

Teaching Spoken English with the Color Vowel Chart

Karen Taylor & Shirley Thompson

color
vowel
chart



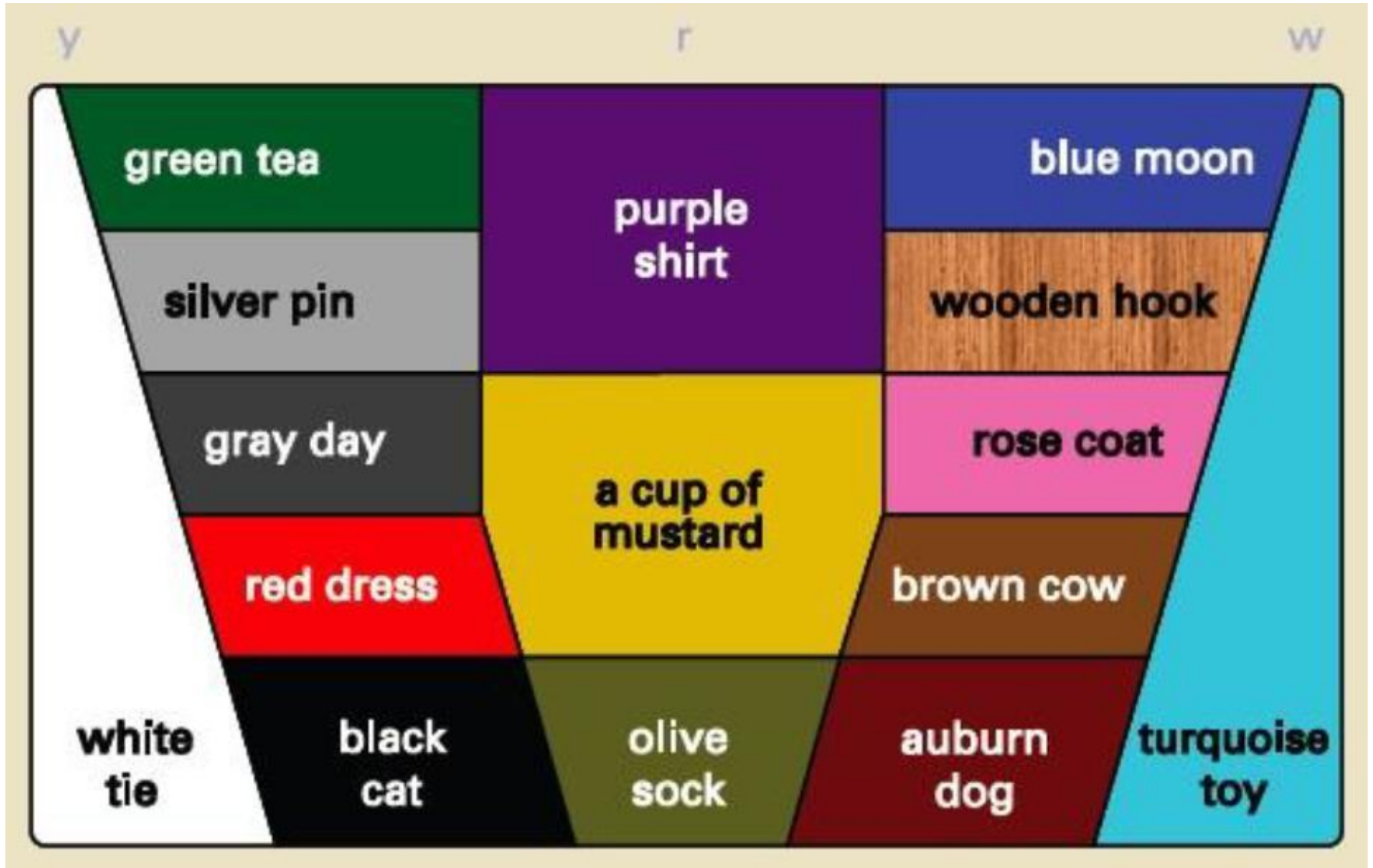
**Changing the way we talk about
the Sounds of English**



Shirley Thompson
& Karen Taylor

Co-authors of
The Color Vowel Chart

The Color Vowel Chart



Written English vs. Spoken English

Written English. . .

