

Learning together

Diphthongs: Complex Vowels

ACTIVITY #4

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

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Purpose of the activity

The aim of this activity is to learn how to read (part 1) and spell (part 2) diphthongs (2 letters = 2 consecutive vowel sounds).



Relevance of the activity

English has complex vowel sounds called diphthongs. A diphthong is 2 consecutive vowel sounds in the same syllable. There can be numerous diphthongs depending on the local pronunciations (up to 8, some say) but for reading and spelling purposes, we only teach two: [oy] like boy and [ow] like cow. The aim of this activity is to take most of the "by heart" out of reading and spelling diphthongs by learning to recognize the graphemes and spell the phonemes using probability rules.



Supplies



- word lists 39 to 42 (see appendix)
- optional: your child's vocabulary word list or words from a book with the graphemes oi, oy, ou, ow.

LET'S GO!

Explain the activity:



In this activity, we will learn two diphthong pronunciations and two graphemes for each. [oy] like *boy* can be spelled OI or OY, and [ow] like *cow* can be spelled OU or OW. We will learn to identify the words with diphthongs by pronunciation frequency, and to spell diphthongs by their context (what letters come after the diphthong) and their position in a word (beginning, middle or end).

Explain why:



As we have seen in earlier activities, multi-letter graphemes are more complex to read and spell than single-letter graphemes, but in the case of these two diphthongs, there is the added challenge of a complex spelling AND a complex pronunciation. By learning these common diphthong pronunciations and spelling rules, you will learn to read and spell words faster, and with more accuracy when they include a diphthong.

Explain when:



You will apply these rules when reading and spelling words with the graphemes: oi, oy, ou, ow. The rules teach you how to recognize and how to spell a diphthong when you hear one. For the sound [oy] like *boy*, the spelling rule applies almost 100% of the time. For [ow] like *cow*, you will learn to read the graphemes and spell the phonemes by position and frequency (probability).

Try it together:



Rules

1 The noisy busboy

READING OI and OY: consistent*

When you see these graphemes, you pronounce [oy] like *boy*.

SPELLING [oy] like boy: consistent by position in the word.

When you hear the phoneme [oy] in a word, you will choose how to spell it according to its position in the word. In the beginning and the middle of the word, write OI, at the end of the word, write OY.

Beginning: Oi

Middle: Oi

End: Oy

2 The cow and the mouse

READING OU: inconsistent*

The grapheme OU can be pronounced in 5 different ways: /ow/cow, /oo/soup, /o/soul, /u/young, and /er/journey. However, the most probable pronunciation is /ow/ like *cow*, so it is always the 1st one to choose. Then follow the order as above when trying to identify a word with the grapheme OU.

ou – 1) mouse, 2) soup; rare spellings 3) soul, 4) young

READING OW: inconsistent*

The grapheme OW can be pronounced in 2 different ways: /ow/ like *cow*, and /O/ like *snow*. The probability that you will pronounce one or the other is almost equal. Therefore, you have 2 choices when you see OW in a word (mostly at the end of words). When you meet a new word, try either pronunciation first. If the first one doesn't help you identify the word, try the second one.

ow – 1) cow, 2) yellow

SPELLING [ow] like cow: consistent at the beginning and at the end of words, inconsistent in the middle

When you hear the phoneme [ow] like cow in a word, you will 1st choose how to spell it according to its position in the word. In the beginning and the middle of the word, write OU, at the end of the word, write OW. However, OW can be found at the beginning of the word owl, and it can be found in the middle of a word when followed by the graphemes L, N, ER or EL.

Beginning: Ou **Middle: Ou** **End: Ow**

Beginning: Owl **Middle: ow + l, n, er, el**

*A **consistent** grapheme has one pronunciation (with or without a few “delinquent” words) and represents only one phoneme. There are very few truly consistent graphemes. The letter V is one such grapheme: you see the letter V, you say [v]; you hear the phoneme [v], you spell V or VE at the end of words. There are no exceptions.

Some graphemes are consistent to read while also being **inconsistent** spellings. Example: OI. It always makes the sound [oy] like boy, but if you must spell the sound [oy] like boy, you have two choices. Some graphemes are inconsistent to read and to spell, like OW. It can be pronounced /O/ like snow or /ow/ like cow, and if you want to spell the sound /o/ like snow, there are many choices: *open, toe, snow, goat, dough, shoulder*. If you want to spell the sound /ow/ like cow, you have 2 choices, OU and OW: *mouse, now*

Note

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 such.



Quick tips!

When teaching the inconsistent graphemes OU and OW, teach the position rule first. Once that rule is mastered, teach the words with OW in the middle of a word like brown, howl, flower, towel.



List 39 and 40

DIPHTHONG /oy/ - The Noisy Busboy

39 - OI	40 - OY
<i>Beginning, middle - Advanced spellings</i>	<i>End and word families - Rare: middle of words (advanced spellings)</i>
oil	boy
boil	joy
coin	toy
join	play
soil	annoy
void	boycott
broil	convoy
choice	cowboy
moist	decoy
point	destroy
spoil	employ
voice	enjoy
noisy	envoy
poison	homeboy
sirloin	boyfriend
toilet	overjoyed
exploit	royal
rejoice	loyal
asteroid	oyster
ointment	voyage
turquoise	gargoyle
appointment	flamboyant

*homophones

List 41 and 42

DIPHTHONG /ow/ - The Cow & the Mouse

41 - OU	42 - OW
<i>Beginning, middle 1st pronunciation = diphthong 2nd, 3rd, 4th = vowels</i>	<i>End, word families or before er, n, l, el 2nd pronunciation = See list 29/yellow</i>
out	cow
loud	how
mouth	now
noun	wow
cloud	plow
count	allow
found	eyebrow
ground	countdown
house	tower
mouse	flower
couch	power
south	shower
sound	tower
proud	coward
counter	brown
boundary	clown
mountain	down
thousand	town
trousers	owl
soup	howl
soul	towel
young	vowel