



W H A L E C L A S S

Circle Time Guide

Landforms

Week of Apr 19–23 · 13 minutes a day · ages 2.5–6

mountain · river · island · lake · land

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.  Water on the mat from Tuesday on — put the towel down before the children sit down. 谷雨 falls on Tuesday 20 April and Earth Day on Thursday 22 April: one nod each, then straight back to the landforms.

Five words they'll own by Friday

mountain

river

island

lake

land

Littles (2.5–3)

One word + a gesture is a win: **“Mountain!”** (both hands make a peak over your head), **“River!”** (one arm winds along in front of you), **“Island!”** (one fist is the land, the other hand circles round it).

Bigs (4–6)

Sentence frames: **“This is a mountain.”** · **“The river is long.”** · **“An island has water all around.”** · **“The lake is still.”**

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

The week at a glance

- Mon Up the Mountain** — Magic Box: a real rock, heavy enough to make the box sag; then a mountain of wet sand with the rock on its peak. Game: be a mountain (big, little, then the whole class as one range). Shelf: Tray 3 · Mountain building.
- Tue Down the River** — Magic Box: a jug and a tray propped up at one end; pour at the top and a river runs down it. Lay it flat and it stops — a river needs a hill. Game: pass the river (a cup relay down the line). 谷雨 falls today.
- Wed Round the Island** — Magic Box: a clay island in a basin of water and a paper boat; the box is carried flat and never shaken. Game: sail round the island. Shelf: Tray 2 · Landform 3-part cards.
- Thu Still as a Lake** — Magic Box: a clay mound with a hollow scooped in it, and a jug — a hole in the land until the water goes in. Game: don't wake the lake (a full cup carried in silence). Earth Day, in one sentence.
- Fri Land & Water + Big Review** — the whole week back in the box plus a handful of plain earth; the island & lake land-form model, poured. Game: landform quick-fire, then outside to the sandpit and the water table. 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 · Up the Mountain

Today's words: **mountain**

Grab: a **real rock** in the Magic Box — a heavy one, so the box is heavy; a tray of **wet sand** on the mat with a small jug of water and a spray bottle; the picture cards from print pack page 11; the **山** card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box is **heavy**. Lift it with two hands, let it sag, and pretend it is nearly going to drop.

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

Shake it — one deep **thud**, not a rattle. Sniff it: nothing at all. Peek in for a long moment and let your eyebrows go right up.

TEACHER "Something in here is **HARD**... and it is very, very **OLD**." (*lift the rock out in both hands, slowly, as if it weighed as much as you do*)

The rock goes right round the circle and every child holds it in two hands. Peak hands over heads: **"Mountain!"**

4 MIN TEACH · MOUNTAIN

Everybody stands up. We **are** the mountain, twice — tiny first, then enormous:

My mountain is **small**. (*crouch right down, hands in a tiny peak*)

My mountain is **TALL**. (*grow up onto tiptoe, hands in a big peak*)

Up... up... up we climb... (*climbing hands, higher and higher*)

and I am **very small**! (*arms wide at the top, then shrink right down*)

Then the wet sand. Pile it up with both hands, pat it firm, spray it once so it holds, and let one child set the **rock** on the very top — that is the peak. It stays on the shelf all week and it will still be there on Friday.

Littles do the peak hands and say **"Mountain!"** Bigs take the frame: **"This is a mountain."** **"The mountain is tall."**

Teacher fails: build your mountain **upside down** — dig a deep hole in the sand, step back and admire it. "There. A beautiful mountain." Hold it. Wait.

Chinese moment: lay the **山** card at the foot of the sand tray. **山** is a mountain — three peaks, one tall one in the middle. Draw it in the wet sand with one finger. Leave the card there; the row grows by one card a day.

3 MIN GAME · BE A MOUNTAIN

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" Everybody in a space of their own, standing.

