



W H A L E C L A S S

Circle Time Guide

The Cycle of Plants

Week of Nov 16–20 · 13 minutes a day · ages 2.5–6

seed · root · leaf · flower · fruit

Everything you need, one page per day

Week Overview

 Print · laminate · ring-bind · hold this all week. One page per day, in your hand, at the circle. Every script here is word-for-word the same as the teachers' page.  **Start the bean jar the FRIDAY BEFORE** — soaked broad bean, wet cotton wool, wedged against the glass; by Monday it has a root.  小雪 falls on Sunday 22 November — announced on Friday.

Five words they'll own by Friday

seed

root

leaf

flower

fruit

Littles (2.5–3)

One word + a gesture is a win: **“Seed!”** (curl up tiny on the floor), **“Grow!”** (rise up slowly), **“Flower!”** (both hands bloom open above your head).

Bigs (4–6)

Sentence frames: **“I plant a seed.”** · **“The roots go down.”** · **“The leaves go up.”** · **“The flower is beautiful.”**

Never ask a little for a sentence. They will get there by watching the bigs.

The week at a glance

- Mon** **A Seed** — Magic Box: a jar of seeds, an enormous broad bean beside a seed like a speck of dust. Game: seed or not a seed? Shelf: Tray 1 · Bean in a jar (started the Friday before).
- Tue** **Roots Go Down** — Magic Box: a whole small plant pulled up, roots washed clean. Game: I am a tree (feet are roots, and the wind blows). Shelf: Tray 2 · Plant-part 3-part cards.
- Wed** **Leaves Go Up** — Magic Box: one enormous ginkgo or plane leaf. Game: the leaf hunt outdoors, then graded biggest to smallest. Shelf: Tray 3 · Leaf matching & rubbing.
- Thu** **The Flower Opens** — Magic Box: one real flower. Game: the flower opens (slowest wins, then freeze). Shelf: Tray 4 · Seed sorting & spooning.
- Fri** **Fruit & Seed Again** — an apple cut across, the star and the pips, with every prop from the week underneath. Game: seed to seed. Full song, top to bottom.

The 13 minutes, every day

- 2 min** **Magic Box hook** — chant, shake, sniff, dramatic peek.
- 4 min** **Teach** — the day's word, dramatised with the object. Get it wrong once on purpose.
- 3 min** **Song** — chorus → today's new verse → chorus.
- 3 min** **Game.**
- 1 min** **Close** — whisper → normal → shout.

MONDAY

Day 1 • A Seed

Today's words: **seed**

Grab: a **jar of seeds** in the Magic Box — one enormous broad bean and, beside it, a seed like a speck of dust (poppy, or the dust out of a lettuce packet); a tray of beans, pebbles and buttons all mixed together; the bean jar you started last Friday; the 种 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box gives a tiny dry *shhhh* when you tilt it, like sand. Whole class chants:

EVERYONE "What's in the box? What's in the box?"

Shake it — that whispery rattle again. Sniff it. Peek in, and look *disappointed*.

TEACHER "Oh... there's nothing in here. Just... a little **stone**." (*lift out the broad bean between two fingers, hold it up, and turn it slowly*)

Then, very quietly: "But this stone is **alive**. There is a whole **plant** asleep inside it."

Curl up tiny on the floor, all of you. "**Seed!**"

4 MIN TEACH • SEED

The big bean in one palm, the dust-speck seed on one fingertip. Both go round the circle, ten seconds each pair of hands:

This one is **BIG**. (*hold the broad bean up high*)

This one is so small I can hardly see it. (*peer at your fingertip, cross-eyed*)

But they are **both** seeds... (*hold them side by side*)

and they are both **fast asleep**. (*hands together against your cheek*)

Littles hold one seed and say the one word "**Seed!**" Bigs take the frame: "**I plant a seed.**" "**The seed is small.**"

Then bring out **Friday's bean jar** and put it in the middle of the circle. The bean has split; a fat white root is pushing down the glass. Nobody touches it. Say what you see and nothing more: "*Something came out. It went **down**.*" Then it goes on the shelf, and one child draws it in the growth book — the first of five drawings.

Teacher fails: try to plant the bean by putting it carefully on top of a **closed** jar lid. Pat it. Wait for the plant. Look at your watch. Wait.

