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 jewelry

珠 (zhu) = pearl

Pronunciation: zhu (Putonghua, 1st tone), jue (Cantonese, 1st tone)
Basic meaning: pearl

Girls’ tears are 珠泪 (zhu lei = pearly-tears). Dark-skinned beauties are 黑珍珠 (hei zhen zhu = black-pearls). 珠圆玉润 (zhu yuan yu run = pearl-round-jade-moisture-enriched) describes plump women. 人老珠黄 (ren lao zhu huang = person-aged-pearl-yellow/lustreless) describes faded looks of women past their prime.

by Diana Yue