



W H A L E C L A S S

Circle Time Guide

Everything you need, one page per day.

Week 19 · China

25–29 January 2027 · 13 minutes a day · ages 2.5–6, English learners

The country under our feet · Chinese New Year is next week, 春节 falls on Saturday 6 February

WEEK OVERVIEW



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

Last week it was our city; this week it is the whole country round it — **China** — and it is red, and huge, and ours. Every day one real thing out of the box that is China in the hand: the flag, the panda, the dragon ribbon, a block of the wall, a pair of chopsticks.

FIVE WORDS THEY'LL OWN BY FRIDAY

China red dragon wall panda

Littles (2.5–3) — one word + a gesture is a win: “China!” (hug yourself), “Red!” (wave the red cloth), “Dragon!” (wiggle both arms).

Bigs (4–6) — sentence frames: “I live in China.” · “The flag is red.” · “The wall is very long.” · “The panda eats bamboo.”

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

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 small five-star red flag, and a big map of China for the floor · **Tue** a panda toy and a few real bamboo leaves · **Wed** a long red silk ribbon, long enough for the whole class to hold at once · **Thu** a photo of the Great Wall and one wooden block (the basket stands by) · **Fri** everything from the week, plus chopsticks, a lump of dough and one piece of jade.

THE WEEK'S CLOSE

Everyone: “China... China... I LIVE IN CHINA!” (*hug yourself · point down at the floor · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

SAY BOTH, OUT LOUD, ON MONDAY

If a child's family is not Chinese, that is easy and lovely and it is said plainly at the circle: “**You live in China, and your family is from __.**” Both true, both named, nobody left out of the hug. Then straight on with the flag.

THEME SHELF · FOUR TRAYS

- 1** • Flag collage — a red card ground and five yellow felt stars. *Control:* faint star shadows printed on the mat. (From Monday.)
- 2** • Panda black-and-white matching — panda body-part cards, black half to white half. *Control:* matching symbols on the backs. (From Tuesday.)
- 3** • Great Wall building — blocks along a printed curved base-line that climbs a paper hill. *Control:* the plan itself; the wall is finished when no line is showing. (From Thursday — leave the class wall standing.)
- 4** • Chopstick transfer — five pom-poms into five small bowls with child chopsticks. *Control:* five bowls, five pom-poms, none left over. (Practical life, from Friday.)

CHINESE ANGLE

One 汉字 card a day, laid on the map: 中 · 熊 · 龙 · 城 · 饺 — read back as a row on Friday. 中国 · 熊猫 · 舞龙 · 长城 · 饺子, and 你好 / 谢谢 every single time anything changes hands.

FRIDAY'S DARK PHONICS SOUND

j — short, sharp and voiced, the tongue jumping off the roof of the mouth: jug, jam, jet. “**jump in the jelly jam!**” The week's own words carry it: jiaozi, jade, jump.

MONDAY · DAY 1

This Is China

Today's words: **China** · red

Grab: a small **five-star red flag** in the Magic Box; a **big map of China** that will lie on the floor in the middle of the circle; one little paper flag or red sticker to plant on Beijing; the 中 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is flat and light and something inside it **slides**. Hold it up. Whole class chants:

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

Tip it slowly from side to side — a soft slither, no rattle. Peek in for a long time and pull out something **folded**. Unfold it once. Twice. Then let it fall open all at once and hold it up above your head.

Teacher: "Look at this. It's **red**... it has little gold stars... and it belongs to the whole country we live in." (*let it hang still for one long beat, then wave it*)

Arms wide, then hug yourself: "**China!**"

4 MIN TEACH · CHINA & RED

Everybody stands. Say it twice — the second time they say it with you:

This is my country, (*both arms out wide*)

big and **wide**. (*sweep the arms right round the circle*)

The flag is **RED**... (*wave the flag over your head*)

and I live **inside!** (*hug yourself tight*)

Now the map goes down on the floor in the middle of the circle and everybody kneels round it. Walk one finger over it. Find our city, and plant the little flag on it. "**We are here. This dot is us.**" Then sweep your whole hand over the map: "**and ALL of this is China.**" Let each child put one finger on the map.