Chinese moment: lay the 种 card beside the jar. Then 李绅's two lines, said slowly with your hands — 春种一粒粟，秋收万颗子。 One seed in the spring (one finger), ten thousand seeds in the autumn (both hands thrown wide). That is the whole week in fourteen characters.

3 MIN GAME • SEED OR NOT A SEED?

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" The tray goes in the middle: broad beans, sunflower seeds, apple pips mixed up with pebbles, buttons and beads.

TEACHER "Take ONE. Look at it. Is it a **seed**... or **not a seed**?" (*two hoops or two cloths on the floor, one for each*)

One child at a time chooses an object and lays it in a hoop. Littles say the one word as it lands: "**Seed!**" or a head-shake. Bigs: "**It is a seed. It can grow.**" "**It is not a seed.**"

Go round twice. Do **not** correct anybody out loud — a pebble in the seed hoop is Thursday's problem, and by then they will move it themselves.

The honest answer to "how do you know?" is "**we plant it and see.**" Keep one wrong guess back, plant it beside a bean in a pot, and let the week answer it for you.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody curled up tiny on the floor, one seed held in a closed fist. Whisper → normal → shout:

EVERYONE "Seed... root... leaf... flower... **FRUIT!**" (*grow all the way up through the line and throw both arms open on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? The *Tiny Seed* (Eric Carle) — the whole week, in one book, on Monday. Read it again on Friday and they will tell you what happens next on every page.

Today's song moment — chorus, starting crouched right down on the floor → **Monday's verse:** A tiny seed, so small, so still, plant it in the pot — yes I will! → chorus. Chords and all five verses on the songbook page.

TUESDAY

Day 2 · Roots Go Down

Today's words: **root** (*seed comes back every day*)

Grab: a whole small plant pulled up, roots rinsed clean under the tap so every hair shows, in the Magic Box on a white cloth; a carrot with its leaves still on; a glass of water; the bean jar; the 根 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is heavier and something inside it is **damp**. Chant, then shake — a soft wet thud, once.

EVERYONE “What’s in the box? What’s in the box?”

Sniff it, properly, with your eyes shut. “It smells like... **rain**. It smells like the **ground**.”

TEACHER “Somebody pulled a whole plant right OUT of the earth.” (*lift it out by the stem so the roots hang down and swing, and hold it high*)

Point down at the floor with both hands. “**Root!**”

4 MIN TEACH · ROOT

Hold the plant up by the stem so it hangs the right way up, and go bottom to top, one beat each:

Down here — the **roots**. (*run one finger down the hanging roots*)

They hold on **tight** so the wind can’t take it. (*grip your own two fists together and pull*)

And they **drink**. (*a long, loud slurp*)

Up, up, up the stem... all the way to the **leaves**. (*finger travelling up*)

The plant goes round the circle. Everybody touches the roots — they are wet, and stringy, and slightly horrible, and that is the point.

Littles point at the floor and say “**Root!**” Bigs: “**The roots go down.**” “**The roots drink the water.**”

Then the carrot. Hold it up and wait. “*What if I told you this whole thing IS a root?*” Snap it in half. Let that sit.

Teacher fails: hold the plant **upside down**, roots waving in the air, leaves buried in your other hand, and admire it. “*What a beautiful plant.*” Wait.

Chinese moment: the 根 card goes down beside yesterday’s 种. Point at the plant, then the card, then the floor. Then eat the carrot. 萝卜 is a 根 — and so is 红薯, and 土豆 is not, but nobody needs that today.

3 MIN GAME · I AM A TREE

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Everybody stands, well spread out, plenty of room between them.

TEACHER “Your feet are the **roots**. Push them into the floor. Your body is the **stem**. Your arms are the **leaves**.”

Then you are the wind. Blow gently — only the leaves move. Blow harder — the stem sways. Blow a **storm** — everything moves except the feet. “**My roots are holding ON!**”

Littles just wave their arms and keep their feet stuck. Bigs get the whole sentence: “**My roots hold me down.**”

Last round: one child is the wind and you are a tree. Fall over, dramatically, when they blow. Feet off the floor. They will tell you exactly what you did wrong.

Feet **stuck to the floor** is the whole rule of this game, and it is also the only way twenty children storm about the room without a collision.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody standing, feet planted, pushing down hard. Whisper → normal → shout:

EVERYONE “Root... root... ROOT!” (*push both hands down to the floor and stamp once on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? Jack and the Beanstalk — told, not read, with one real bean in your hand. Plant it in front of them at the end and refuse to promise anything.

