

Character Builder 您好學嗎?

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 **lullabies**

搖

Putonghua pronunciation: *yao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yiu1*

Meaning: Sway, swerve, shake, row, rock

搖 (radical 扌 = 手, *shou3*, hand) means 搖動 (*yao2 dong4* = shake/sway-move): 搖頭 (*yao2 tou2* = shake-head), 搖船 (*yao2 chuan2* = row-boat).

Classical pianist 搖身一變 (*yao2 shen1 yi1 bian4* = turn-body-one-change = turns himself into) 搖滾樂 (*yao2 gun3 yue4* = rock-*roll*-music) singer, 搖錢樹 (*yao2 qian2 shu4* = shake-money-tree = winner of big bucks).

Mom rocks 搖籃 (*yao2 lan2* = rocking-basket/cradle), sings 搖籃曲 (*yao2 lan2 qu3* = cradle-song/lullaby): 搖搖, 搖到外婆橋 (*yao2 yao2, yao2 dao4 wai4 po2 qiao2* = rock-rock, rock-to-Grand-ma's-bridge), 外婆叫我好實實, 給我一塊糕 (*wai4 po2 jiao4 wo3 hao3 bao3 bao3, gei2 wo3 yi1 kuai4 gao1* = Grand-ma-calls-me-good-Ba-by, gives-me-a-piece-of-cake).

by Diana Yue