



W H A L E C L A S S

Circle Time Guide

Everything you need, one page per day.

Week 20 · Chinese New Year

1-5 February 2027 · 13 minutes a day · ages 2.5-6, English learners

The last week before the holiday · 除夕 Friday 5 Feb · 春节 Saturday 6 Feb, the Year of the Goat 羊年 · 立春
Thursday 4 Feb · holiday 8-26 February · back Monday 1 March

WEEK OVERVIEW



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

The New Year is **coming**, and we get ready together. This is not a week about a festival that has passed — it is the countdown to it. Every day we make one more thing ready: the red packets, the lanterns, the dumplings, the lion — and then on Friday we say it to each other.

FIVE WORDS THEY'LL OWN BY FRIDAY

red packet lantern dumpling lion visit

Littles (2.5–3) — one word + a gesture is a win: “Red!” (hold up a red packet), “Boom!” (one big clap — firecracker), “Lantern!” (both hands make a round shape).

Bigs (4–6) — sentence frames: “Happy New Year!” • “I have a red packet.” • “We eat dumplings together.” • “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 red packet with a sweet inside — and one for every child at the door • **Tue** a red paper lantern, folded flat • **Wed** dumpling dough and a little bowl of filling • **Thu** a cardboard lion head and a small drum • **Fri** every prop from the week, plus a tray of sweets to share.

THE WEEK'S CLOSE

Everyone: “Red packet... lantern... DUMPLING! GONG XI FA CAI!” (*hands out • round lantern hands • fold a dumpling • fist in palm and bow on the shout*)

THEME SHELF • FOUR TRAYS

- 1 •** Fold a red packet — red paper printed with fold lines, a folder, a paper “coin” card. *Control:* the printed fold lines. (Practical life, from Monday.)
- 2 •** Cut-and-paste lantern — folded red paper with cutting lines to a stop line, scissors, glue. *Control:* a finished lantern beside the template. (From Tuesday — this tray fills the room over the week.)
- 3 •** Make dumplings — dough, rolling pin, spoon, filling, and a five-hole steamer tray. *Control:* five holes, five dumplings. (From Wednesday.)
- 4 •** Spring Festival 3-part cards — 红包 • 灯笼 • 饺子 • 狮子 • 拜年, plus the 12 sorting cards and the action cards. *Control:* the whole control cards; gold and red dots on the sorting-card backs.

CHINESE ANGLE

One 汉字 card a day on the red strip: 红 • 灯 • 饺 • 狮 • 拜. 恭喜发财 with the fist-in-palm from Monday; 新年快乐 and 万事如意 on Friday. Thursday is 立春 — pass round a shoot with a bud on it: it is still cold, but spring has officially started. Friday names the 羊年, the Year of the Goat, which begins on Saturday.

FRIDAY'S DARK PHONICS SOUND

v — voiced, top teeth on the bottom lip, and it buzzes: van, vet, very, five. “Vroom-vroom van!” The week carries it: we **v**isit our family and wish them a **v**ery happy new year. Finger on the throat — **v** buzzes, **f** does not. That is the whole difference.

MONDAY · DAY 1

The Red Packet

Today's words: **red packet**

Grab: one **red packet** with a sweet inside for the Magic Box, and **one for every child**, kept out of sight until the end; music you can start and stop; a long strip of red paper to pin up as the week's display; the 红 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is light, and something inside it slides when you tip it. Whole class chants:

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

Shake it — a small dry rattle. Sniff it — nothing. Peek in and let your eyes go enormous. Then lift out one red packet, very slowly, held in **both hands**, the way it is properly given.

Teacher: "It's **RED**... and there is something **inside** it." (*hold it up, shake it once beside your ear*)

Everybody holds up an imaginary one: "**Red!**"

4 MIN TEACH · RED PACKET

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

A little **red packet**, (*hold it up in both hands*)

Held in **two** hands, (*offer it out flat, both palms up*)

"**Thank you, thank you!**" (*fist in palm, one small bow*)

The New Year is **grand!** (*both arms thrown wide*)

Then the whole thing, done properly, once, with one child: you offer it with two hands and a small bow; they take it with **two hands**, bow back, and say "**Thank you!**" Nobody snatches, nobody opens it. Two hands is the lesson.