TEACHER **"BIG** mountain!" (*everybody grows onto tiptoe, hands in a huge peak*) ... **"little** mountain!" (*everybody shrinks to a tiny crouching peak*)

Faster and faster, and get it wrong yourself once or twice. Then the good part: **two children make one mountain together**, back to back with their hands meeting in a point above them. Then three. Then the whole class, in one enormous mountain range across the room, tall ones and small ones side by side.

End it standing still: "A mountain does not move." Ten seconds of a completely frozen room is worth having, and they will hold it because they are being a mountain, not being told to sit.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody standing, peak hands ready. Whisper → normal → shout:

EVERYONE "Up the mountain... down the RIVER!" (*climbing hands going up on the first half · swimming arms going low on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? Mountain Dance (Thomas Locker) — big quiet paintings of mountains and about four words a page. Read it slowly and let them just look.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Monday's verse → chorus, standing round the sand mountain. "A mountain is high, a mountain is tall, / Up at the top I am very small!"

TUESDAY

Day 2 · Down the River

Today's words: **river** (*mountain comes back every day*)

Grab: a **jug of water** and a **tilted tray** in the Magic Box (a metal baking tray propped up at one end on a book); a long blue ribbon; six little cups and two bowls for the relay; a **towel down first**; the 河 card. 谷雨 is today.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box **sloshes**. Carry it carefully. Chant, then tip it a few centimetres from side to side and let them hear it.

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

Hold a finger to your lips and listen to it with your ear right against the lid.

TEACHER "Careful... something in here is going to **RUN AWAY**." (*lift out the jug, then the tray, and set the tray down propped up at one end*)

One arm winds along in front of them: **"River!"**

4 MIN TEACH · RIVER

The tray is propped so one end is high — that end is yesterday's mountain. Pour, very slowly, right at the top, and say nothing at all while the water finds its way down.

Everybody follows it with one finger in the air and we all say it together, long and low: **"Riverrrr."** Then the words, twice:

A river **runs**, (*one arm winds along*)
it never stops, (*keep it winding, don't let the arm rest*)
Down the **hill**... (*the arm slopes downhill*)
it **drips and drops!** (*fingers raining down onto the floor*)

Now take the book away and pour onto the **flat** tray. Nothing runs; it just sits there in a puddle. Ask them why, and wait for it: **a river needs a hill**. Prop it up again and let a child do the pouring.

Littles do the winding arm and say **"River!"** Bigs owe you the sentence: **"The river is long." "The water runs down."**

Teacher fails: *try to pour the water up the tray, from the low end, and get crosser and crosser with it. "It will not go up. What is wrong with this river?" Wait.*

Chinese moment: the 河 card joins 山. Today is 谷雨 — Grain Rain, the last solar term of spring: 雨生百谷, the rain that makes a hundred grains grow. Say it once, then one line of 杜甫《春夜喜雨》: 好雨知时节, 当春乃发生。 One line only, then stop.

3 MIN GAME · PASS THE RIVER

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" One long line, sitting, with a **full bowl** at one end and an **empty bowl** at the other. Put a strip of tape on the empty bowl to mark how high we want to get.

TEACHER "Fill your little cup... pass it on... the river goes **this way!**" (*the cup travels hand to hand down the line and is tipped into the far bowl*)

Everybody gets a cup, so the water is always moving. Spilling is completely fine and it is meant to be funny — that is why the towel is down. At the end, hold the far bowl up and see how close to the tape the river got. Littles say **"River!"** as they pass; Bigs say **"The water runs down the line."**

Run it twice: once fast and sloppy, once slow and careful. They will notice all by themselves which one filled the bowl higher, and that is the whole lesson in carrying water.

1 MIN CLOSE

Everybody standing, one arm winding. Whisper → normal → shout:

EVERYONE "Up the mountain... down the RIVER!" (*climbing hands going up on the first half · swimming arms going low on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? A River (Marc Martin) — one river seen from a window and followed all the way to the sea. Trace it with a finger on every page.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Tuesday's verse → chorus, sung travelling from tall to crouched. "A river runs and never stops, / Down the hill it drips and drops!"

