



WHALE CLASS

Circle Time

Guide

Everything you need, one page per day.

Week 5 · Autumn (1)

The Tree Is Changing

Mon 28 – Wed 30 September · Thu 8 – Fri 9 October 2026
13 minutes a day · ages 2.5–6, English learners

One week, split in half. The 国庆 National Day holiday runs 1–7 October, right through the middle of it. Days 1–3 are 28, 29 and 30 September; days 4–5 are 8 and 9 October. Same five words, same song, same four trays on the shelf right through. The break is written *into* the week: on Wednesday we say goodbye to the tree and ask it to keep changing without us — and on Thursday we come back and find out that it did.

🍁 Week Overview

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

Five words they'll own by Friday

autumn

leaf

red

yellow

windy

Two tiers, every day

Littles
2.5-3

One word + a gesture is a win: **"Leaf!"** (flutter one hand down to the floor) · **"Red!"** (point at something red) · **"Windy!"** (whoosh both arms sideways and sway)

Bigs
4-6

"It is autumn." · **"The leaf is red."** · **"The wind blows the leaves down."** · **"The tree changed while we were away."**

中文

秋天到了。／ 树叶变黄了。／ 国庆节快乐！／ 风把树叶吹下来。 汉字, one a day: 秋 · 叶 · 红 · 黄 · 风

The Magic Box, day by day

Mon 28 Sep

A **branch that is only just turning** — mostly green, two leaves going gold at the tip. **Photograph it.** Thursday depends on that photo

Tue 29 Sep

A **basket of just-fallen leaves**, tipped over the circle from a height

Wed 30 Sep

A small 红旗 and a **red maple leaf** 枫叶, side by side — tomorrow is 国庆节, and today we say goodbye to the tree

1-7 Oct

国庆节 holiday — no circle time. Every tray stays out, the branch stays on the shelf

Thu 8 Oct

Gold **ginkgo leaves** 银杏 picked on the way in that morning, beside Monday's photograph — plus a jar of **cold, wet grass** for 寒露

Fri 9 Oct

A **paper fan** and the whole week's leaves — fan the basket and watch them fly

The 13-minute flow — same 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 a real leaf in your hand. Get it wrong once on purpose so they correct you

3 min

Song — chorus → today's new verse → chorus, with the actions

3 min

Game — one named game, tied to the day's word

1 min

Close — whisper → normal → SHOUT: **"Red... yellow... WINDY! It's AUTUMN!"**

Theme shelf · four trays (out from Monday, right through the holiday)

Tray 1

Leaf colour sorting — green, yellow and red dishes, twenty pressed leaves. *Control:* a colour dot on the back of each card

Tray 2

Leaf-shape matching — five pairs face-down (ginkgo, maple, poplar, willow, oak). *Control:* outlines on the mat

Tray 3

Leaf rubbing — leaves under thin paper, crayon on its side. *Control:* if the leaf slips, the rubbing shows it

Tray 4

Biggest to smallest — seven leaves graded. *Control:* numbered outlines printed on the mat

MONDAY • 28 September

The tree is only just starting to turn — and today we photograph it.

Today's words: autumn

Grab: a branch that is only just turning — mostly green, with two leaves going gold at the tip. **And your phone: you must photograph that branch today.** Thursday's whole lesson depends on the photo. Also: two hoops or two big dishes, a pile of real leaves (half green, half gold), and the 秋 character card.

2 MIN Magic Box hook

The box is longer than usual today — something is sticking out of the lid. Whole class chants:

EVERYONE

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

Shake it — a dry, papery rustle, nothing else. Sniff the lid: (*eyes closed*) "It smells like... **outside.**"

TEACHER

"It came off a tree. This morning. And the tree is **changing.**" (*lift the branch out slowly and hold it up above their heads so they look up into it*)

Turn it. Two leaves at the tip are gold; the rest are still green. Let them touch one gold leaf each, one at a time.

4 MIN Teach • Autumn

Hold the branch across your two open hands, low, so everyone can see both colours at once.

Green... (*touch a green leaf*) Green... (*touch another*)

GOLD! (*touch the gold tip — big surprised face*)

It's **autumn.** (*both arms open wide, slow*)

Say the word three times, getting quieter: **autumn**, autumn, autumn. Littles just say it with you —

"Autumn!" Bigs take the frame: **"It is autumn."**

Now the photograph. Stand the branch up where everybody can see it, get the whole circle to say **"cheese"** to it, and take the picture in front of them — ceremonially, like it matters, because on Thursday it will. Tell them plainly: *"I am keeping this picture. When we come back after the holiday we will look at it again and see what the tree did without us."*

Teacher fails: hold up the gold tip, look at it with total confidence and announce "Ah — **green.**" Nod. Wait. They will shout you down, and the shouting is the lesson.

