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 pirates

海 (hai) Pronunciation: hai (Putonghua, 3rd tone), hoi (Cantonese, 2nd tone)
Basic meaning: sea

海 = 海洋 (hai yang = seas-oceans) contain 海水 (hai shui = sea-water). 海島 (hai dao = sea-islands), 海灣 (hai wan = sea-bays) strew 海岸線 (hai an xian = sea-coast-lines). Mainland China and Taiwan are 海 峽兩岸 (hai xia liang an = sea-gulf-two-shores = two sides of the Taiwan Strait).

海军 (hai jun = sea-army) = navy. Fishermen harvest 海産 (hai chan = sea-products = fish/seaweed etc.) Romeos are 情深似海 (qing shen si hai = love/affection~deep~as~sea).

Wanderers 四海為家 (si hai wei jia = four-seas-are/as/make-home). “四海之內, 皆兄弟也!” (si hai zhi nei, jie xiong di ye = four-seas-’s-within, all-elder/younger-brothers~indeed!” means “All men are brothers!”

by Diana Yue