



W H A L E C L A S S

Circle Time Guide

Everything you need, one page per day.

Week 15 · Christmas

14–18 December 2026 · 13 minutes a day · ages 2.5–6, English learners

The last week of term · winter holiday 21 Dec – 1 Jan · back on Monday 4 January · 冬至 falls on the 22nd

WEEK OVERVIEW



Print · laminate · ring-bind · hold this all week

Christmas is a **giving** festival. Every child makes one present during the week — in free work time, not at circle — and on Friday gives it away to a friend. Everything else this week is decoration; that is the lesson.

FIVE WORDS THEY'LL OWN BY FRIDAY

tree star present bell Santa

Littles (2.5–3) — one word + a gesture is a win: “Tree!” (arms out like branches), “Ho ho ho!” (pat your belly, big laugh), “Present!” (shake a box beside your ear).

Bigs (4–6) — sentence frames: “Merry Christmas!” · “This is a present for you.” · “I can see a star on the tree.” · “Thank you!”

THE 13-MINUTE FLOW, EVERY DAY

- 2 MIN** Magic Box hook — chant, shake, sniff, dramatic peek, the day's real object.
- 4 MIN** Teach — the day's word with the real thing in your hands. Get it wrong once on purpose.
- 3 MIN** Song — chorus → today's new verse → chorus.
- 3 MIN** Game — one named game, tied to the day's word.
- 1 MIN** Close — whisper → normal → SHOUT.

IN THE MAGIC BOX, DAY BY DAY

Mon a real pine sprig — a branch off a real tree, it has to smell · **Tue** the gold star for the top of the tree · **Wed** a wrapped present and a little bell · **Thu** a Santa hat and a big red stocking · **Fri** every prop from the week, plus the presents the children made.

THE WEEK'S CLOSE

Everyone: “Tree... star... PRESENT! MERRY CHRISTMAS!” (*arms out · point up high · hands held out · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

THEME SHELF · FOUR TRAYS

- 1** • Decorate the little tree — a felt tree and five felt ornaments. *Control:* each ornament's outline is sewn on the tree. (From Monday.)
- 2** • Wrap a present — a small box, paper, tape, ribbon. *Control:* when it is right, the box has completely disappeared. (Practical life, from Wednesday — the tray the whole week is really for.)
- 3** • Christmas 3-part cards — tree · star · present · bell · Santa, Chinese and English, plus the 12 sorting cards and the action cards. *Control:* the whole control cards; gold and red dots on the sorting-card backs.
- 4** • Bell sound pairing — six small bells in six identical pots, three pairs, matched by sound alone. *Control:* coloured dots on the bottoms. (Sensorial, from Wednesday's bell.)

CHINESE ANGLE

One 汉字 card a day at the foot of the tree: 树 · 星 · 礼 · 圣 · 送. 圣诞快乐! said at full volume on Thursday. 谢谢 · 不客气 every single time anything changes hands. One line of 《一闪一闪亮晶晶》 on Tuesday with the torch on the ceiling. Friday: 冬至 falls on the 22nd, in the holiday — 北方冬至吃饺子, folded in the air together.

FRIDAY'S DARK PHONICS SOUND

h — a puff of breath with no voice in it, like a panting puppy: hat, hen, hop, hot. “Ha-ha, hairy hippo!” The week carries it everywhere: **hat**, **ho** ho ho, **holly**, **hang** it up, **happy**. Hand in front of the mouth — if it doesn't feel the puff, it isn't an h.

MONDAY · DAY 1

The Christmas Tree

Today's words: **tree**

Grab: a **real pine sprig** in the Magic Box (a small branch off a real tree — it has to smell); the bare classroom tree standing where everyone can reach it; the picture cards from print pack page 11; the 树 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box weighs almost nothing. Hold it up. Whole class chants:

Everyone: "What's in the box? What's in the box?"

Shake it — silence. Now lift the lid a crack and **sniff**, loudly, with your eyes shut. Sniff again. Let your face go amazed.