Littles hold theirs up and say "**Red!**" Bigs owe you the frame: "**I have a red packet.**" "**Thank you!**"

Teacher fails: take the red packet back with **one** hand, snatched, and stuff it straight in your pocket. Look pleased with yourself. Wait for the outrage.

Chinese moment: pin the 红 card at the top of the red strip — 红包. Say 恭喜发财 once, all together, with the fist-in-palm. The row of 汉字 grows by one card every morning this week.

What is inside is not the point. One sweet in each is plenty, and it keeps every packet the same. If a family sends money in, it goes home in the bag unopened.

3 MIN GAME · PASS THE RED PACKET

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" Everybody in a circle, knees touching. One red packet goes round hand to hand while the music plays — **two hands** to give, **two hands** to take.

Teacher: "Music on — pass it. Music **STOPS** — whoever is holding it stands up!" (*they bow, fist in palm, and say it*)

The child standing says "**Happy New Year!**" and the whole class bows back. Littles just say "**Red!**" and hold it up — that is a full win. Then the music starts again.

Stop the music so that **everybody** gets one turn. Watch who has not stood up yet and stop it on them; this game is only fun if it is fair, and they are counting.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody's hands held out flat, ready to receive. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: "Red packet... lantern... DUMPLING! GONG XI FA CAI!" (*hands out · round lantern hands · fold a dumpling · fist in palm and bow on the shout*)

At the door: every child gets their own red packet to take home, handed over with two hands, one at a time, and a bow. It takes four minutes and they will remember it all year.

Got 3 spare minutes? *Bringing In the New Year* (Grace Lin) — one family getting ready, day by day, ending in a dragon that unfolds across the last spread. It is this exact week in a book.

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

"A little red packet in my hand, / "Thank you, thank you!" — the New Year's grand!" (*hold both hands out flat; fist in palm and bow, then arms wide*)

TUESDAY · DAY 2

Lanterns Everywhere

Today's words: **lantern** (*red packet comes back every day*)

Grab: one **red paper lantern** in the Magic Box, folded flat; a torch; string already hung across the room at your own head height, empty; the red paper, safe scissors and glue on the shelf tray; the 灯 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is completely flat and completely silent. Chant, then shake it — nothing at all. Press the lid: it does not spring back.

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

Lift out a flat folded lantern and hold it up. Look disappointed. Turn it over. Then **open it**, slowly, with both hands, until it is round.

Teacher: (*the lantern opens out round*) “Ohhhh — it was hiding!”

Both hands make the round shape: **“Lantern!”**

4 MIN TEACH · LANTERN

The lantern hangs from one finger while you say it — twice, and the second time they say it with you:

Lantern, lantern, **round** and red, (*both hands make a big round shape*)

Hanging, hanging **over** my head. (*hold the round hands up high and let them sway*)

The light goes **on...** (*open both hands, twinkling*)

and the dark goes **away!** (*throw both arms wide*)

Now the room. Lights off, torch inside the lantern, and hold it up: the whole ceiling goes red. Every child gets to hold it for a count of three. Then it goes up on the string, first of many — the rest are made on the tray this week and go up as they are finished.

Littles make the round hands and say **“Lantern!”** Bigs owe you a sentence: **“I can see a red lantern.” “The lantern is over my head.”**

Teacher fails: try very hard to hang the lantern on the **floor**. Crouch down. Pat it. Stand back and admire it. Wait to be corrected.

Chinese moment: the 灯 card joins 红 on the red strip — 灯笼. Ask them where they have seen red lanterns going up this week: the shops, the gate, the street. They will all have seen them; this is the week the whole city turns red.

3 MIN GAME · LANTERN PARADE

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Everybody takes a lantern — a paper one, a hand-made one, or two round hands if there are not enough — and we walk the room in one long line while the music plays.

Teacher: “Walking feet, lanterns **up...** and when the music stops — **FREEZE!**” (*everything stops, lanterns still held high*)

Walk, freeze, walk, freeze. On the last freeze, everybody holds the pose while you count to five out loud and they count with you.

Slow the music each round until the parade is moving at half speed. Walking slowly while holding something up is real work for a three-year-old, and it looks beautiful.

