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 drugs

毒

Pronunciation: du (Putonghua, 2nd tone), duk (Cantonese, 6th tone)
Basic meaning: poison, evil

Snakes/pesticides/cancers 有毒 (you du = have-poison = are poisonous). Murderers 下毒 (xia du = drop-poison) in food/drink, 放毒氣 (fang du qi = release-poisonous-gas), victims 中毒 (zhong du = hit-by-poison = are poisoned).

Drug addicts 吸毒 (xi du = inhale/consume-poison) = take 毒品 (du pin = poison-products = drugs/narcotics): 海洛英 (hai luo ying = “heroine”-transliterated), 嗗啡 (ma fei = “morphine”-transliterated), 大麻 (da ma = marijuana), 冰 (bing = ice-drug), try to 戒毒 (jie du = get-off-drugs). China fought two 鴉片戰爭 (ya pian zhan zeng = Opium Wars) with Britain.