

Learning together

Vowel Digraphs and Trigraphs: Complex Graphemes

ACTIVITY #2

SEQUENCE: READING RULES —
5TH AND 6TH GRADES (3RD CYCLE)

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Purpose of the activity

The aim of this activity is to help children learn how to read vowel digraphs (two letters = one sound) and trigraphs (three letters = one sound). It focuses on understanding common patterns in vowel sounds to make reading easier.



Relevance of the activity

Many vowel sounds are made up of 2, 3, or even 4 letters. Reading these multiple-letter vowels can be challenging because they are more difficult to read than single-letter vowels. This activity helps reduce the guesswork when reading complex vowel combinations by teaching four important reading rules.



Supplies

- word lists 20 to 31 (see appendix)
- optional: your child's vocabulary word list or words from a book containing the following graphemes: ai, ay, ee, oa, igh, ie, ew, aw, ea, ei, oo, ow



LET'S GO!

Explain the activity:



In this activity, we will learn the pronunciations of 12 common vowel digraphs and one trigraph, plus four rules to help you read them. You will also learn less common pronunciations when there are more than one, and in what order to “test” them when you see unknown words

Explain why:



Many complex graphemes have multiple pronunciations. One way to help you recognize new words faster, is to start by pronouncing the most common pronunciations for that grapheme first. If the word doesn't make sense, you try the 2nd most common, then the 3rd, 4th option. This will help you access word meaning faster as you are choosing the most likely pronunciations first. The rules in this activity guide you to the most frequent pronunciations first, with backup options (plan B, C, D) when needed.

Explain when:



These 4 rules apply when you see one of the complex graphemes **ai, ay, aw, ee, ea, ei, ew, ie, oa, oo, ou, ue**, and **ow** in an unfamiliar word. Each rule teaches you how to pronounce the graphemes and recognize it in a keyword (ex. ow like yellow) for each to help you remember the sound. If there is more than one sound, it teaches you which is the most likely 2nd, 3rd, 4th... sound to pronounce. This is the case for rules 3 and 4, where you will learn to choose from the most probable pronunciation to the least. Although the rules won't apply to every single word you meet, they will apply to most words, and really help improve your reading accuracy.

Try it together:



Reading rules:

1 Two Vowels go walking, the 1st one does the talking and it says its name

When reading **ai**, **ay**, **ee** and **oa**, apply the following rule: When 2 vowels go walking, the 1st one does the talking, and it usually says its name. Therefore, when you see one of the 4 digraphs in this rule, you say the name of the 1st letter.

- **ai-main** (found mainly, but not exclusively, before an L or N.)
- **ay-play**
- **ee-three**
- **oa-road**

See word lists 20 to 23

2 Highlight

- When reading **igh**, always pronounce the long sound¹, for example the name of the vowel [i]: light

See word list 24

3 The chief's new law

When reading the digraphs **ie**, **ew**, **ue** and **aw**, ignore Rule # 1, and pronounce as follows:

- **ie-chief** (the 2nd vowel E says its name)
- **ew-new** (makes the long sound /U/ as in unicorn or flute)
- **ue-blue** (makes the long sound /U/ as in unicorn or flute)
- **aw-law²** (makes the short sound /O/ like octopus)

See word lists 25 to 27

4 Eight yellow moon beams

When reading vowel digraphs ei, ow, oo, ea you must use a “probability rule”: try the most frequent pronunciation first. If the word makes no sense, try the 2nd, then the 3rd, and so on. Follow this order for each digraph sound.

- 1 is the most frequent pronunciation,
- 2 the 2nd pronunciation can be frequent or rare,
- 3 and 4 pronunciations are rare.

- ei – 1 eight³, 2 receive
- ow – 1 yellow, 2 cow
- oo – 1 moon, 2 book
- ea – 1 peach (apply rule #1), 2 bread, 3 steak 4 bear
will be seen in Activity 4 (R-controlled vowels).