Today’s song moment — chorus → **Tuesday’s verse:** Roots go down, down, down below, drinking, drinking — that’s how I grow! → chorus. Drop your voice a step on each “down”.

WEDNESDAY

Day 3 • Leaves Go Up

Today's words: **leaf** (seed · root come back)

Grab: one **enormous leaf** in the Magic Box — a ginkgo or a plane leaf off a Beijing pavement, the biggest you can find; a basket for the leaf hunt; paper and fat crayons for rubbings; the bean jar; the 叶 card. Coats on — today you go outside.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is light again, and it **crackles**. Chant, then shake it slowly next to your ear.

EVERYONE “What’s in the box? What’s in the box?”

Open the lid a crack, look in, and shut it fast. Do it again. Then open it right up and lift out the leaf with two hands, like it is made of glass.

TEACHER “Look how **BIG**. Bigger than my hand...” (hold it flat against your own palm, then against a child’s face — bigger than that too)

Both arms stretched up and open. **“Leaf!”**

4 MIN TEACH • LEAF

Hold the leaf up to the window so the light comes through it. Everybody leans in:

Look — little **lines**, all over it. (trace one vein with a fingertip)

That is the **drink** coming up from the roots. (finger travelling up from the stalk)

And the leaf holds it up to the **sun**... (leaf flat on your open palm, lifted to the light)

...and that is how the plant makes its **food**. (rub your tummy)

Littles reach both arms up and say **“Leaf!”** Bigs: **“The leaves go up.” “The leaf catches the sun.”**

Then lay the three things you have collected in a row on the mat: the **seed**, the plant with its **roots**, the **leaf**. Point along the row and say the three words. That row grows by one every day until Friday.

Teacher fails: hold the leaf up to the **ceiling light** with enormous seriousness and announce that this plant will now grow very fast. Hold it there. Wait for somebody to point at the window.

Chinese moment: the 叶 card joins the row — 种 · 根 · 叶. Then show them 银杏 and let them say it; ginkgo leaves are all over Beijing in November and they will find them on the way home.

3 MIN GAME • LEAF HUNT

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Coats on, basket out, everybody outside. One rule, said before you open the door:

TEACHER “Bring me **ONE** leaf. Just one. The one *you* like best.”

Back inside, all the leaves go on the floor in one long line: **biggest to smallest**. The children build the line; you sit on your hands. Littles bring their leaf and name it: **“Leaf!”** Bigs compare: **“Mine is bigger than yours.” “This one is the smallest.”**

Then crayon rubbings, one each, at the table — leaf under the paper, crayon flat on its side. The lines come up out of nowhere and it is properly magic.

A child who brings back six leaves has not broken the rule, they have found a **gradation exercise**. Line all six up smallest to biggest and say so.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody standing, arms stretched right up, leaf in one hand. Whisper → normal → shout:

EVERYONE “Leaf... leaf... LEAF!” (wave both arms overhead like a tree in wind on the shout)

Got 3 spare minutes? Leaf Man (Lois Ehlert) — then make one on the table out of this morning’s hunt. It will not survive till home time. That is fine.

Today’s song moment — chorus, “leaves go up” right onto tiptoe → **Wednesday’s verse:** Green, green leaves that catch the sun, one, two, three — look, more than one! → chorus. Sing it outside under a real tree if the leaf hunt runs long.

THURSDAY

Day 4 • The Flower Opens

Today's words: **flower** (seed · root · leaf come back)

Grab: one **real flower** in the Magic Box, still with its stem and a leaf on it; a second flower you are willing to pull to pieces; a magnifying glass; the bean jar (it will have a leaf by now); the 花 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box makes no sound at all. Chant, shake it — nothing. Shake it harder — still nothing.

EVERYONE “What's in the box? What's in the box?”

Then **sniff** it. Sniff it again. Let your whole face change. Pass the closed box round and let every single child sniff the lid before anybody sees inside.