Lay the 秋 card beside the branch on the mat. Say it once, in Chinese — 秋天到了 — and leave it there. One character a day, no drilling.

3 MIN Game • Green or gold?

"One, two, three — eyes on me!" Two hoops on the floor, well apart. A green leaf in one, a gold leaf in the other — those are the labels. Tip the pile of leaves out in the middle. One child at a time: pick up **one** leaf, hold it high so the circle can see, and run it to the hoop it belongs in. The circle calls the colour as it goes — **"GREEN!"** ... **"GOLD!"** Go round twice. Then hold up a leaf that is **half and half** and let them argue about it — there is no right answer, and that is exactly the point: it is *changing*.

Real leaves, never paper ones. The dry crackle is half of what they are learning.

1 MIN Close

EVERYONE

"Red... yellow... WINDY! It's AUTUMN!" (*fingers flutter down, then both arms fly up on AUTUMN*)

Today's song moment (3 min): chorus → **Monday's verse** — "Summer's packed her bags and gone, autumn's here — put your jumper on!" → chorus. Full song on page 8.

TUESDAY • 29 September

A whole basket of them, tipped over the circle from a height.

Today's words: leaf (*autumn comes back every day*)

Grab: a **basket of just-fallen leaves**, as full as you can carry; yesterday's branch, still standing on the shelf; the 叶 card.

2 MIN Magic Box hook

Today the box is **heavy and light at the same time**. Let two children lift it. Chant:

EVERYONE

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

Shake it hard — a huge dry rustle, like rain on a window. Peek in, and make your face enormous.

TEACHER

"There are **hundreds**. And they all fell off the tree by themselves." (*stand up, lift the basket high over the middle of the circle and tip it slowly*)

Leaves come down over everybody. Let the shrieking run for five whole seconds before you say anything. Then, quietly: **"Leaf!"** — one hand fluttering down to the floor.

4 MIN Teach • Leaf

Everyone picks up **one** leaf from the floor in front of them. One each, no swapping, and hold it flat on the palm.

One little **leaf**... (*hold yours up between two fingers*)

Let go... (*drop it, and everyone watches it all the way down*) Down, down, down.

It landed on **me!** (*catch one on the top of your head*)

Now go round the circle: each child holds their leaf up and says one thing about it. Littles say the word —

"Leaf!"

Bigs take a frame:

"My leaf is big."

"The leaf is red."

Then all together: hold the leaf as high as you can reach, and on **three**, everybody lets go at once. Twenty leaves falling in silence is the best three seconds of the week.

Teacher fails: try to make your leaf fall **upwards**. Throw it at the ceiling, twice, and look genuinely puzzled when it comes back down.

The 叶 card goes down beside yesterday's 秋 — 树叶变黄了。The row is starting to build.

3 MIN Game • Leaf, leaf, drop

Everybody stands up. "You are not children any more. You are **leaves**, and you are still on the branch." Arms up high, fingers spread, completely still.

TEACHER

(*quietly*) "The tree is very still... very still... and then — **WINDY!**"

On the word **windy**, every leaf spins slowly down to the floor and goes absolutely still where it lands. Then back up on the branch, and again. Four or five rounds — and make them wait for it, longer each time.

The stillness is the game, not the spinning. If they land and stay down for three silent seconds, you have taught self-regulation and the word **windy** in the same breath.

1 MIN Close

EVERYONE

"Red... yellow... **WINDY!** It's **AUTUMN!**" (*leaves go up on AUTUMN*)

Today's song moment (3 min): chorus → **Tuesday's verse** — "One little leaf let go of the tree, down, down, down — it landed on me!" → chorus. Sing it sitting *inside* the fallen leaves.

WEDNESDAY · 30 September

The last day before 国庆. Red leaf, red flag, and a proper goodbye.

Today's words: red (*the last day before the holiday*)

Grab: a small 红旗 and one **red maple leaf** 枫叶, side by side in the box; five red things hidden in plain sight round the room; the 红 card; and Monday's photograph, printed if you can.

2 MIN Magic Box hook

Two things in the box today, and they are the same colour. Lift out the maple leaf first, high, and turn it slowly. Then the little flag beside it, and hold them together.

TEACHER

"Red... and red. One came off a tree. One belongs to the whole country. Tomorrow is 国庆节."

Point at something red on your own clothes. Then they hunt their own: "Red!"

4 MIN Teach · Red

The maple leaf goes round the circle, one child at a time, held up against something of theirs. Same or not the same?