Day 3 · Round the Island

Today's words: **island** (*mountain · river come back*)

Grab: a **clay island** sitting in a basin of water, and a **paper boat**, in the Magic Box — the box is carried **flat**; a hoop or a length of rope for the game; paper for more boats; the towel; the 島 card.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today the box cannot be shaken at all, and that is the hook. Carry it in flat on two hands like a birthday cake.

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

Start to shake it — tip it about a millimetre — then gasp and hold it dead still.

TEACHER “I **can't** shake it today. If I shake this box... the whole **sea** comes out.” (*lift the lid and turn it round the circle so everybody sees the water before anything is lifted out*)

Set the basin down in the middle. One fist is the land, the other hand circles it: **“Island!”**

4 MIN TEACH · ISLAND

The basin stays in the middle of the circle where everyone can see the water. Say it twice; the second time they do the hands with you:

An **island** sits in the sea, (*one fist held out in front of you*)
 with water all **around**, (*the other hand circles round and round the fist*)
 Hop in my boat and off we go — (*rowing arms*)
right the way round! (*one big circle in the air*)

Then the boat. Float it and push it gently all the way round the clay island without ever touching the land. Every child gets one push, and the class counts the laps.

Say the definition once, slowly, with the fist and the circling hand: **an island is land with water all round it.**

Littles do the two hands and say **“Island!”** Bigs owe you the sentence: **“An island has water all around.” “My boat goes round the island.”**

Teacher fails: *lift the clay island out of the water and set it on the dry table. “There. My island.” Admire it. Wait for somebody to point at the empty basin.*

Chinese moment: the 島 card joins 山 · 河. Show them what is hiding in it: a 鸟 (bird) sitting on top of a 山 (mountain) that pokes up out of the sea. Once they have seen the bird on the mountain they never forget the character.

3 MIN GAME · SAIL ROUND THE ISLAND

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” A hoop or a rope circle on the floor is the island. Everybody else is a boat.

TEACHER “Boats... **sail!**” (*everybody walks round the island, rowing*) ... “Boats... **STOP!**” (*freeze — and nobody may be touching the island*)

Then turn round and sail the other way. Then a storm: big waves, wobbly walking, and STOP. The one rule all the way through is that the island is land and boats do not go on the land.

Last round, put two children **on** the island and let them wave at the boats going past. Littles just walk and row; Bigs call out **“I can sail round the island!”** as they go.

If the room is small, make the island out of one child standing still with their arms folded. A landform you can look in the eye is better than a hoop.

1 MIN CLOSE

Standing round the basin, boats parked. Whisper → normal → shout:

EVERYONE “Up the mountain... down the RIVER!” (*climbing hands going up on the first half · swimming arms going low on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *The Little Island (Golden MacDonald & Leonard Weisgard) — one small island through a whole year. It is old and quiet and they go completely still for it.*

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Wednesday's verse → chorus, in a ring round the basin with the boat afloat. “An island is land with water all round, / Hop in my boat — look what I found!”

THURSDAY

Day 4 • Still as a Lake

Today's words: **lake** (*mountain · river · island come back*)

Grab: a **lake** in the Magic Box — a mound of clay or plasticine with a hollow scooped out of the top, plus a jug of blue water to fill it; a small **mirror**; one cup of water per child for the game; yesterday's island basin; the towel; the 湖 card. **Earth Day** is today.

2 MIN MAGIC BOX HOOK

Today there are two things in the box and one of them looks like nothing at all.

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

Lift out the clay mound with the hollow in the top and hold it up. Turn it round. Look disappointed.

TEACHER "It's a **hole**. That's all it is. A hole in the land." (*now lift out the jug and fill the hollow right to the brim, slowly*) "...and **now** it's a **LAKE**."

