

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 sheep and goats

祥

Putonghua pronunciation: *xiang2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *cheung4*

Meaning: auspicious, benign, blessed, hallowed, favorable, agreeable, propitious, peaceful, kind

祥 (radical 礻 = 示 *shi4*, divine revelation + 羊 *yang2*, sheep/goat) means auspicious. Comet is 祥兆 (*xiang2 zhao4* = auspicious sign) to astrologers. Timely snow is 祥瑞 (*xiang2 rui4* = auspicious-jade/symbol = benign sign) to farmers. 祥雲 (*xiang2 yun2* = lovely/hallowed-clouds = halos) encircle fairy's abode. Old superstition says widows are 不祥 (*bu4 xiang2* = not-
auspicious = causing bad luck).

Child adores mother's 慈祥 (*ci2 xiang2* = kind/loving-peaceful) expression. Guangzhou Asian Games' 吉祥物 (*ji1 xiang2 wu4* = luck-fortune-thing = mascot) shows five goats because Guangzhou is also called 五羊城 (*wu3 yang2 cheng2* = five-goats-city). 如意吉祥 (*ru2 yi4 ji2 xiang2* = as-feeling/intent-
auspicious-blessed = "May you have all the blessings you wish for") is greatly-welcomed New Year blessing.

by Diana Yue