Teacher: "Something in here smells like a whole **FOREST**." (*lift out the pine sprig and hold it under your own nose for one long beat*)

The sprig goes right round the circle and every child sniffs it. Arms out like branches: **"Tree!"**

4 MIN TEACH · TREE

Everybody stands up. We **are** the tree, twice — small and slow, then big:

My tree is **green**. (*arms out wide, fingers spread like branches*)

My tree is **TALL**. (*stretch right up on tiptoe*)

The lights go on... (*open and close both hands, twinkling*)

and a **star** on top of all! (*both hands to a point above your head*)

Littles do the branch arms and say **"Tree!"** Bigs take the frame: **"This is my Christmas tree." "The tree is green and tall."**

Then the bare tree itself. Walk round it once, touching nothing, and name what is **not** there yet: no lights, no star, nothing hanging. It is the emptiest tree in the world. Tomorrow the star, today everything else.

Teacher fails: try to hang a picture card on your own **head**, standing very still with your arms out. "Look. I am the tree." Hold the pose. Wait.

Chinese moment: lay the 树 card at the foot of the tree and say 圣诞树 once. Leave the card there all week; the row grows by one card a day.

3 MIN GAME · DECORATE THE TREE

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" The picture cards are face down in a basket at the foot of the bare tree.

Teacher: "Take one card... **tell us what it is**... now hang it on the tree."

One child at a time: pick, name, hang. Littles name it with one word — **"Bell!" "Star!"** Bigs give the sentence as they hang it: **"I can see a star on the tree."**

Go all the way round; everybody hangs one thing. By the end the tree is covered and it was covered by them.

Leave it up all week. Everything that comes out of the Magic Box from today on has somewhere to live, and on Friday the presents go at its feet.

1 MIN CLOSE

Standing round the tree, branch arms out. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: "Tree... star... PRESENT! MERRY CHRISTMAS!" (*arms out · point up high · hands held out · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *Mr Willowby's Christmas Tree* (Robert Barry) — a tree gets cut shorter and shorter and every animal in the wood ends up with one. It is a giving book, which is this week's whole point.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Monday's verse → chorus, standing at the tree.

"A little green tree, a little green tree, / lights and stars — come and see!" (*branch arms, small then big; twinkling hands, then beckon everybody in*)

TUESDAY · DAY 2

A Star on Top

Today's words: **star** (tree comes back every day)

Grab: the **gold star** for the top of the tree, in the Magic Box; about twenty small gold paper stars, hidden round the room **before** the children come in; a torch; the 星 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today there is exactly **one** thing in the box and it does not rattle. Chant, then tip the box slowly from side to side — something slides.

Everyone: “What’s in the box? What’s in the box?”

Peek in for a long time. Lift it out with **both** hands, very slowly, and turn it so the light catches the gold and flashes round the circle.

Teacher: “It’s gold... it’s pointy... and it goes **right at the very top.**” (*hold it above your own head*)

Hands to a point above their heads: **“Star!”**

4 MIN TEACH · STAR

The star sits in your two open hands while you say it — twice, and the second time they say it with you:

One gold star, (*hold it up in two hands*)

Right on the **TOP.** (*reach as high as you can*)

It shines all night... (*open and close both hands, twinkling*)

and it does **not stop!** (*keep twinkling, faster and faster*)

Then the real thing: one child is lifted up (or stands on a safe chair, held) to put the star on the tree while the whole class counts down — **three, two, one** — and cheers.

Littles point up high and say **“Star!”** Bigs owe you the sentence: **“I can see a star on the tree.” “The star is on the top.”**

Teacher fails: put the star carefully on the **floor** beside the tree, step back, fold your arms and admire it. “Beautiful.” Wait. Let them march you back.

Chinese moment: the 星 card joins 树 at the foot of the tree — 星星. Sing one line of 《一闪一闪亮晶晶》 with the torch on the ceiling. One line only, then stop.

3 MIN GAME · STAR HUNT

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Twenty gold paper stars are hidden round the room, some in plain sight at knee height for the littlest ones.

Teacher: **“Walking** feet... find the stars... **GO!**” (*everything found comes straight back to the mat*)

When the hunt is over, lay every star out in one long line on the carpet and **count them all together**, out loud, pointing at each one. Littles count with their fingers up; Bigs count the line themselves and tell you: **“I found three stars.”**

Hide exactly as many as the class can count to together, and count them into your hand before you hide them — the counting at the end is the real work, and it only works if the number comes out right.

