

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:

- 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

Putonghua pronunciation: *lan2*
Cantonese pronunciation: *laam4*
Meaning: basket, hamper, cradle

籃 (radical 竹 *zhu2*, bamboo) = 籃子 (*lan2 zi0* = basket-diminutive = basket): 竹籃 (*zhu2 lan2* = bamboo-skin-basket), 草籃 (*cao3 lan2* = straw-basket), 菜籃 (*cai4 lan2* = vegetable/groceries-basket), 搖籃 (*yao2 lan2* = rocking-cradle). 編籃 (*bian1 lan2* = weave-basket) = basket-weaving.

Guest brings 果籃 (*guo3 lan2* = fruit-basket/hamper). 籃球員 (*lan2 qiu2 yuán2* = basket-ball-er) 上籃 (*shang4 lan2* = up-basket/net/hoop = leaps, shoots layup). Investors trade 一籃子貨幣 (*yi1 lan2 zi0 huo4 bi4* = one-basket-diminutive-goods-currency = basket of currencies).

Kindergarten kids sing: 小小姑娘, 清早起來 (*xiao3 xiao3 gu1 niang2, qing1 zao3 qi3 lai2* = little-girl, early-morning-get-up), 提著花籃上市場 (*ti2 zhe0 hua1 lan2 shang4 shi4 chang3* = take/hold-ing-flower-basket-goes-to-the-market).

by Diana Yue