Cupped hands held out in front, water sitting in them: "**Lake!**"

4 MIN TEACH • LAKE

Put yesterday's island basin down beside today's lake and do the two of them one after the other, with the hands, twice:

An **island** — land with water all round. (*fist, and the other hand circling it*)

A **lake** — water with **land** all round. (*cupped hands, one finger circling inside them*)

Still and quiet... (*finger on your lips*)

not a sound. (*whisper it, hands completely still*)

Then the mirror, laid flat on the mat: **a still lake is a mirror**. Hold the 山 card upside down above it and let them see the mountain standing in the water. Breathe on the water in the clay lake and the picture wobbles away.

Littles do the cupped hands and say "**Lake!**" Bigs owe you the sentence: "**The lake is still.**" "**A lake has land all around.**"

Teacher fails: swap them over. Hold up the island in its basin and announce, very confidently, "and **this** one is a lake." Nod. Wait for the roar.

Chinese moment: the 湖 card joins 山 · 河 · 岛. Point at the three little strokes on the left of both 河 and 湖 — that is 水, water, and it is hiding in every water word. Then **Earth Day** 地球日, in one sentence: every mountain, river, island and lake we have made this week is on **one round Earth**, and it belongs to all of us to look after. Then straight back to the lake.

3 MIN GAME • DON'T WAKE THE LAKE

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" Every child gets a cup filled right up to the top. The class sits in a ring and the room goes silent.

TEACHER "Your cup is a **lake**. A lake is **still**. Walk it all the way round... and don't wake it." (*one child at a time walks the circle while everybody watches the water, not the child*)

They will walk more slowly and more carefully than you have ever seen them walk. Anybody who spills just fills it up again and goes once more. Littles carry a half-full cup a quarter of the way; Bigs go the whole way round and tell you "**My lake is still.**"

This is a practical-life exercise dressed up as a game — carrying water is a real Montessori skill and this is the day it gets a name. Tray 3 keeps it available all week.

1 MIN CLOSE

Standing round the clay lake, cupped hands ready. Whisper → normal → shout:

EVERYONE "Up the mountain... down the RIVER!" (*climbing hands going up on the first half · swimming arms going low on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? *Over and Under the Pond* (Kate Messner & Christopher Silas Neal) — everything living above and below still water. Perfect on lake day.

3 MIN · Today's song moment — chorus → Thursday's verse → chorus, the verse sung as quietly as you possibly can. "A lake is water with land all round, / Still and quiet — not a sound!"

FRIDAY

Day 5 • Land & Water + Big Review

Today's words: **land** — and **mountain • river • island • lake**, the whole week

Grab: the **island & lake land-form model** (or this week's two clay ones side by side) and a jug of blue water; every prop from the week packed into the box, plus a handful of plain **earth**; the sorting cards and the two signs (print pack pages 12–14); the awards (page 17); the **地** card; shoes on — we go outside.

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 rock → **“Mountain!”** The jug and the tilted tray → **“River!”** The clay island in its water → **“Island!”** The clay lake → **“Lake!”**

Last of all, one thing left in the bottom: a handful of plain **earth**. Let it run through your fingers. **“LAND!”**

4 MIN TEACH • LAND, THEN THE WHOLE WEEK

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

Mountain, (*peak hands over your head*) **river**, (*one arm winds along*)

island, (*fist, other hand circling*) **lake**, (*cupped hands, still*)

Land and **water** — (*one hand flat and steady, one hand wavy*)

that's what we **make!** (*arms thrown wide*)

Then the land-form model, and this is the moment of the week: pour the blue water into both trays and say the pair out loud, twice, pointing. **Island: land with water all round it. Lake: water with land all round it.** Same two things, swapped over.

Then the big sort, right there on the mat: every card from page 14 goes under **Land 陆地** or **Water 水**. The class decides together and nobody is told the answer.

Littles do the five gestures and shout the five words. Bigs owe you a whole sentence each: **“An island has water all around.” “A lake has land all around.” “The mountain is tall.”**

Teacher fails: *pour the blue water carefully onto the floor beside the model, put the jug down and dust off your hands. “Done.” Wait.*

Chinese moment: the **地** card joins the row — 山 · 河 · 岛 · 湖 · 地, the whole week laid out on the mat. **大地** is the great wide land, and **地球** is the Earth: the same **地**. Read the five characters right along the row, all together, once, loudly.

