

Beginner Mandarin: Sensory Greetings (Nǐ hǎo) and Tones

Materials Needed

- A comfortable, soft mat or blanket (for tummy time or lap sitting)
- One high-contrast soft toy or puppet (The "Mandarin Friend")
- A small, safe mirror (handheld or placed securely nearby)
- Optional: A simple rattle or gentle musical instrument (for auditory focus)
- Caregiver's relaxed presence and facial expressions

Learning Objectives

By the end of this sensory experience, the learner will be able to:

1. Visually track the instructor's mouth and the Mandarin Friend puppet when hearing the target word "Nǐ hǎo" (Hello).
2. Demonstrate an affective response (smile, coo, focused gaze) during rhythmic repetition of the first tone (high and flat).
3. Associate physical contact (e.g., gentle rocking or tapping) with simple auditory Chinese phrases.

Lesson Structure and Activities

I. Introduction (The Connection Hook)

Goal: Establish eye contact and a relaxed, focused environment.

Activity 1: Soft Start and Tonal Warm-up

- **Hook:** The instructor gently holds the learner, ensuring close proximity and eye contact. The instructor makes a soft "Aaaaah" sound, varying the pitch slowly up and down, modeling the foundational skill of tone variation without language pressure.
- **Instruction:** "We are going to listen to some new, beautiful sounds today! These sounds are Mandarin Chinese. I will show you how my mouth moves to make the sounds."
- **Success Criteria (Caregiver Focus):** The learner is calm and maintains eye contact for at least 5 seconds.

II. Body: Content Presentation and Practice

Focus: Introducing "Nǐ hǎo" (Hello - pronounced roughly as 'Nee How') and the Third Tone (Nǐ - dipping tone) and Third Tone (hǎo - dipping tone).

Activity 2: I Do (Instructor Modeling and Auditory Exposure)

Topic: Modeling the Greeting and Association.

1. **Modeling the Sound:** The instructor holds the learner close or uses a secure carrier/chair position facing them. The instructor repeats the phrase "Nǐ hǎo" slowly, using exaggerated facial movements and high intonation. (Modeling the tone is key: Nǐ (dip) hǎo (dip)).

2. **Visual Aid Link:** Each time the instructor says "Nǐ hǎo," they bring the colorful Mandarin Friend puppet into the learner's field of vision and have the puppet gently wave.
3. **Repetition Loop (1st Tone Focus):** The instructor then isolates the first syllable, flattening the tone intentionally for easy listening: "Nī Nī Nī." This is repeated in a sing-song manner three times, pausing for the learner's reaction.

Activity 3: We Do (Shared Sensory Practice)

Topic: Linking sounds to kinesthetic experience (The Hello Bounce).

1. **Shared Movement:** While holding the learner safely, the instructor performs a gentle, rhythmic bounce or sway. With each bounce, the instructor says "Nǐ hǎo!" clearly and with positive emotion.
2. **Mirror Interaction:** Place the learner near the safe mirror. The instructor holds the learner's hand/finger and gently touches the reflection, saying, "Nǐ hǎo! Baby Nǐ hǎo!" This connects the sound to self-recognition and physical location.
3. **Formative Check:** Does the learner look at the mirror/reflection when the sound is made? If yes, reinforce with a gentle touch.

Activity 4: You Do (Supported Independent Practice and Reinforcement)

Topic: Focus on auditory attention and tracking.

1. **The Tracking Game:** The learner is placed on their mat or lap. The instructor moves the Mandarin Friend puppet slowly from left to right while only saying the word "Nǐ hǎo!" when the puppet is directly in the center of the learner's gaze. The volume should remain consistent.
2. **Pause and Respond:** The instructor pauses after saying the phrase, waiting 3-5 seconds for any vocalization (cooing, gurgle) or physical movement (kicking, smiling) from the learner. If the learner responds, the instructor responds in Mandarin with "Hǎo!" (Good!).

III. Conclusion (Closure and Recap)

Goal: Gentle transition out of the learning state, reinforcing the rhythm.

Activity 5: Gentle Farewell and Reflection

1. **Recap (Caregiver narration):** The instructor gently rocks the learner and whispers, "We learned the sound 'Nǐ hǎo' today! That means hello. We heard the high and dipping sounds."
2. **Closing Phrase:** The instructor introduces the phrase "Xiè xiè" (Thank you - pronounced roughly as 'Shyeh Shyeh') while gently rubbing the learner's back or giving a final tickle.
3. **Musical Closure:** If a gentle rattle or music is available, the instructor plays a short, soft sound cue while saying "Zài jiàn" (Goodbye) and slowly covering the Mandarin Friend puppet with a blanket (indicating the lesson is over).

Assessment and Differentiation

Formative Assessment (Ongoing Checks)

- **Engagement Level:** Did the learner track the movement of the puppet/face for the duration of the 'I Do' section? (Check for sustained gaze).
- **Affective Response:** Did the learner smile or coo (positive vocalization) during the rhythmic "Hello Bounce" activity?
- **Body Response:** Did the learner physically calm or orient their head towards the sound when the

phrase was repeated?

Success Criteria

The lesson is successful if the learner displays clear attention (tracking, focusing) during the sound modeling and shows a positive, relaxed emotional response throughout the activities, indicating successful auditory exposure and bonding.

Differentiation and Adaptations

Scaffolding for Struggling Learners (Low Engagement)

- **Sensory Boost:** Increase the contrast of the objects used or the loudness/exaggeration of the facial movements.
- **Proximity:** Reduce the physical distance between the instructor and learner. Use skin-to-skin contact while speaking the phrases (tactile learning).
- **Frequency:** Reduce the number of target words to only "Nǐ hǎo" and increase the repetition frequency.

Extension for Advanced Learners (High Engagement)

- **Tonal Practice:** Explicitly model the four main tones of Mandarin using a simple syllable like 'ma' (mā, má, mǎ, mà). Associate each tone with a simple action (e.g., flat tone = soft pat; rising tone = lifting the arms up).
- **Introducing a New Word:** Introduce a simple object word relevant to the current environment, such as "shǒu" (hand) or "yǎn jīng" (eye), while gently touching that body part.