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 Christmas

雪

Pronunciation: xue (Putonghua, 3rd tone), suet (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: snow

During 下雪 (xia xue = down-snow = snowing/snowfall), 雪花 (xue hua = snow-flowers = snowflakes) fall. We 溜冰 (liu bing = slide/twirl-ice = ice-skate) on 結冰 (jie bing = seal-ice = ice-frozen) lakes, climb 雪山 (xue shan = snow-mountain/peak), 滑雪 (hua xue = slide/slip-snow = ski).


Easter lilies are 雪白 (xue bai = snow-white). 冰雪聰明 (bing xue cong ming = ice-snow-good-ears-good-eyes=clever) describes intelligent/talented people. 瑞雪兆豐年 (rui xue zhao feng nian = auspicious-snow-omen-abundant-harvest-year) means good snow (precipitation) forecasts good harvest.

by Diana Yue