Littles hug themselves and say "**China!**", wave and say "**Red!**" Bigs owe you the sentence: "**I live in China.**" "**The flag is red.**"

Teacher fails: point at the far blue edge of the map, out in the sea, and say "So *this* is our kindergarten, just here." Nod, satisfied. Wait to be corrected.

Chinese moment: lay the 中 card on the map and say 中国 once, all together, then again in a whisper. The card stays on the map all week — the row grows by one character a day.

3 MIN GAME · FLAG WAVE

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" You hold the flag. The rule is one sentence long:

Teacher: "Flag **UP** — shout **CHINA!** Flag **DOWN** — not one sound."

Then play with it: up fast, down fast, up and hold it there while they run out of breath, a tiny lift that is nearly nothing, then a huge one. The silence is the half they love.

Finish by giving the flag to one child to be the flag-holder while the rest of you shout and stop, shout and stop.

This is the whole week's volume control and you will use it every day from now on — the flag comes out again on Friday for the quick-fire round.

1 MIN CLOSE

Standing round the map. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: "China... China... I LIVE IN CHINA!" (*hug yourself · point down at the floor · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *Round Is a Mooncake* (Roseanne Thong) — shapes found in ordinary Chinese things, a rice bowl, a lantern, a moon. Point at the round things in your own room afterwards.

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

"This is China, big and wide, / Beijing city — that's where I live inside!" (*sweep both arms right round; point down at the floor, then hug yourself*)

TUESDAY · DAY 2

Panda and Bamboo

Today's words: **panda** (*China · red come back every day*)

Grab: a **panda toy** and a few real **bamboo leaves** or a short bamboo stalk in the Magic Box; the map with yesterday's flag still on it; the panda cards from print pack page 11; the 熊 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box **rustles**. Chant, shake it gently — a dry papery whisper, nothing hard.

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

Lift the lid a crack and **sniff**: green, grassy, like the garden after rain. Pull out the **bamboo** first and pass it round to be smelled and felt — every child.

Teacher: "Somebody in here **eats** this. All day. Who eats leaves all day?" (*wait, then lift the panda out slowly by its ears*)

Hands to your eyes like two black patches: "**Panda!**"

4 MIN TEACH · PANDA

The panda sits in your lap facing the circle. Twice, and the second time they do it with you:

Panda, panda, **black and white**, (*hands over the eyes, then pat your tummy*)

Sitting up so still. (*sit up very tall, hands in your lap*)

Munch, munch, munch the **bamboo**, (*both hands to your mouth, chewing hard*)

Munch until you're full! (*rub your tummy, slow and happy*)

Two colours only: black **and** white. Everybody find black on their own clothes and hold it up; now find white. The panda has both, always, in the same places — ears, eyes, arms, legs.

Littles do the patches and say "**Panda!**" Bigs take the frame: "**The panda eats bamboo.**" "**The panda is black and white.**"

Teacher fails: offer the panda a banana. Then a biscuit. Then your shoe. Look genuinely puzzled each time it is refused. Wait for the outrage.

Chinese moment: the 熊 card joins 中 on the map — 熊猫. Pandas live in 四川; put a finger on the map roughly there, west of us, and leave it at that.

3 MIN GAME · PANDA MUNCH

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" Everybody sits in the circle. The bamboo goes round, hand to hand, while you clap a steady beat.

Teacher: "Pass... pass... pass... **STOP.**" (*the clapping stops dead*)

Whoever is holding the bamboo is the panda: three enormous munches — the whole circle counts them, **one, two, three** — and then **FREEZE**, panda and everybody, absolutely still, for as long as you can hold them.

