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 martial arts

侠, translated as knight-errant, means martial arts heroes/heroines who fight for noble causes. 武侠小说 (wu xia xiao shuo = military-hero-little-talk) are epic novels that describe their romantic feats, which are 侠义 (xia yi = knight-errant-righteous = brave and moral) in nature.

剑侠 (jian xia = sword-knight-errants) are skilled with the sword. 奇侠 (qi xia = strange-knight-errants) act in peculiar ways. 飞侠 (fei xia = flying-knight-errants) can soar like birds over rooftops. 遊侠 (you xia = roaming-knight-errant) travel without fixed destinations. 大侠 (da xia = great-knight-errant) are knight-errants of the top order.

侠骨柔腸 (xia gu rou chang = knight-errant-bones-gentle-intestines) is a beautiful way of saying a hero also has a tender heart for love.

by Diana Yue