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 museums

古 = ancient: 古人 (gu ren = ancient-people), 古代 (gu dai = ancient-epoch/era = ancient times), 古物 (gu wu = ancient-objects). However, 古老 (gu lao = ancient-old) just means old-fashioned, 古怪 (gu guai = ancient-strange) means odd.

古典 (gu dian = ancient-classic) describes classical scholarship/art. 古董 (gu dong = ancient-thing) = 古玩 (gu wan = ancient-play) = antiques/curios: 古玉 (gu yu = ancient-jade), 古錢 (gu qian = ancient-coins), 古琴 (gu qin = ancient-qin/Chinese-lute). 古城 (gu cheng = ancient-city), 古墓 (gu mu = ancient-tomb), 古戰場 (gu zhan chang = ancient-battle-ground) are 古跡 (gu ji = ancient-sites).

博古通今 (bo gu tong jin = broad-ancient-know-today) means learned in both historical and modern topics.

by Diana Yue