

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: *guai1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gwaai1*

Meaning: perverse, well-behaved, intelligent, dexterous, sweet-tempered, obedient, darling

乖 (radical 千 *qian1*, thousand) has opposite meanings: 乖張 (*guai zhang1* = perverse-rude/arrogant) rogue, but Grandma's 乖孫 (*guai sun1* = sweet/obedient-grandchild), 乖巧 (*guai qiao3* = sweet-tempered-intelligent) student/pet.

乖覺 (*guai jue2* = intelligent/smart-alert/quick-minded) fox outsmarts hunter. After crackdown, drug-traffickers 學乖 (*xue2 guai1* = learn-smart = get smarter), find new buyers.

Mom sings to her 小乖乖 (*xiao3 guai1 guai1* = little-darling): 小兔子乖乖, 把門兒開開 (*xiao3 tu4 zi0 guai1 guai1, ba3 men2 er0 kai1 kai1* = little-rabbit-dearie, open-open-the-door), 不開不開我不開 (*bu4 kai1 bu41 kai1 wo3 bu4 kai1* = no-open-no-open-I-no-open), 媽媽沒回來, 誰也不能開 (*ma1 ma1 mei2 hui2 lai2, shei2 ye3 bu4 neng2 kai1* = Mommy-isn't-back, I-won't-open-to-anyone).

by Diana Yue