1 MIN CLOSE

Lanterns up, or round hands up. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: “Red packet... lantern... DUMPLING! GONG XI FA CAI!” (*hands out · round lantern hands · fold a dumpling · fist in palm and bow on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? Lights off, every lantern lit from one torch passed round the circle, and sing the chorus once, quietly. Nobody talks in the dark; they just watch.

3 MIN · Today’s song moment — chorus → Tuesday’s verse → chorus, with the lights off and the torch in the lantern. “Lantern, lantern, round and bright, / Shining, shining in the night!” (*round hands, held up high; twinkling fingers, turning slowly*)

WEDNESDAY · DAY 3

Folding Dumplings

Today's words: **dumpling** (*red packet · lantern come back*)

Grab: a lump of **dough** and a small bowl of filling in the Magic Box; a rolling pin, a spoon and a floured board; a steamer basket or a tray with five hollows; wooden spoons and five paper dumplings for the relay; the 饺 card.

2 MIN

MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is **heavy**, and when you tip it something soft thumps from one side to the other.

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

Shake it: *thump*. Sniff it: something is in there. Lift out the dough in both hands and hold it up like treasure, then **squeeze** it and let everybody hear it.

Teacher: “It’s soft... it’s cold... and on **Friday night** every family in this city will be making these.” (*lift out the little bowl of filling and hold it under one child’s nose*)

Everybody folds an imaginary one: **“Dumpling!”**

4 MIN

TEACH · DUMPLING

You make **one** dumpling, in front of them, slowly, saying each step. They do it in the air with you, twice:

Roll it flat, (*two flat hands, rolling*)

Spoon it in, (*one hand a bowl, the other a spoon*)

Fold it over... (*bring both palms together*)

and **pinch**, pinch, PINCH! (*pinch along the edge with both thumbs and fingers*)

Then say the true thing, plainly, because it is the heart of the week: on 除夕 — this Friday night — families sit down **together** and fold dumplings **together**, and that is the point of them. Not the eating. The sitting down together.

Littles pinch the air and say **“Dumpling!”** Bigs owe you the frame: **“We eat dumplings together.” “I can fold a dumpling.”**

Teacher fails: fold your dumpling with the filling on the **outside**, hold it up proudly and take a big bite of air. Wait for the shrieking.

Chinese moment: the 饺 card joins 红 · 灯 — 饺子. Say it with the mouth-shape exaggerated, and count five together into the steamer: 一 · 二 · 三 · 四 · 五.

Dough, not food. The circle dough is for folding, not eating — say so once, at the start. Real cooking, if you do it, happens later in the morning with clean hands and an adult at the steamer.

3 MIN

GAME · DUMPLING RELAY

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” Two short lines, a wooden spoon each, a paper dumpling balanced on the spoon, and the “steamer” (the tray with five hollows) at the far end.

Teacher: “Carry it... **slowly**... into the steamer — and run back with the spoon!” (*dropped it? pick it up, put it back on, carry on — nobody starts again*)

Five dumplings in each steamer and the whole class counts them in out loud as they land. Littles carry theirs with a hand steadying it; that is fine and nobody says otherwise.

There is no winning line. When both steamers are full you count them together — five and five — and that is the end of the game. Racing turns it into tears before Friday.

1 MIN

CLOSE

Everybody's palms together, ready to pinch. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: “Red packet... lantern... DUMPLING! GONG XI FA CAI!” (*hands out · round lantern hands · fold a dumpling · fist in palm and bow on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *The Runaway Wok* (Ying Chang Compestine) — a New Year story where the food ends up shared with everybody in the town. Read the wok's song out loud and let them join in on the second time round.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Wednesday's verse → chorus — the three claps become three pinches.

“Fold it, fold it — a dumpling for me, / Jiaozi, jiaozi — one, two, three!” (*palms together, then pinch; one finger, two, three*)

THURSDAY · DAY 4

The Lion Dance

Today's words: **lion** (red packet · lantern · dumpling come back)

Grab: a **cardboard lion head** and a small **drum** in the Magic Box; a big cloth or sheet for the lion's body; one green shoot, bulb or twig with a bud on it for **立春**; the **狮** card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box will not shut properly — something big is inside it — and when you move it, it **booms**.