See word lists 28 to 31

Notes

¹ The pronunciation of the letter i is a diphthong (2 sounds that “slide” together: *a* → *ee*) like in the word hi, but we have chosen not to teach it as a diphthong because it is also the name of the vowel = the long vowel sound, so we teach it as a long vowel. If your child has a difficult time recognizing the long sound of the letter i, you can teach it as a diphthong, explaining the 2 sounds that “slide” together : *a* → *ee*

² When preceded or followed by a W, or followed by the letters L or LL, the letter A generally makes the short sound /o/ as in octopus: law, water, always, call

³ The grapheme **igh** is usually pronounced like the long sound (name of the letter) A: *eight, sleigh*



Quick tips!

There are 12 graphemes in the 4 rules presented in this activity. Teach one rule at a time, and then help your child to practice reading words using those rules. Encourage your child to apply the rules when reading sentences.



Lists 20 to 23

Vowel Diagrams - 2 Vowels Go Walking, the 1st one does the talking

20 - AI	21 - AY	22 - EE	23 - OA
<i>Beginning, middle of words before l, n</i>	<i>End of words, except in word families</i>	<i>Mostly in the middle, in closed syllables</i>	<i>Beginning, middle, in closed syllables</i>
aid	bay	bee	boat
ail	day	eel	coat
fail	ray	see*	foam
jail	say	beef	goal
mail*	way	deep	goat
rail	gray	deer*	hoax
sail*	play	feet*	load
pain*	spray	free	loaf
brain	tray	heel	loan*
chain	always	knee	oats
drain	display	meet*	road
grain	maybe	seem*	roar
saint	payment	seen*	soap
train	portray	teen	toad

Lists 20 to 23

daily	monday	cheer	broach
dainty	tuesday	greed	cloak
detail	wednesday	speed	coach
domain	thursday	street	charcoal
explain	friday	sweet	cockroach
obtain	saturday	three	oatmeal
raisin	sunday	wheel	soapstone
remain	yesterday	sixteen	toaster

*homophones

List 24 to 27

Vowel Diagrams - Trigraph - Highlight + The Chief's New Law			
24 - IGH	25 - IE	26 - EW/UE	27 - AW
<i>Mostly in middle, IGH + T</i>	<i>Middle and end</i>	<i>Mostly at the end</i>	<i>End + before K, L or N</i>
high	brief	new	jaw
sigh	chief	few	law
tight	field	Jew	paw
fight	fierce	chew	saw
light	grief	drew	thaw

List 24 to 27

night	piece	flew	claw
right	priest	knew*	crawl
sight	shield	stew	draw
tight	siege	threw	flaw
bright	thief	curfew	hawk
flight	wield	jewel	lawn
fright	yield	nephew	pawn
knight	achieve	sewage	shawl
daylight	believe	steward	spawn
delight	calorie	unscrew	straw
eyesight	cookie	blue	yawn
slightly	goalie	clue	awesome
tonight	prairie	true	awful
pie	relieve	value	coleslaw
die	retrieve	avenue	Mohawk
lie	rookie	rescue	strawberry
tie	zombie	statue	withdraw

*homophones

List 28 to 31

Vowel Diagrams – Eight Yellow moon beams			
28 – EI	29 – OW	30 – OO	31 – EA
<i>1st and 2nd pronunciations</i>	<i>Mostly end of words and families 1st pronunciation (see diphthongs)</i>	<i>1st and 2nd pronunciations</i>	<i>1st, 2nd and 3rd pronunciations (see lesson 14 for EAR)</i>
beige	bow	boot	eat
reign*	low	cool	easy
veil	tow*	doom	sea*
vein*	show	food	weak*
sleigh*	blow	fool	beach
weight*	bowl	hoop	cheap
eight*	crow	loon	cream
eighteen	flow	moon	dream
eighty-one	grow	noon	leave
freight	slow	pool	speak
heirloom	snow	roof	teach
neighbor	throw	room	please
reindeer	arrow	smooth	reason
surveillance	follow	spoon	underneath

List 28 to 31

unveiling	narrow	tooth	bread
caffeine	pillow	troop	head
ceiling	shadow	book	heavy
either	widow	foot	ready
leisure	window	good	weather
receipt	yellow	hood	break
seize	marshmallow	look	great
weird	toe*	wood	steak

*homophones