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 earthquakes

活

Pronunciation: huo (Putonghua, 4th tone), woot (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: live, alive, living

Adjective 活 (radical 氵 = water) means alive/vibrant: 活水 (huo shui = alive-water = fresh running water), 活魚 (huo yu = live-fish), 靈活 (ling huo = spirited-alive = alert/adaptive).


Premier Wen Jiabao consoled a young earthquake victim: “你們倖存活下來，就要好好活下去” (Ni men xing cun huo xia lai, jiu yao hao hao huo xia qu = You-plural-fortunately-survived-live-down-come, so-should-good-good-live-down-go = You have lived through it fortunately, you must live on seriously/courageously.)

by Diana Yue