TEACHER “Something in here **smells**. And it has been waiting all week...” (*lift the flower out slowly, stem first, so it appears the way it grows*)

Both hands blooming open from a closed cup. **“Flower!”**

4 MIN TEACH • FLOWER

The flower stands in a glass in the middle. Everybody's hands make one too, and open with the words:

First the seed... (*fists tight, tucked in low*)
then the **root**, then the **leaf**... (*point down, then stretch up*)
and right at the top, at the very end... (*hands closed into a cup and lifted*)
the **FLOWER**. (*open both hands wide, slowly, like a time-lapse*)

Littles bloom their hands and say **“Flower!”** Bigs: **“The flower is beautiful.” “The flower smells nice.”**

Then take the second flower apart on a white cloth, one piece at a time, naming almost nothing: petal ... petal ... petal ... and this dusty yellow bit in the middle. Magnifying glass. Get a fingertip yellow. *“Bees carry this from flower to flower — and THAT is how a flower turns into a fruit.”* One sentence, then stop.

Teacher fails: hold the flower by its head and try to plant the **petals**, one by one, in the pot. Pat the soil down. Look pleased. Wait.

Chinese moment: the 花 card joins the row — 种 · 根 · 叶 · 花. Say 一朵花, then count the flowers in the room together: 一朵, 两朵, 三朵. 朵 is the measure word and they pick it up in a week.

3 MIN GAME • THE FLOWER OPENS

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Everybody curled up on the floor in a tight little ball, hands over their heads. You are the sun and the rain.

TEACHER “Here comes the rain... here comes the sun... now **open**. As slowly as you can. The slowest flower wins.”

Count them up, one number every two seconds, all the way to ten. On ten everybody must be standing with both hands wide open, and then — **freeze**. Nobody moves. Walk round and admire the garden out loud.

Littles just have to get up and open their hands. Bigs narrate as they go: **“I am growing.” “Now I am a flower!”**

Second round, backwards: winter comes, and the slowest flower to close up small again wins that one too.

This is the calmest three minutes of the week — use it before a transition, not after one. Slow is the skill being practised here, not speed.

1 MIN CLOSE

Hands cupped shut at chest height, ready to bloom. Whisper → normal → shout:

EVERYONE “Flower... flower... FLOWER!” (*both hands burst open above the head on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? Planting a Rainbow (Lois Ehlert) — every page is one colour of flower. They will start calling the colours out for you.

Today's song moment — chorus, opening your hands as slowly as you possibly can on “like a cup” → **Thursday's verse:** A flower, a flower, pink and red, it opens up above my head! → chorus. Hold the last word, hands wide open, for four beats.

Day 5 • Fruit & Seed Again + Big Review

Today's words: **seed • root • leaf • flower • fruit** — the whole week

Grab: an **apple** and a knife in the Magic Box, with every prop from the week underneath — the seed jar, the pulled-up plant, the big leaf, the flower; a plate; the bean jar (now a real plant); the awards (print pack page 17); the 果 card. Sunday is 小雪.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

The box comes out fat and bulging and will not quite shut.

TEACHER “Today the box is FULL — it's got our whole WEEK inside it!”

Pull each prop out and hold it up in complete silence. They will supply the word before you can.

The jar of seeds → **“Seed!”** The pulled-up plant → **“Root!”** The big leaf → **“Leaf!”** Yesterday's flower → **“Flower!”**

Last of all, one apple. Hold it up. Nobody knows what it is doing here. Hands ready... **“FRUIT!”**

4 MIN TEACH • FRUIT, THEN THE WHOLE WEEK

Everybody watches while you cut the apple **across the middle**, not down — and open it like a book. There is a star inside, and the star is full of pips.

A flower turned into this **fruit**. (*hold the two halves up*)

And inside the fruit... (*turn one half round very slowly*)

...there is a **star**. (*let them see it, and wait*)

And in the star — a **SEED**. (*pick one pip out and hold it up between two fingers*)

Then everybody stands and the whole week goes through the body, twice, slow then fast: **seed** (curled up tiny) → **root** (push down) → **leaf** (stretch up) → **flower** (bloom) → **fruit** (round arms) → and back to **seed**.

Littles do the five gestures and shout the five words. Bigs owe you a sentence each: **“I plant a seed.” “The roots go down.” “The flower is beautiful.” “The fruit has seeds inside.”**

Teacher fails: *hold up the pip and say “well, that's the end of the story then.” Put it in the bin. Wait. Somebody will physically stop you.*

Chinese moment: the 果 card completes the row — 种 · 根 · 叶 · 花 · 果, the whole week on the mat, and you can read it left to right like a sentence. Then: Sunday is 小雪, the day the first snow can come. 小雪腌菜 — this is when families put the vegetables away for winter. Everything we planted, we keep.