- consists of individual **words** separated by spaces
- adheres to a **narrow range** of acceptable spellings
- is evaluated on its **correctness** (of spelling and punctuation, etc.)

Spoken English. . .

- consists of connected words delivered as **phrases**
- includes a **wide range** of national, regional, and cultural accent differences
- is primarily judged by its **comprehensibility**

American English Vowels

Letters

- a
- e
- i
- o
- u

Sounds

- approximately 15 sounds (depending on the variety of English one speaks)

and sometimes **y** (as in “sky”)

The Vowel Sounds of Spoken English

Letters vs. Sounds

- to
- so
- on
- of
- woman
- women
- work
- dress
- friend
- bread
- any
- said

One letter → many sounds

One sound → many letters

TRUST YOUR EARS, NOT YOUR EYES

Help students learn to LISTEN to how something is pronounced and NOT be misled by the spelling.

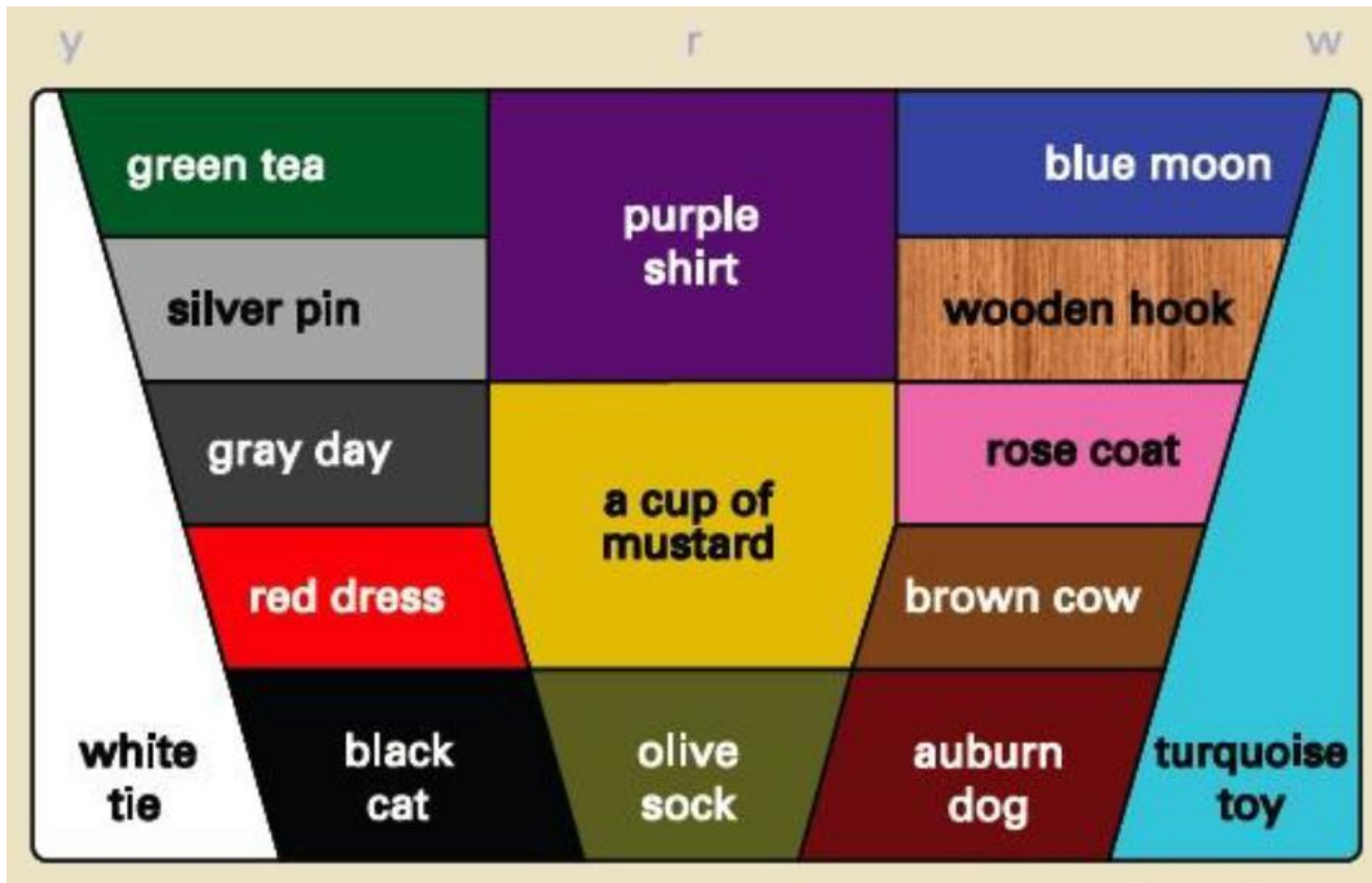
How do we pronounce “a” in English?