Then the clapping starts again. Go round until every child has been the panda at least once; slow the pass down near the ones who have not.

The freeze is the real work — it is the quietest game of the week, and it teaches them that stopping is part of playing.

1 MIN CLOSE

Sitting up tall like pandas, hands over your eyes. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: "China... China... I LIVE IN CHINA!" (*hug yourself · point down at the floor · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?* (Bill Martin Jr & Eric Carle) — the whole class can join in on "What do you see?" by the second page.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Tuesday's verse → chorus, sitting in the circle.

"Panda, panda, black and white, / munching bamboo — day and night!" (*hands over the eyes, then pat your tummy; chew with both hands, then head on hands*)

WEDNESDAY · DAY 3

The Red Dragon

Today's words: **dragon** (*China · red · panda come back*)

Grab: a **long red silk ribbon** in the Magic Box — two or three metres, long enough for the whole class to hold at once; a simple dragon head (a paper plate with eyes, or a small box on a stick); a clear floor to wind round; the **龍** card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is **full** — the lid will not sit down flat. Chant, then shake it: almost no noise at all, which is wrong for something this fat.

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

Peek in. Gasp. Shut the lid. Peek again. Now take hold of one end and pull, hand over hand, and keep pulling — and keep pulling — until the red ribbon is longer than the circle and lying in coils on the floor.

Teacher: “It’s **red**... and it’s **long**... and in China, when this dances, it is a **DRAGON**.” (*lift the middle of it and make one big wave run down its whole length*)

Both arms wiggling: **“Dragon!”**

4 MIN TEACH · DRAGON

Everybody stands, the ribbon on the floor in front of them. Twice, second time all together:

A dragon in China is a **friendly** thing, (*both arms wiggling from the shoulders*)

He wiggles and he waggles, (*wiggle low, then high*)

He does **not** bite — (*shake your head, hands up, no*)

he **DANCES!** (*one enormous wave with both arms*)

This is the part worth saying slowly: the Chinese dragon is **lucky and kind**. He brings the rain. He is not a monster to be frightened of — and he is never danced by one person on their own. It takes a whole class of people under one long body to make a dragon move.

Littles wiggle both arms and say **“Dragon!”** Bigs take the frame: **“The dragon is long.” “The dragon dances.”**

Teacher fails: hold both ends of the ribbon yourself and wiggle it feebly on the spot. “There you are. A dragon.” Look pleased. Wait until somebody tells you it takes everybody.

Chinese moment: the **龍** card joins 中 and 熊 on the map. Say 舞龍 — dragon dance — once, doing the arm wave on the word 舞.

3 MIN GAME · DRAGON TRAIN

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Everybody takes hold of the ribbon with one hand, spaced out along it. You are the head, with the dragon head held up in front.

Teacher: “The dragon never breaks. If it breaks, we **stop**, and we join it up again.”

Wind slowly round the room: round the shelf, under the window, in a big curl and out of it. Then faster. Then high — everybody’s hand up — then low, ducking. Then **FREEZE**, dead still, dragon and all.

Finish by curling the dragon into a spiral on the floor and everybody sitting down exactly where they are.

Put your steadiest child at the tail, not the head — the tail is where a dragon breaks. Littles who will not hold the ribbon can hold your hand and be the head with you.

1 MIN CLOSE

Sitting in the ribbon spiral, everybody holding a piece of red. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: “China... China... I LIVE IN CHINA!” (*hug yourself · point down at the floor · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *The Great Race: The Story of the Chinese Zodiac* (Dawn Casey) — the dragon is in it, and so are twelve animals they will meet again next week.

3 MIN · Today’s song moment — chorus standing → Wednesday’s verse **walking** → chorus standing again.

“The dragon dances, long and loud, / wiggle, wiggle — through the crowd!” (*wiggle both arms high and wide, in and out between each other*)

THURSDAY · DAY 4

The Great Wall

Today's words: **wall** (*China · red · panda · dragon come back*)

Grab: a big **photo of the Great Wall** and one wooden block in the Magic Box; the whole block basket standing by; a long **curved line** taped or chalked on the floor with a hill in the middle of it (the shelf tray's printed base-line works); the 城 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is **heavy** and it **clonks**. Chant, then shake it once, hard: one solid knock.

