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

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

籃 (radical 竹 zhū2, bamboo) = 篮子 (lan2 zi0 = basket-diminutive = basket): 竹籃 (zhú2 lan2 = bamboo-skin-basket), 草籃 (cǎo3 lan2 = straw-basket), 菜籃 (cài4 lan2 = vegetable/groceries-basket), 搖籃 (yáo2 lan2 = rocking-cradle). 編籃 (biān1 lan2 = weave-basket) = basket-weaving.

Guest brings 果籃 (guǒ3 lan2 = fruit-basket/hamper). 籃球員 (lan2 qiú2 yuān2 = basket-ball-er) 上籃 (shàng4 lan2 = up-basket/net/hoop = leaps, shoots layup). Investors trade 一籃子貨幣 (yī1 lan2 zi0 huò4 bi4 = one-basket-diminutive-goods-currency = basket of currencies).

Kindergarten kids sing: 小小姑娘, 清早起來 (xiǎo xiǎo3 gu1 niáng2, qīng1 zào3 qi3 lái2 = little-girl, early-morning-get-up), 提著花籃上市場 (tí zhe0 huá1 lan2 shàng4 shì4 chāng3 = take/holding-flower-basket-goes-to-the-market).

by Diana Yue