1 MIN CLOSE

Standing at the tree, everybody’s star held up. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: “Tree... star... **PRESENT! MERRY CHRISTMAS!**” (*arms out · point up high · hands held out · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? Lights off, torch on the ceiling, and sing *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* lying on your backs. It costs nothing and they will ask for it every day this week.

3 MIN · Today’s song moment — chorus → Tuesday’s verse → chorus. On “a star on top” everybody points at the **real** star.

“One gold star right on the top, / twinkle, twinkle — it will not stop!” (*reach up high and hold it; twinkling hands, faster and faster, ending in a whisper*)

WEDNESDAY · DAY 3

A Present for You

Today's words: **present** (tree · star come back)

Grab: a **wrapped present** and a little **bell** in the Magic Box; the pass-the-present parcel, wrapped in one layer per child, with a bag of star stickers to share in the middle; music you can start and stop; wrapping paper, tape and ribbon on the shelf tray; the 礼 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box gives one bright *ting* when it moves. Chant, then shake it once — **ting** — and stop dead.

Everyone: “What’s in the box? What’s in the box?”

Lift out the **bell** and ring it once, high above your head. Everybody goes quiet on the ring — that is the rule for the rest of the week.

Teacher: “The bell means something is coming...” (*reach back in and lift out the wrapped present in both hands*)

Shake it beside your ear. **“Present!”**

4 MIN TEACH · PRESENT

The present stays in your hands the whole way through. Say it twice; the second time they do the actions with you:

A present, a present, tied with a **bow**, (*hold it up and trace the ribbon with one finger*)

What’s inside? I do **not** know! (*shake it beside your ear, then shrug enormously*)

It’s **not** for me... (*hands off it, both behind your back*)

it’s for **YOU**, you know! (*hold it out to one child with two hands*)

Here is the whole week in one sentence, said slowly: **a present is a thing you give away**. Then send it round: two hands, eyes up, **“This is a present for you.”** — and the child who takes it says **“Thank you!”** before passing it on.

Little ones shake it beside their ear and say **“Present!”** Bigs owe you both halves: **“This is a present for you.”** and **“Thank you!”**

Teacher fails: start tearing the paper off greedily with your teeth. “Mine. All mine.” Wait for the roar — **“It’s for YOU!”** — then look very ashamed and hand it on.

Chinese moment: the 礼 card joins 树 · 星 — 礼物. And the two words that go with it every time something changes hands: 谢谢 and 不客气.

3 MIN GAME · PASS THE PRESENT

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Everybody in a circle, knees touching. Say the rule out loud **before** you start: there is **one layer for every child**, so everybody unwraps exactly once, and what is inside is for all of us.

Teacher: “Music on — pass it. Music STOPS — one layer off!” (*the child who takes the layer off then hands the parcel straight on*)

Round it goes. The waiting is the lesson and it is a hard one, so narrate it kindly: **“It’s not your turn yet... and you are waiting so well.”** The last layer comes off to a bag of star stickers — one each, handed out by the child who opened it.

Never let the middle be a prize for one child. The whole game teaches waiting, and a single winner at the end quietly teaches the opposite.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody’s hands held out flat, as if offering something. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: “Tree... star... PRESENT! MERRY CHRISTMAS!” (*arms out · point up high · hands held out · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *The Jolly Christmas Postman* (Janet & Allan Ahlberg) — every page has a real envelope to open. Let a different child open each one and hand it round.

3 MIN · Today’s song moment — chorus → Wednesday’s verse → chorus. One child holds the real bell and rings it on “ring, ring, ring”.

“A present, a present, tied with a bow, / it’s not for me — it’s for YOU, you know!” (*trace the bow; hands to your chest, then out to a friend — everybody points at somebody else*)

THURSDAY · DAY 4

Ho Ho Ho, Santa!

Today's words: **Santa** (tree · star · present come back)

Grab: a **Santa hat** and a big red **stocking** in the Magic Box; a mirror the children can see themselves in; the 𐄎 card; paper and a pot to draw the **giving pairs** for tomorrow.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is **fat** and completely silent — press the lid down and it springs back up, soft.

