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.

This week: Words about the crime

殺

Pronunciation: sha (Putonghua, 1st tone), saat (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: kill


誤殺 (wu sha = mistaken-kill) = unintentional killing, 謀殺 (mou sha = plan-kill) = murder. 殺手 (sha shou = kill-hand = killer) 殺死 (sha si = kill-die) target. 大殺傷武器 (da sha shang wu qi = big-kill-harm-military-instrument) = weapons of mass destruction.

殺雞儆猴 (sha ji jing hou = kill-chicken-warn-monkey) means punishing A to warn/threaten B. “天殺的!” (tian sha de = heaven-kill-it) = “Dammit!”

by Diana Yue