

Four Days by the Tide

A regulation-first, Montessori-aligned barrier island week

Ages 2–8 · two bands

Half-day, flexible timing

Written at Hunting Island, SC

THE WEEK ARC

DAY 1

Slow Down

Toes in the Sand — arrive, ground, and settle the body.

DAY 2

Look Closer

Tidal-Pool Detectives — slow hands and quiet attention.

DAY 3

Move with Purpose

Following the Shorebirds — big movement, then stillness.

DAY 4

Document & Return

The Field Journal — reflect, sort, and give thanks.

Regulation comes first — every day, before anything else

This schedule is built on one pedagogical claim: a child cannot observe, wonder, or learn until their body is regulated. The adult's first job each day is not to teach — it is to slow the group into a calm, grounded state. Only then does the naturalist work begin.

Nature is the classroom, not the backdrop. Each day depends on the barrier island itself — the wrack line, the tide pools, the shorebirds at the swash. Montessori principles run underneath: prepared environment, freedom within limits, real tools, child-led pace, and sorting by observable attributes. Two age bands (**2–4** and **5–8**) are differentiated concretely on every activity, because a two-year-old and a seven-year-old do fundamentally different things with the same shell.

Timing note. Minutes are flexible ranges for a half-day. Follow the children — a long, regulated tide-pool session is worth cutting the closing short.

DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAIN KEY

Every phase in the session flows and in-depth sections is tagged with the domains it primarily addresses. Use these tags to guide your observations and documentation.

■ Sensory & Regulation	Co-regulation, sensory input, grounding, breath work — the foundation every day.
■ Gross Motor	Whole-body movement, balance, coordination, and purposeful locomotion.
■ Fine Motor	Precise hand use: pinching, lens work, drawing, gentle specimen touch.
■ Cognitive & Scientific	Observation, prediction, comparison, cause-and-effect reasoning about the natural world.
■ Mathematical Thinking	Sorting, counting, comparing, grouping by attribute, simple graphing.
■ Language & Literacy	Vocabulary, verbal narration, dictation, drawing as recording, sequencing.
■ Social-Emotional	Co-regulation with peers, gratitude practice, turn-taking, safe risk-taking.

*These domain tags appear in two places throughout the document: in the **Session Flow table** for each day (right-hand column), and in each **In-Depth section header** (right-aligned). They are additive — a phase often touches multiple domains simultaneously.*

DAY 1

Slow Down

Toes in the Sand

The week opens with nothing to find and nothing to make — only the body arriving on the beach. Children move barefoot from soft dry sand to firm wet sand, lie down to feel the ground hold them, and breathe with the rhythm of the waves.

Regulation focus	Grounding through the body	Setting	Upper beach & wrack line
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Domains: ■ Sensory & Regulation · ■ Gross Motor · ■ Social-Emotional · ■ Language & Literacy

SESSION FLOW

Phase	Time	What happens · regulation cue	Domains
Arrival & Regulation Entry	10–15 min	Shoes off at the boundary line; feet in the sand; three slow wave-breaths. Cue: “feet first, then eyes.”	■ Sensory & Regulation
Opening Circle	6–8 min	Sit in a sand circle; today’s word: slow. Pass a smooth stone.	■ Sensory & Regulation ■ Social-Emotional ■ Language & Literacy
Core Exploration	20–30 min	Barefoot texture walk: dry → damp → wet sand → the cool edge of the swash. Notice temperature underfoot.	■ Sensory & Regulation ■ Gross Motor
Movement Integration	8–10 min	“Heavy walking” — slow, deliberate giant steps that press prints into the sand.	■ Gross Motor ■ Sensory & Regulation
Deeper Inquiry	10–12 min	Lie back on the warm sand; “sky watching” — what moves up there?	■ Cognitive & Scientific ■ Language & Literacy ■ Sensory & Regulation
Closing Circle	6–8 min	One thing your feet felt. Gratitude to the beach. Cue: quiet body, quiet voice.	■ Social-Emotional ■ Language & Literacy ■ Sensory & Regulation

IN DEPTH

Arrival & Regulation Entry · 10–15 min

■ Sensory & Regulation ■ Social-Emotional

Facilitator does: Stop the group at a driftwood or drawn line before the open sand. Everyone sits to remove shoes together — the removal itself is the transition ritual. Lead three slow breaths timed to the waves.

SAY

“We’re going to leave our shoes right here, with the sea oats. Feel your feet touch the sand. Let’s take three big breaths — in as the wave comes, out as it goes back.”

Children do: Take shoes off, wiggle toes into sand, breathe. No task yet — just landing.

■ Regulation cue · “Feet first, then eyes.” Bodies settle before attention is asked for.

Ages 2–4

Adult kneels beside each child; hand-over-hand shoe removal is fine. One breath may be all they hold — that counts.

Ages 5–8

Manage their own shoes and line them up. Invite them to name the breath count aloud and set the wave rhythm for the little ones.