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

Out comes... one wooden block. Hold it up. Turn it over. Let the disappointment sit there for a second.

Teacher: "One block. That's all. — Unless..." (*lift out the photo and hold it up beside the block*) "...you have about a **million** of them."

Arms stretched as wide as they will go: **"Wall!"**

4 MIN TEACH · WALL

The photo goes round the circle, every child holding it. Then, standing:

Up the hill and down the hill, (*one hand climbs, then drops*)

the wall goes **on and on**. (*roll both hands forward, away from you*)

Longer than the longest thing — (*stretch both arms as wide as they go*)

the **GREAT WALL** of China! (*shout it, arms still wide*)

Say the size in things they know: it is longer than our room, longer than our whole school, longer than our whole street, longer than our city — you could walk all day and all night and not come to the end of it. It climbs over the mountains instead of going round them. And people built it with their **hands**, stone by stone, a very long time ago.

Littles stretch wide and say **"Wall!"** Bigs owe you: **"The wall is very long." "I can build a wall."**

Teacher fails: lay two blocks end to end, dust off your hands and step back. "Finished. The Great Wall of China." Fold your arms. Wait.

Chinese moment: the 城 card joins the row — 长城, the *long* wall. Say 长 stretching your arms wide on the word, then 城.

3 MIN GAME · BUILD THE WALL

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" The curved line is on the floor with its hill in the middle. The block basket sits at one end.

Teacher: "One block each. On the line. And we **count** it as it grows."

One child at a time walks a block down and lays it on the line, and the whole class counts out loud — one, two, three... When the wall reaches the hill it has to **climb**: the blocks go up the slope, which is the moment the photo suddenly makes sense.

If it falls, nobody is in trouble and we rebuild that bit together. Count the whole wall once more at the end, all together, pointing.

Leave the wall standing until Friday if you possibly can. It goes on the shelf as Tray 3 and it is the thing they will show their parents.

1 MIN CLOSE

Standing along your own wall, arms stretched wide. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: "China... China... I LIVE IN CHINA!" (*hug yourself · point down at the floor · both arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *Grandfather Tang's Story* (Ann Tompert) — a tangram story; put the seven shapes out on the shelf afterwards and let them make one animal.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Thursday's verse → chorus, standing at the block wall.

"Up the wall and up the hill, / long, long, longer — longer still!" (*one hand climbing; arms opening wider on every "long"*)

FRIDAY · DAY 5

Jiaozi, Chopsticks and All of China

Today's words: **all five** — China · red · dragon · wall · panda

Grab: child **chopsticks**, two small bowls and a handful of pom-poms; a lump of dough and a small rolling pin (play dough is fine); one **jade** pendant or a smooth cool green stone; **every prop from the week** back in the Magic Box; the 饺 card; the awards from print pack page 17.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the whole week is in the box and it is the fullest it has been. Chant, then take the things out **one at a time** — and the class names each one **before** it touches the floor.

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

Flag... **“Red!”** Panda... **“Panda!”** Bamboo, ribbon, block, photo — round they go. Then, last, with the lid nearly shut, one thing left.

Teacher: “This one you have to feel, not look at. Eyes **closed**. Two hands.” *(the jade goes round the circle with every child's eyes shut — cool, smooth, heavy for its size)*

Then everybody opens their eyes at once and sees what they were holding.