A red, red **leaf**... (*hold it up*) A red, red **flag**... (*wave it gently*)

Red on my **jumper**! (*point at a child's red thing*)

RED! (*everyone points at anything red at once*)

Littles point and name: "Red!" Bigs take the frame: "The leaf is red." "I see a red flag."

Lay the red leaf beside a green one and a gold one from Tuesday's basket. Three colours, one week, one tree.

Teacher fails: hold the bright red maple leaf up, admire it, and call it **green** — with your whole chest. Say it twice. Let them physically take it off you.

3 MIN Game · Red hunt

"Find me **five red things** — before the song ends. GO!" Sing the chorus, slowly, on the ukulele while they scatter. They bring red things back to the middle and pile them up. When the chorus ends, everybody sits, and you count the pile together — out loud, in English and in Chinese. Last round: everybody holds one red thing, and the 红旗 goes to whichever child has been waiting most patiently, to wave for the class.

Cap it at five, count it properly, and stop. Today ends with a ceremony.

1 MIN Close

EVERYONE

"Red... yellow... WINDY! It's AUTUMN!" (*standing at the window, flag in one hand*)

再见, tree — **keep changing without us.** 国庆节 holiday · 1-7 October, no circle time. Take the class to the window, or out to the tree itself. Hold up Monday's branch and say it slowly, and mean it: "We are going away for a week. You are not. **Keep changing without us.** When we come back, we are going to look very carefully and find out exactly what you did." Everybody waves the 红旗 once. Then check the photograph is safe on your phone. **All four trays stay out**, the 汉字 row stays on the shelf edge, the branch stands beside it — the room should still look mid-week when they walk back in on 8 October.

Today's song moment (3 min): chorus → **Wednesday's verse** — "A red, red flag and a red, red leaf, goodbye, tree — we'll be back next week!" → chorus. Sing it **at the window**, facing the actual tree.

THURSDAY · 8 October

First day back — and 寒露, Cold Dew. This is the day the hole in the middle pays off.

Today's words: yellow (*first day back — and 寒露*)

Grab: gold ginkgo leaves 银杏, picked on your own way in *this morning* — not last week's; **Monday's photograph**, on the biggest screen you can find; a jar of **cold, wet grass** for 寒露; the 黄 card. Two minutes before circle, take them outside to touch the railing: 凉不凉?

Welcome back — 国庆节快乐. The class has been away seven days. This is the **second half of the same week**: do not start a new theme. Same words, same song, same trays, same branch on the shelf.

2 MIN Magic Box hook

The box has been sitting on the shelf, shut, for a week. Say so. Shake it — a rustle, and something sloshes. Peek, and go very still.

TEACHER

(*whisper*) "These were not this colour when you left." (*lift out a handful of gold ginkgo leaves and let them fall through your fingers*)

Then the jar of cold wet grass. Everyone touches it. **"Cold!"** That is 寒露 — 寒露到, 露水凉。

4 MIN Teach · Yellow — and What changed?

This is the big one. Hold Monday's **photograph** up in one hand and the real branch in the other, right next to each other, and say nothing at all for five seconds.

We went away... (*walk two fingers off to one side*) and the tree turned **GOLD**.

Yellow, yellow — look, behold! (*point at the gold, then open both hands wide*)

Now round the circle: each child names **one thing** that is different between the photograph and the branch. Littles point at the gold and say the word — **"Yellow!"** Bigs take the full frame:

"The tree changed while we were away." Then the honest part, said plainly: *"Nobody watched it. It did it anyway."* Beijing's 银杏 trees all turned at once while they were on holiday, and every child walked past it.

Teacher fails: look from the photo to the branch and back, frown, and announce "Hmm. Exactly the same." Hold your ground for a good long moment.

3 MIN Game · What changed?

Monday's photograph propped up in the middle of the circle; the real branch lying beside it; the gold ginkgo leaves in a pile. One child at a time comes into the middle, points at **one** difference and names it. The circle answers together: **"It CHANGED!"** Nobody may repeat somebody else's difference — which forces them to look properly. Second round, harder and quieter: everyone shuts their eyes, you move or turn **one** thing on the mat, and they open them and find it. Three times.

1 MIN Close

EVERYONE

"Red... yellow... WINDY! It's AUTUMN!" (*gold leaves fly up on AUTUMN*)

Today's song moment (3 min): chorus *first* — they will remember it a week later better than you expect — then **Thursday's verse**, which starts on **Am**: *"We went away and the tree turned gold, yellow, yellow — look, behold!"* Slow right down for it.

FRIDAY · 9 October

The fan, the whole basket, and all five verses top to bottom — that run-through *is* the review.