Everyone: “What’s in the box? What’s in the box?”

Shake it: nothing at all. Squash it: it bounces. Peek in and laugh out loud, then pull out something **red**, very slowly, and put it on your own head.

Teacher: “HO... HO... HO!” (*both hands on your belly, laughing from right down low*)

Everybody pats their belly. “**Ho ho ho!**” Then the enormous red stocking comes out and gets held up against a child, who disappears inside it.

4 MIN TEACH · SANTA

Hat on. Say it twice, the second time with everybody joining in:

Red, red hat, (*pat the hat on your head*)

A big white **beard**, (*stroke a long beard down to your tummy*)

He comes at **night**... (*tiptoe on the spot, finger on your lips*)

HO HO HO — he’s **here!** (*both hands on your belly, big laugh*)

Then the mirror. Every child who wants to wears the hat for five seconds, looks at themselves and does one “**Ho ho ho!**” Littles need nothing else. Bigs give the sentence: “**Santa has a red hat.**” “**Santa gives presents to everybody.**”

Say the true thing once, plainly: Santa is a **story**. Some families tell it, some families don’t, and both are completely normal — exactly like families being different. Then get straight back to the laughing.

Teacher fails: put the Santa hat carefully on your **foot** and stand there beaming. “How do I look?” Hold it. Wait.

Chinese moment: the 𐄎 card joins the row — 圣诞老人 — and the whole class says 圣诞快乐! once, at full volume.

Nobody has to wear the hat: if a child is frightened of it or of the beard, it sits on your knee, on the far side of the circle, and nothing is said about it at all.

3 MIN GAME · SANTA SAYS

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Simon says, played in a red hat — and every instruction is one of the week’s words.

Teacher: “**Santa says...** ring the bells! **Santa says...** hang a star! ... **wrap a present!**” (*the last one has no “Santa says” — freeze and look round*)

Actions: ring the bells (shake both hands) · hang a star (reach up high) · wrap a present (wrap in the air) · be a tree (branch arms) · HO HO HO (pat your belly). Nobody is ever *out*; a child who moves just does it again with you. Last round, the hat goes to a Big and **they** give the orders while you play in the circle like everybody else.

Five instructions, no more — the same five, over and over, faster and faster. That repetition is the English lesson; new instructions would only make it a listening puzzle.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody’s hands on their bellies, ready. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: “Tree... star... PRESENT! MERRY CHRISTMAS!” (*arms out · point up high · hands held out · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Before home time: draw the **giving pairs** for tomorrow — every child’s name pulled out of the stocking, so that everybody gives one present and everybody receives one. Check the list twice tonight; a child holding a present with nowhere to take it is the one thing that can spoil Friday. **Got 3 spare minutes?** *Dear Santa* (Rod Campbell) — lift-the-flap, one flap per child.

3 MIN · Today’s song moment — chorus → Thursday’s verse → chorus. Whoever wears the hat stands in the middle for the “HO HO HO”.

“Red, red hat and a big white beard, / ho, ho, ho! — Santa’s here!” (*pat your head, stroke the beard; three belly laughs, lower each time, then arms wide*)

FRIDAY · DAY 5

Give the Gift + Big Review

Today's words: **bell** — and **tree** · **star** · **present** · **Santa**, the whole week

Grab: the **bell**, and every prop from the week packed into the box (or a red sack); the **presents the children made**, hidden until the game; the giving-pairs list from yesterday; the awards (print pack page 17); the 送 card. Monday is the start of the **winter holiday** — back on **4 January**.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

The box comes out bulging and will not quite shut.