4 MIN TEACH · JIAOZI + THE WHOLE WEEK

Fold a dumpling in the **air**, all together, twice — and then really do it with the dough:

A little round wrapper, *(one flat hand held out)*
a spoon of the **middle**, *(the other hand spoons something in)*
fold it, and pinch it, *(fold the flat hand over, pinch along the edge)*
pinch, pinch, PINCH! *(three fast pinches, the last one shouted)*

Jiaozi are the food a whole family makes **together**, everybody at one table, everybody's dumplings in the same pot — the ugly ones too. Let each child fold one real one out of dough and put it on the tray with the others.

Then the quick-fire round: hold up each prop, the class names it in English — and read the 汉字 row back off the map together: 中 · 熊 · 龙 · 城 · 饺. Littles give one word per prop; Bigs give the whole sentence for each.

Teacher fails: try to pick up a pom-pom with the chopsticks yourself. Drop it. Try again. Drop it. Hold the chopsticks like a spoon and look hopeful.

Chinese moment: the 饺 card finishes the row — 饺子. As the bowls go round, every single hand-over gets 你好 and 谢谢, out loud.

3 MIN GAME · CHOPSTICK RACE + QUICK-FIRE

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Two bowls in front of each pair, pom-poms in one of them.

Teacher: “Move them across — **one** at a time. Not fast. **Neatly.**”

Littles use their fingers or a small spoon and nobody says a word about it. Bigs use the chopsticks. It is not really a race — the child who moves three carefully beats the child who tips the bowl.

Then the flag comes back for quick-fire: flag **UP** and you hold up a prop — everybody shouts its name; flag **DOWN** — silence, and the next prop comes up. Finish on the flag itself: **“CHINA!”**

Awards. Print page 17, one half per child, and give them out here by name, one at a time, with the whole class clapping. Then the “Colour MY lantern” sheets go home in their bags.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everything from the week on the floor, everybody standing round it. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: “China... China... I LIVE IN CHINA!” *(hug yourself · point down at the floor · both arms thrown wide on the shout)*

Got 3 spare minutes? *Dim Sum for Everyone!* (Grace Lin) — a family sharing little dishes, which is exactly what the chopstick tray on the shelf is for.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — the **whole song**, top to bottom — chorus, all five verses, chorus. This run-through IS the week's review.

“Chopsticks, chopsticks — one, two, three, / jiaozi, jiaozi — yum, for me!” *(two fingers pinching, counting; pinch the dumpling, then rub your tummy)*

SONGBOOK

★ “I Live in China”

C (0003) F (2010) G7 (0212) · Strum: Down · Down · Down-Up (“Chi—na—China”)

Three chords, and **no Am anywhere** — every verse is only C and G7. C is one finger, F is two, G7 is three; learn them in that order. Proud and marching, not fast — this is a song you can walk to, and on Wednesday you will. Big open rest before the last “I love it all!” so they can hear it coming.

CHORUS — EVERY SINGLE DAY

C China, China — F this is my C home! (*arms wide, then hug yourself*)

F Red, red C flag — watch it G7 fly! C (*wave the flag*)

C A dragon and a F panda and a great long C wall, (*wiggle arms · panda ears · stretch wide*)

F China, C China — I G7 love it C all! (*hug yourself, then both arms up*)

MONDAY · CHINA

C This is China, big and wide,

G7 Beijing city — C that's where I live inside!

TUESDAY · PANDA

C Panda, panda, black and white,

G7 Munching bamboo — C day and night!

WEDNESDAY · DRAGON

C The dragon dances, long and loud,

G7 Wiggle, wiggle — C through the crowd!

THURSDAY · WALL

C Up the wall and up the hill,

G7 Long, long, longer — C longer still!

FRIDAY · JIAOZI

C Chopsticks, chopsticks — one, two, three,

G7 Jiaozi, jiaozi — C yum, for me!

Each day: chorus → today's verse → chorus, always standing round the map. Friday: sing the whole thing top to bottom with the block wall still up beside you — that run-through is the review of the week. If your fingers get stuck, put the uke down, give one child the red flag to wave on the beat and do the actions instead; the arms carry the meaning either way.