* = sly~hare~three~holes) describes 野兔 (*ye3 tu4* = wild~rabbit = hare) or person using multiple hideouts/exits for camouflage/escape. Children's 兔脣 (*tu4 chun2* = rabbit~lip = cleft lip) needs surgery.

Chinese saying “鳥盡弓藏，兔死狗烹” (*niao3 jin4 gong1 cang2, tu4 si3 gou3 peng1* = birds~all-gone/killed~bow~hidden, hares~die~dog~cooked) describes hunter who neglects/destroys his bow/hound after preys/birds/hares are caught — analogous to cold-blooded conqueror who suppresses/eliminates loyal supporters who helped him win.

by Diana Yue