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 friendship

敵 = 敵人 (di ren) = enemy/opponent. Hostile is 敵視 (di shi = enemy~look), hostility is 敵意 (di yi = enemy~feeling). 敵對 (di dui = enemy~facing) = opposing, 敵軍 (di jun) = enemy troops. 天敵 (tian di = sky/nature~enemy) means natural predator.

棋逢敵手 (qi feng di shou = chess~meet~enemy~hand) means meeting your match. 輕敵 (qing di = light/belittle~enemy) means under-rating your opponent.

Sixteen-word motto of PLA guerillas: 敵進我退，敵駐我擾，敵疲我打，敵退我追 (di jin wo tui, di zhuo wo you, di pi wo da, di tui wo zui = “Enemy advances, we retreat. Enemy camps, we harass. Enemy tires, we attack. Enemy retreats, we pursue”).

by Diana Yue