

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 precious stones

Putonghua pronunciation: *bao3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bo2*

Meanings: treasure, precious

寶 = precious/treasured: 寶座 (*bao4 zuo4* = precious~seat = throne), 寶書 (*bao3 shu1* = treasure~book = extremely resourceful book), 寶貴 (*bao3 gui4* = precious~expensive = valuable). Crown jewels are 國寶 (*guo2 bao3* = national~treasures). 尋寶 (*xun2 bao3* = hunt~treasure) = treasure-hunt.

Mom kisses her 寶寶 (*bao3 bao3* = precious~precious = darling baby). 寶貝 (*bao3 bei4* = precious~mother-of-pearl = valuable object) also means parent/lover's beloved darling. Virgin forests have 奇珍異寶 (*qi2 zhen1 yi4 bao3* = strange~jewels~alien~treasures = rare/fantastic plants/animals/resources etc). Fairies have 法寶 (*fa3 bao3* = magic~power/weapons).

寶刀未老 (*bao3 dao1 wei4 lao3* = precious~sword/knife~not~yet~old) praises art/skill/dexterity of aged veteran/specialist. Company's 鎮山之寶 (*zhen4 shan1 zhi1 bao3* = weigh/guard~mountain~s~treasure) means its most renowned brand/asset.

by Diana Yue