Tricky Arabic sounds

12 letters that English speakers find hardest to say, with a word to practise each one.

Name _____

ث

Thaa

"th" in *think*

Tongue peeps out between the teeth.

ثَعْلَب tha'lab, fox

ذ

Dhaal

"th" in *this*

Like thaa, but with your voice on.

ذُرَة dhura, sweetcorn

ر

Raa

a rolled or tapped r

Tap the tip of your tongue, like a Spanish r.

رُمَّان rummaan, pomegranate

ح

Ḥaa

a breathy h

Breathe out hard, as if misting a window.

حِصَان ḥiṣaan, horse

خ

Khaa

"ch" in Scottish *loch*

A scrape at the back, like clearing your throat.

خَرُوف kharoof, sheep

ع

ʻAyn

a squeezed sound

Tighten the middle of your throat and say "a".

عِنَب ʻinab, grapes

غ

Ghayn

like a French r

A soft gargle at the back of the mouth.

غَيْمَة ghaymah, cloud

ق

Qaaf

a k from far back

Say "k" right at the back of your mouth.

قِطَّة qiṭṭah, cat

ص

Ṣaad

a heavy s

Say "s" with your tongue low and mouth rounder.

صَقْر ṣaqr, falcon

ض

Ḍaad

a heavy d

Say "d" with a full, deep mouth.

ضِفْدَع ḍifda', frog

ط

Ṭaa

a heavy t

Say "t" with your tongue pressed up and back.

طَائِرَة ṭaa'irah, aeroplane

ظ

Ẓaa

a heavy "th" as in *this*

Like dhaal, but deeper and fuller.

ظَرْف ẓarf, envelope

For grown-ups

These are only a guide: some Arabic sounds have no English match at all. The best way to learn them is to hear them, so listen to a fluent speaker or a recitation teacher, then copy. Heavy letters (ṣaad, ḍaad, ṭaa and ẓaa) make the vowels next to them sound deeper.

Say it, trace it

Say each sound out loud, then trace the grey letters from right to left.

Name _____

Thaa
right to left ←

ث ث ث ث

Dhaal
right to left ←

ذ ذ ذ ذ

Raa
right to left ←

ر ر ر ر

Ḥaa
right to left ←

ح ح ح ح

Khaa
right to left ←

خ خ خ خ

ʻAyn
right to left ←

ع ع ع ع

Ghayn
right to left ←

غ غ غ غ

Qaaf
right to left ←

ق ق ق ق

Ṣaad
right to left ←

ص ص ص ص

Ḍaad
right to left ←

ض ض ض ض

Ṭaa
right to left ←

ط ط ط ط

Ẓaa
right to left ←

ظ ظ ظ ظ

For grown-ups

Write the main shape first and add the dots last. Each row starts on the right, as Arabic is written. Once a sound feels easy, ask your child to find the letter on the first page and say its word.