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

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

The pine sprig → “**Tree!**” The gold star → “**Star!**” The wrapped present → “**Present!**” The red hat → “**Santa!**”

Last of all, one small thing left in the bottom. Lift it out and ring it, high. “**BELL!**”

4 MIN TEACH · BELL, THEN THE WHOLE WEEK

Everybody stands. We tell the whole week with our bodies, twice — slow, then fast:

Ring the bell — it's Christmas Day! (*shake both hands like bells*)

A **tree**, (*branch arms*) a **star**, (*point right up high*)

A **present** to give away, (*hold both hands out to a friend*)

And a **HO HO HO!** (*pat your belly*)

Merry Christmas — **I love you!** (*hands over your heart, then blow a kiss*)

Littles do the five gestures and shout the five words. Bigs owe you a whole sentence each: “**I can see a star on the tree.**” “**This is a present for you.**” “**Merry Christmas!**”

Teacher fails: on “a present to give away”, clutch the present to your chest with both arms and shake your head. Hold on tight. Let them prise it out of you.

Chinese moment: the 送 card joins the row — 树 · 星 · 礼 · 圣 · 送, the whole week on the mat, and 送 is the one that matters: *to give*. Then tell them: 冬至 falls on the 22nd, while we are all at home, and 北方冬至吃饺子 — families sit down together and eat dumplings. Fold an imaginary dumpling with them, all twenty pairs of hands.

3 MIN GAME · GIVE THE GIFT

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Every child fetches the present they made and sits down holding it. Nobody opens anything until the very end — say so first, and say it twice.

Teacher: (*ring the bell once*) “Whose turn? ... Off you go.”

One bell, one child: they walk across the circle, hand it over with **two hands** and look at the person: “**This is for you.**” The one who receives it says “**Thank you!**” Then the bell rings again for the next child. Littles say the one word with the two hands — “**Present!**” — and that is a full win. When every present has been given, and only then: **open them all together**, on the count of three.

Use yesterday's pairs, and hold the list in your hand. Every child gives one and receives one — count it twice before you start. This is the moment of the whole term; it is worth the extra two minutes of preparation.

1 MIN CLOSE + AWARDS

Every child gets a “You are a STAR!” award to take home with the holiday news. Then, standing round the tree with their presents, all five gestures:

Everyone: “Tree... star... PRESENT! MERRY CHRISTMAS!” (*arms out · point up high · hands held out · both arms thrown wide, and everybody rings the bells on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? Sing the whole song one more time with the lights off and the tree lit. Then wish them a happy holiday, in both languages, and tell them the date they come back: **Monday 4 January**.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — Friday's verse, then the WHOLE song, standing round the tree with the presents at its feet and nobody touching them.

“Bells and stars and presents too, / Merry Christmas — I love you!” Then chorus → Mon → Tue → Wed → Thu → Fri → chorus. That run-through is the week's review.

SONGBOOK

★ “Ring the Bells, It's Christmas!”

C (0003) F (2010) G7 (0212) · Strum: Down · Down · Down-Up (“ring — ring — ring-a”)

Three chords, and **no Am anywhere** — this is the easiest song of the term, so if last week's verses defeated you, this is the one to come back on. C is one finger, F is two, G7 is three; learn them in that order. Bright and bouncy, like a sleigh, with a big rest before “HO HO HO” so they can hear it coming.

CHORUS — EVERY SINGLE DAY

- C Ring, ring, ring the F bells! C *(shake both hands like bells)*
F Christmas C Day is G7 here! C *(arms wide)*
C A star on F top, a present down be C low, *(reach up, then right down to the floor)*
F Merry C Christmas, everyone — G7 HO HO C HO! *(pat your belly and laugh)*

MONDAY · TREE

- C A little green tree, a little green tree,
G7 Lights and stars — C come and see!

TUESDAY · STAR

- C One gold star right on the top,
G7 Twinkle, twinkle — C it will not stop!

WEDNESDAY · PRESENT

- C A present, a present, tied with a bow,
G7 It's not for me — C it's for YOU, you know!

THURSDAY · SANTA

- C Red, red hat and a big white beard,
G7 Ho, ho, ho! — C Santa's here!

FRIDAY · MERRY CHRISTMAS

- C Bells and stars and presents too,
G7 Merry Christmas — C I love you!

Each day: chorus → today's verse → chorus, always standing at the tree. Friday: sing the whole thing top to bottom with the presents piled at its feet and nobody touching them until the last chord — that run-through is the review of the week. If your fingers get stuck, put the uke down, give one child the real bell and do the finger-play instead; the actions carry the meaning either way.