Core Exploration — the Texture Walk · 20–30 min

■ Sensory & Regulation ■ Gross Motor ■ Cognitive & Scientific ■ Language & Literacy

Facilitator does: Walk the group slowly from soft dry sand toward the water, pausing at each change underfoot. Narrate temperature and texture, not instructions. Let the pace be glacial.

SAY

"The dry sand is warm and it slides away from your toes. Keep walking... ohh — did the sand just get cooler? Firmer? Stop where the sand feels wet. What happens when you press down and lift your foot up?"

■ **Regulation cue** · If energy spikes near the water, kneel and press both palms flat to the wet sand together — "give the sand a big push."

Ages 2–4

Stay in the dry-to-damp zone; the swash edge can overwhelm. Focus on one contrast: warm vs. cool. Hold a hand if wanted.

Ages 5–8

Go all the way to the swash. Ask them to order the zones by wetness and predict where footprints last longest, then test it.

Closing Circle & Reflection · 6–8 min

■ Social-Emotional ■ Language & Literacy ■ Sensory & Regulation

Facilitator does: Regather in the sand circle. Each child names one thing their feet felt. Close with a shared thank-you to the beach and a slow breath.

SAY

"Put your hand on the sand one more time. Thank you, beach, for holding us today. Let's carry our slow bodies back to our shoes."

■ **Regulation cue** · "Quiet body, quiet voice" as the closing signal — the same phrase all four days, so it becomes a reliable anchor.

OBSERVATION & ASSESSMENT

■ Sensory & Regulation

Look for: Does the child settle after the breathing ritual, or need continued co-regulation?

■ Language & Literacy

Look for: Does the child describe a sensation without prompting — "cold," "squishy," or "hard"?

■ Social-Emotional

Look for: How does the child navigate the boundary near the water — self-managed, or reliant on the adult?

Montessori alignment

Freedom within limits (a clear shoe-line boundary, free movement inside it) and the absorbent, sensorial mind — grading sand by temperature and texture is a natural sensorial exercise. The adult follows the child's pace rather than driving a schedule.

WHOLE-WEEK MATERIALS CHECKLIST

Carry every day

- First-aid kit & sun/bug protection
- Drinking water for the group
- Boundary markers (flags, cones, or driftwood)
- Small towel or sit-cloth
- A few smooth “settling stones”
- Roster, allergy & emergency info

Day-specific

Day 2: child-safe hand lenses (plastic)
Day 3: nothing extra — bodies & birds
Day 4: field journals or paper on boards,
chunky pencils/crayons, a sorting cloth

Optional: a collection basket for the week's treasures

REGULATION CUE CHEAT SHEET

Keep this in your pocket. When the group escalates, your calm body is the first tool — then reach for one of these. The real audience for every cue is **you**: your regulated presence is what the children co-regulate to.

Feet first, then eyes	Ground the body before asking for attention. Bare feet on sand, weight sensed, then observe.
Wave breathing	Breathe in as the wave rolls in, out as it draws back. The ocean sets a slow, external pace.
Heavy hands	A palm-sized stone or a push against wet sand gives deep-pressure input that settles a busy body.
Land before you fly	Before movement, a still “landed bird” pose. Every burst of speed resolves back into a freeze.
Quiet body, quiet voice	The shared closing signal, used all four days so it becomes a dependable anchor for transitions.
Let it settle	When something is grabbed or splashed, pause: hands back, let the water/sand settle, try again slowly.

Regulation recovery script — when the whole group loses it

SAY

"Everyone find the sand with your hands. We're going to be still like the tide pools. Feet under you, hands heavy, three breaths with me... in with the wave... out with the wave. When you're ready, look at me."

If it doesn't land, shrink the group and the task: one adult, a few children, one small sensory thing. Regulation before content — always. It is never a failure to spend the whole session here.

THIS IS A FREE PREVIEW

You have just read all of Day 1.

Run it this week. If the group settles the way it is written to, the other three days are worth having.

DAY 2 — LOOK CLOSER

Tidal-Pool Detectives. Settling stones before the water, then slow hands and a who-lives-here inquiry that holds a five-year-old and a two-year-old at once.

DAY 3 — MOVE WITH PURPOSE

Following the Shorebirds. The big-movement day, built so every burst of speed resolves back into stillness rather than ending in a meltdown.

DAY 4 — DOCUMENT & RETURN

The Field Journal. Sorting the week's treasures by observable attributes, and a closing that gives the place back.

PLUS THE PARTS THAT MAKE IT RUNNABLE

Whole-week materials checklist, a pocket Regulation Cue Cheat Sheet, observation and assessment prompts, and the Montessori pedagogy behind every choice.

TWO AGE BANDS ON EVERY SINGLE ACTIVITY

Ages 2–4 and 5–8, differentiated concretely — because a two-year-old and a seven-year-old do fundamentally different things with the same shell.

FOUR DAYS BY THE TIDE · \$24

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Written at Hunting Island. Runs on any barrier island.

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