3 MIN GAME • LANDFORM QUICK-FIRE, THEN OUTSIDE

“One, two, three — eyes on me!” First the quick-fire, indoors: hold up a card, they shout the word and do the gesture, and you go faster and faster until it falls apart laughing. Mix in the two signs — land or water?

TEACHER “Shoes on! We are going to find a **mountain**, a **river**, an **island** and a **lake... outside.**”

In the sandpit and at the water table: build the mountain, dig the river, make the island in the tray, scoop the hollow and fill it for the lake. Anything they cannot find, they **make**. Littles name each one as it appears; Bigs tell a friend what they built and how: **“I made an island. It has water all around.”**

Take four photographs out there — one per landform — and print them for Tray 4 on Monday. The photo of their own sandpit mountain beside the photo of a real one is the best matching material in the room, and it costs nothing.

1 MIN CLOSE + AWARDS

Every child gets a “You are a STAR!” award to take home with their landform photo. Then, standing round the model, all five gestures:

EVERYONE “Up the mountain... down the RIVER!” (*climbing hands going up on the first half · swimming arms going low, and everybody's arms thrown wide on the shout*)

Got 3 spare minutes? Follow the Water from Brook to Ocean (Arthur Dorros) — the river from a trickle to the sea, which is exactly the week, and it hands you Monday's Earth Day theme on a plate.

★ Theme Song · “Up the Mountain, Down the River”

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 (“climb — climb — climb-ing”). Can't manage it yet? Four slow downs per bar works fine — the kids only hear the mountain going up.

Tempo: a walking pace, like climbing — steady, not fast — and let the “down the river” line fall, a little lower and a little softer than the line above it. **Am is one finger**, the same finger as F's first shape, so if you can play F you can already play Am: C is one finger, Am is one finger, F is two, G7 is three. Chant the whole thing without the uke first; add the chords once they know the actions.

CHORUS — SING IT EVERY SINGLE DAY

C Up the mountain — F climb, climb, C climb! (climbing hands, higher and higher)

Am Down the C river — G7 swim in C time! (swimming arms, low)

C Round the F island, round the C lake, (draw two circles in the air)

Am What a C lovely G7 world we C make! (arms thrown wide)

Sing the chorus twice each time. The actions are the whole point — a two-year-old who climbs on the first line, swims low on the second and throws their arms wide on the last has understood the week, whether or not a single word comes out.

ONE VERSE A DAY — EVERY VERSE IS JUST C AND G7

Monday · Mountain

C A mountain is high, a mountain is tall, (peak hands, small then big)

G7 Up at the top C I am very small! (reach up, then shrink right down)

Tuesday · River

C A river runs and never stops, (winding arm, travelling downhill)

G7 Down the hill C it drips and drops! (fingers raining down to the floor)

Wednesday · Island

C An island is land with water all round, (fist, other hand circling it)

G7 Hop in my boat — C look what I found! (rowing, then hands out in surprise)

Thursday · Lake

C A lake is water with land all round, (cupped hands, finger circling inside)

G7 Still and quiet — C not a sound! (finger on lips, everything still)

Friday · Land and water

C Mountain, river, island, lake, (all four gestures in a row)

G7 Land and water — C that's what we make! (flat hand · wavy hand · arms wide)

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 land-form model with the whole week's props in front of them, doubles as the 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** → **Am** → **C** → **G7** → **C**. That is the entire chorus. C is one finger, Am is one finger, F is two, G7 is three; learn them in that order, and note that every one of the five verses is only C and G7 — so if the chorus defeats you on Monday, play the verses and sing the chorus unaccompanied. If your fingers get stuck altogether, put the uke down, put the sand tray in the middle and do the finger-play instead: the class will not notice, and the actions carry the meaning either way.