

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 lonely people



Putonghua pronunciation: *gu1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gool*

Meanings: alone, solitary, single, fatherless, orphaned

孤 (radical 子 *zi3*, son) = alone/orphaned: 孤島 (*gu1 dao3* = isolated-island), 孤本 (*gu1 ben3* = book/text's only-copy), 孤兒院 (*gu1 er2 yuán4* = orphaned-children-building = orphanage). In drama 趙氏孤兒 (*Zhao4 shi4 gu1 er2* = Zhao-clan-orphan = The Orphan of Zhao), martyr's dying wife 托孤 (*tuo4 gu1* = entrusted-orphan) to physician: "Help my 遺孤 (*yi2 gu1* = remnant-orphan = orphan)!"

孤苦伶仃 (*gu1 ku3 ling2 ding1* = alone-poor-thin-helpless) describes parentless/helpless kid. Singleton feels 孤單 (*gu1 dan1* = lonely-isolated/friendless). 孤立 (*gu1 li4* = isolated-stand = isolated/un-aided) person 孤軍作戰 (*gu1 jun1 zuo2 zhan4* = single-army-make-battle = fights/struggles alone).

Chinese emperor's modest self-reference 孤家寡人 (*gu1 jia1 gua3 ren2* = lonely-home-spouseless/lacking-person) now facetiously describes bachelors.

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