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

Take out the drum first and hit it once, hard. Everybody jumps. Hit it again, softly. Then reach back in with both arms and lift the **lion head** out over your own head, and make it blink at them.

Teacher: (*the lion's mouth opens and shuts, once, right at the circle*) "He is not a real lion. He is a **dancing** lion."

Everybody claws the air: "**Lion!**"

4 MIN TEACH · LION — AND 立春

The drum sets the speed for everything. Say it twice, the second time with all of them moving:

The **big** lion dances, (*big stamping steps on the spot*)

He jumps, jump, **JUMP!** (*three jumps, arms up*)

The drum goes **boom...** (*one slow, heavy beat*)

and the lion goes **STOP.** (*everything freezes, completely still*)

Then two children under the cloth — one is the head, one is the back — and the drum tells them what to do: fast, slow, **STOP**. Everybody else claps the beat. Swap so that as many pairs as possible get a turn; nobody is made to go under the cloth.

Littles claw the air and say "**Lion!**" Bigs owe you a sentence: "**The lion is dancing.**" "**The drum goes boom!**"

Teacher fails: put the lion head on **backwards** and walk off in completely the wrong direction, banging into the shelf. Keep going until they turn you round.

Chinese moment: the 狮 card joins the row — 舞狮. And today is 立春, the first day of spring in the old calendar: pass round the shoot with the bud on it and say the plain true thing — it is still cold, but spring has officially started, and the lion is out to say so. 立春了!

The drum is loud. Tell them the rule before you start: when the drum stops, everybody stops. A child who finds it too loud sits with you and holds the beater — they are the one who gets to end it.

3 MIN GAME · LION DANCE

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" Everybody is a lion now, not just the pair under the cloth: hands up like paws, knees bent, and the drum runs the whole room.

Teacher: (*fast drumming*) "**Fast** lions!" (*slow, heavy beats*) "**Slow** lions..." (*silence*) "**STOP.**"

Fast, slow, stop — and then hand the beater to a Big and let **them** run the room while you dance in it. That swap is the best thirty seconds of the week.

Three speeds only, over and over. The listening is the lesson: they are matching their whole body to a sound, which is exactly what they must do to hear the difference between two English words.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody on their knees, paws up, ready. Whisper → normal → shout:

Everyone: "Red packet... lantern... DUMPLING! GONG XI FA CAI!" (*hands out · round lantern hands · fold a dumpling · fist in palm and bow on the shout*)

Before home time: tomorrow every child bows to every other child. Walk the circle once today and practise it in silence — fist in palm, small bow, eyes up — so that Friday is smooth and nobody is embarrassed.

Got 3 spare minutes? *Lion Dance* or any picture book with a real photograph of a lion troupe. Find the drummer on the page and let them point at him.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Thursday's verse → chorus — the drum plays the three booms.

"The big lion dances — jump, jump, jump! / The drum goes boom — thump, thump, thump!" (*three jumps on the spot; three big slow beats*)

FRIDAY • DAY 5

Happy New Year! + Big Review

Today's words: **visit** — and **red packet** • **lantern** • **dumpling** • **lion**, the whole week

Grab: every prop from the week packed into the box, plus a tray of **sweets** (糖果) to share; the finished lanterns on the string; the awards (print pack page 17); the 拜 card. Tonight is 除夕 and the holiday starts on Monday — back on **Monday 1 March**.

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 red packet → "**Red packet!**" The lantern → "**Lantern!**" The dough → "**Dumpling!**" The lion head → "**Lion!**"

Last of all, the tray of sweets. Hold it out to the child beside you with two hands and a bow. "**VISIT!**"

4 MIN TEACH • VISIT, THEN THE WHOLE WEEK

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

A **red packet** in my hand, *(both hands out flat)*

A **lantern** up above, *(round hands, held high)*

A **dumpling** that we fold, *(palms together, pinch)*

A **lion** and a drum — *(paws up, then three beats)*

We **VISIT** — Happy New Year! *(fist in palm, one big bow to a friend)*

Then the word itself, done not explained: to **visit** is to go to somebody's house, knock, bow, and say the words. You knock on the floor, they say "come in", you bow. Do it once with one child in front of everybody, then everybody has a go on Friday's game.

