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 summer

夏 = 夏天 (xia tian = summer~sky/days). 夏至 (xia zhi = summer~arrive) = summer solstice. 盛夏 (sheng xia = grand~summer) = midsummer. Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream is 仲夏夜之夢 (zhong xia ye zhi meng = second-phase~summer~night~’s~dream).

In 炎炎長夏 (yan yan chang xia = hot~hot~long-summer) people 歇夏 (xie xia = rest-summer = take summer breaks), shops offer 夏季大減價 (xia ji da jian jia = summer~season~big~reduce~price = big summer sale).

Some buildings/fabrics are 冬暖夏涼 (dong nuan xia liang = winter~warm~summer~cool) = warm for winter, cool for summer. 夏蟲不可以語冰 (xia chong bu ke yi yu bing = summer~insect~no-can~to-talk/tell-ice) means it’s useless telling small-minded people what they’ll never see.

Pronunciation: xia (Putonghua, 4th tone), ha (Cantonese 6th tone) Basic meaning: summer

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