3 MIN GAME • SEED TO SEED

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Five children stand up and take one stage each: **seed • root • leaf • flower • fruit**. The rest of the circle is the sun, the rain and the wind.

TEACHER “Seed — you're first. Curl up. Now... who comes next?”

Each child does their stage in order, holding the pose, until all five are standing in a line and the whole plant is built out of children. Then the fruit child holds out one hand with a pip in it — and the **seed** child takes it and curls up again. The circle claps once. It goes round.

Littles are the sun and the rain, which is a real job with real actions. Bigs do the five stages and narrate: **“Now I am the flower.”**

Run it three times with new children each time, and get faster.

The pip changing hands is the whole idea of the week. Do not explain it. Do it three times, and by the third round they will start shouting “again!” before the fruit child has even moved.

1 MIN CLOSE + AWARDS

Every child gets a “You are a STAR!” award to take home with the 小雪 news — and one real seed in a twist of paper to plant at home. Then, standing round the bean jar, all five gestures:

EVERYONE “Seed... root... leaf... flower... FRUIT!” (*all the way up from the floor, then everybody drops back down to a seed on the last beat*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *The Tiny Seed (Eric Carle) again — on Monday you read it to them; today they read it to you, holding the bean jar.*

Today's song moment — Friday's verse: *Cut the apple — what do I see? A little seed — ready for me!* then the WHOLE song: chorus → Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri → chorus, standing round the bean jar. Start crouched as a seed and drop back down to a seed on the last word — that run-through IS the week's review.

★ Theme Song · “A Little Seed”

The one song of the week — sung at every circle. Same chorus daily, one new verse each morning, full song on Friday.

C (0003)

F (2010)

G7 (0212)

Am (2000)

Strum: Down · Down · Down-Up (“sing — song — sing-a”). Can’t manage it yet? Four slow downs per bar works fine — the kids only hear the fun.

Tempo: *slow and growing — this one starts almost still and opens out. The only Am in the whole song is on “Rain and sun”, in the second line of the chorus; all five verses are just C and G7. Chant it without the uke first, crouched on the floor, and stand up through it; add the chords once they know the actions.*

CHORUS — SING IT EVERY SINGLE DAY

C A little seed down **F** in the **C** ground, (*crouch right down, curled up small*)

Am Rain and **C** sun **G7** all a **C** round! (*fingers rain down, then arms circle up*)

C Roots go down and **F** leaves go **C** up, (*point down, then stretch up*)

F A flower **C** opens **G7** like a **C** cup! (*hands cupped, then bloomed wide open*)

*Sing the chorus twice each time, and **grow through it** — start crouched on the floor on “a little seed” and be standing with your hands open by “cup”. A two-year-old who curls up and then opens has understood the whole week, whether or not a single word comes out.*

ONE VERSE A DAY — ALL FIVE USE ONLY C AND G7

Monday · Seed

C A tiny seed, so small, so still, (*hold up one finger and freeze*)

G7 Plant it in the pot — **C** yes I will! (*press it into an imaginary pot*)

Tuesday · Root

C Roots go down, down, down below, (*push both hands down, lower each time*)

G7 Drinking, drinking — **C** that’s how I grow! (*slurp, then stretch up tall*)

Wednesday · Leaf

C Green, green leaves that catch the sun, (*both hands flat, tilted up to the light*)

G7 One, two, three — **C** look, more than one! (*count three, then wiggle all ten*)

Thursday · Flower

C A flower, a flower, pink and red, (*one hand blooms, then the other*)

G7 It opens up **C** above my head! (*both hands wide open overhead*)

Friday · Fruit

C Cut the apple — what do I see? (*open two cupped hands*)

G7 A little seed — **C** ready for me! (*one finger up, then curl back down small*)

The build: *each day sing chorus → today’s verse → chorus. By Friday they know five verses without ever “learning” the song — and Friday’s finale, sung standing round the bean jar and ending curled up on the floor, doubles as your review of the whole week.*

IF YOU'RE BRAND NEW TO UKULELE

Practice this loop for five minutes tonight: **C** (4 strums) → **F** (4 strums) → **C** → **G7** → **C**. That is most of the chorus. Add **Am** last — it is one finger on the same string as F, so slide Am → F → Am until it stops feeling like a change; you only need it for two words, “Rain and sun”. If your fingers get stuck, put the uke down and do the finger-play instead: the class will not notice, and the actions carry the meaning either way.