Littles do the five gestures and shout the five words. Bigs owe you a whole sentence each: "**Happy New Year!**" "**I have a red packet.**" "**We eat dumplings together.**"

Teacher fails: "visit" a child by walking straight past them, out of the door, and shutting it. Come back in looking confused. Let them tell you what you forgot.

Chinese moment: the 拜 card completes the row — 红 · 灯 · 饺 · 狮 · 拜, the whole week on the red strip, and 拜年 is the one that matters: to go and greet people at New Year. Then the three lines everybody says tonight: 新年快乐 · 恭喜发财 · 万事如意. And tomorrow the 羊年 begins — the Year of the Goat. Everybody makes goat horns with two fingers and says 咩.

3 MIN GAME • NEW YEAR VISITING 拜年

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" Everybody stands in the circle facing a partner. This is the whole week, performed.

Teacher: "Fist in palm... small bow... look at them... and **say it.**" *(then everybody takes one step to the left and does it again with the next friend)*

Round and round until every child has greeted every child. Bigs use the name: "**Happy New Year, Amy!**" Littles bow and say "**Happy New Year!**" — and a bow with no words at all is still a greeting.

When the circle closes, the sweets go round: two hands to give, two hands to take, "**Thank you!**" every single time.

Say the names out loud with them as they go round. Twenty children hearing their own name twenty times, in English, on the last day before a three-week break, is worth more than any worksheet.

1 MIN CLOSE + AWARDS

Every child gets a "You are a STAR!" award to take home with the holiday news. Then, standing under the lanterns, all five gestures:

Everyone: "Red packet... lantern... DUMPLING! GONG XI FA CAI!" *(hands out · round lantern hands · fold a dumpling · fist in palm and a big bow, with the drum, on the shout)*

Say the dates at the door, twice. Tonight is 除夕; tomorrow is 春节 and the **Year of the Goat** begins; the holiday runs **8–26 February**; we are back on **Monday 1 March**. Send the lanterns home with them — they were made to be hung up.

Got 3 spare minutes? Sing the whole song one more time with every lantern lit and the drum going, and let them leave the room loud. It is the last minute of the term; do not spend it tidying.

3 MIN • Today's song moment — Friday's verse, then the **WHOLE** song, top to bottom, under the lanterns.

"We visit Grandma, we visit you, / Happy New Year — I love you too!" *(bow one way, then the other; hands to heart, then arms wide)*

SONGBOOK

★ “Gong Xi, Happy New Year!”

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

Three chords, and **no Am anywhere** — every verse is just C and G7. C is one finger, F is two, G7 is three; learn them in that order. Bright and marching, like a lion troupe coming down the street, with a big rest before “Boom! Boom! Boom!” so the three claps land clean. Chant it without the uke first; add the chords once they know the claps and the bow.

CHORUS — EVERY SINGLE DAY

C Gong xi, gong xi — F Happy New C Year! (*fist in palm, one bow*)
F Red and C gold and G7 lanterns C here! (*both hands make a round lantern*)
C Boom! Boom! Boom! The F firecrackers C go, (*three big claps*)
F Happy C New Year — G7 hello, hel C lo! (*wave, then bow to a friend*)

MONDAY · RED PACKET

C A little red packet in my hand,
G7 “Thank you, thank you!” — C the New Year’s grand!

TUESDAY · LANTERN

C Lantern, lantern, round and bright,
G7 Shining, shining C in the night!

WEDNESDAY · DUMPLING

C Fold it, fold it — a dumpling for me,
G7 Jiaozi, jiaozi C — one, two, three!

THURSDAY · LION

C The big lion dances — jump, jump, jump!
G7 The drum goes boom C — thump, thump, thump!

FRIDAY · VISIT

C We visit Grandma, we visit you,
G7 Happy New Year — C I love you too!

Each day: chorus → today’s verse → chorus. Friday: sing the whole thing top to bottom, standing under the lanterns with the drum on the three booms — that run-through is the review of the week. If your fingers get stuck, put the uke down, give one child the drum and do the finger-play instead; the claps and the bow carry the meaning either way.