Today's words: windy (+ all five, all week, one last time)

Grab: a paper fan and every leaf the week collected, in one basket; two baskets or hoops labelled **red** and **yellow**; the 风 card; the star awards (print pack page 17), signed and ready.

2 MIN Magic Box hook

Last box of the week, and it is completely silent. Shake it. Nothing. Shake it harder. Still nothing. Look worried.

TEACHER

"It's **empty**... no, wait." (*lift out the folded paper fan, open it with one snap, and fan the whole front row's hair*)

Whoosh both arms sideways and sway. **"Windy!"**

4 MIN Teach · Windy

Tip the week's whole basket of leaves onto the mat in one heap. Then kneel down and fan it, hard.

The windy, windy **wind**... goes whoosh and blow! (*everyone whooshes with you*)
And all the leaves... let go, LET GO! (*hands high, then open — everything flutters*)

The fan goes round the circle, one child at a time: three fans each, and the rest of the class makes the wind sound. Littles say the word with the whoosh — **"Windy!"** Bigs take the frame:

"The wind blows the leaves down."

Then blow with your mouths instead: one big class breath, all together, on three. The leaves barely move. Try the fan again. Which is stronger? That is a real question with a real answer, and they can see it.

Teacher fails: fan yourself elegantly and wonder aloud why the leaves are not moving. Point the fan at your own face for a good ten seconds before somebody turns your wrist round.

The 风 card completes the row: 秋 · 叶 · 红 · 黄 · 风. Read it left to right with them once — that row is the week, and it is also your display.

3 MIN Game · Red basket, yellow basket

Two baskets, far apart. One leaf at a time, one child at a time: pick it up, hold it high, name the colour, run it to the right basket. The circle calls the colour with them — **"RED!"** ... **"YELLOW!"** Go until the mat is clear. Then count both baskets out loud — which one won? Fan the winner over the floor and watch it all come down again, and let them groan.

Then the awards: one star each, name read out, on the spot. And the leaf worksheets go home with them.

1 MIN Close

EVERYONE

"Red... yellow... WINDY! It's AUTUMN!" (*the whole basket goes up on AUTUMN*)

Today's song moment (3 min) — the review: chorus → **all five verses** → chorus, outside standing in the fallen leaves if the weather allows. Do not add a second review activity — five verses in order *is* the five words in order.

THE ONE SONG OF THE WEEK

★ “Autumn Is Here!”

Ukulele · **C** 0003 **F** 2010 **G7** 0212 **Am** 2000 · strum: Down · Down · Down-Up

Every day: chorus → today's verse → chorus. **Friday 9 October:** the whole thing top to bottom — and that run-through is the week's review. The holiday sits between Wednesday's verse and Thursday's, so open Thursday with the chorus before you say anything else, and watch them remember.

CHORUS — EVERY SINGLE DAY

C Autumn is here — the **F** leaves come **C** down, (*flutter both hands to the floor*)
F Red and yellow **C** all over the **G7** town! **C** (*big circle arms, point out*)
Am Whoosh goes the wind and **F** away they **C** go, (*whoosh sideways*)
F Round and round **C** and **G7** down be **C** low! (*spin one finger, then crouch*)

MONDAY 28 SEP · AUTUMN

C Summer's packed her bags and gone, **G7** autumn's here — **C** put your jumper on!

TUESDAY 29 SEP · LEAF

C One little leaf let go of the tree, **G7** down, down, down — **C** it landed on me!

WEDNESDAY 30 SEP · RED

C A red, red flag and a red, red leaf, **G7** goodbye, tree — **C** we'll be back next week!

THURSDAY 8 OCT · YELLOW

Am We went away and the tree turned gold, **G7** yellow, yellow — **C** look, behold!

FRIDAY 9 OCT · WINDY

C The windy, windy wind goes whoosh and blow, **G7** and all the leaves **C** let go, let go!

If you're brand new to ukulele

Practice this loop for five minutes tonight: **C** (4 strums) → **F** (4 strums) → **C** → **G7** → **C**. Add **Am** last: it is one finger on the same string as F, so slide from Am to F and back until it stops feeling like a change. That is the entire song — and four of the five verses are only C and G7. 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.

Tempo

Unhurried and swaying, like something drifting down — this is a falling song, not a marching song. Slow right down on the **Am** in the third line, then lift again for “down below!” Chant it without the uke first; add chords once they know the actions.

Sound of the week · Dark Phonics m — a long hum with the lips shut: *mmm, me, my, mud, map, mist, maple*. “Mmm, muddy monkey!” Lips together, hum, and touch the side of your nose — it buzzes.