- gray
- black
- mustard
- auburn
- about
- any



The chart allows us to talk about **sounds** without the use of letter names.



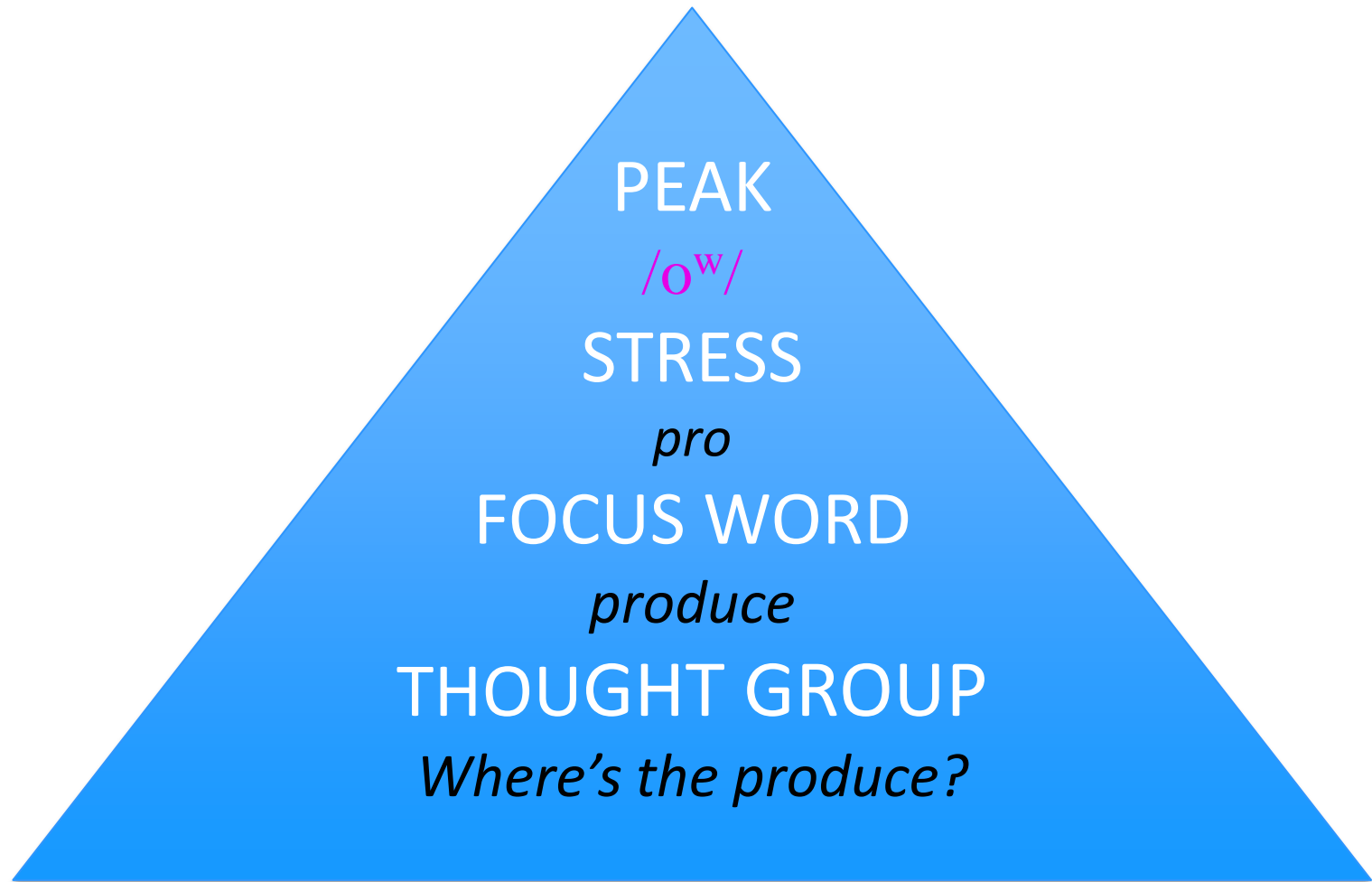


Why focus on stress?

Spoken English is based on combinations of **stressed and unstressed syllables**.

The use of stress in spoken English is essential. When stress is absent or inaccurate, one's speech is less comprehensible and may result in misunderstandings – even if all of the individual sounds are correct!

Stress is a “deal breaker” in spoken English!



Judy Gilbert's Prosody Pyramid

[prosody = melody + rhythm]

another way of looking at the importance of stress.

The vowel sounds in peak syllables are crucial. Other parts of the thought group can (and should) be muffled, but the vowel sound at the center of the peak syllable needs to be extra long and extra clear.

Judy B. Gilbert

Stress in English impacts meaning.

OF WORDS: CONvict vs. conVICT, REcord vs. reCORD, PROduce vs. proDUCE

IN CONVERSATION:

A customer at a fast food restaurant ordered as follows:

“Two double **cheeseburgers**, an order of **fries** and a **lemonade**, please.”

After looking at his order he says:

“Excuse me. I asked for two double cheeseburgers.”

What’s the problem?

What if he said: “Excuse me. I asked for two double **cheeseburgers**.” What’s the problem?



Different languages use different techniques to indicate what is most important, so using stress may not come easily for your students, but it's perhaps THE most important thing in helping students speak more clearly!

- 1. What are you doing? I'm listening.*
- 2. Who's listening? Im listening.*
- 3. Why aren't you listening? I am listening.*

Stress starts at the word level,
so let's get started!



Listen to Karen pronounce each of the color-keyword combinations.

- Make sure you are producing the same vowel sound for both words.
- It is important that you and your learners feel comfortable saying each color-keyword phrase, as you will use these familiar words as a bridge to learning and remembering the pronunciation of new words.



The Color Vowel Chart

americanenglish.state.gov colorvowelchart.org

Key Word Version
2nd Edition

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Identifying the “color” of new words:

Each word has **one primary stressed syllable**.

At the heart or peak of that syllable is a **vowel sound which will be lengthened**.

Using The Color Vowel Chart, we can say that each English word has exactly one “color”.

Deciding what “color” a word is. . .

One-syllable words

soup is **blue**

bread is **red**

knife is **white**

Multi-syllable words

education is **gray**

classroom is **black**

biological is **olive**

What color is that **WORD**?



The Color Vowel Chart
americanenglish.state.gov colorvowelchart.org

What **color** is your name?

“**Shirley** is **purple**.”

- Names are the most **personal words** we know
- Personalizing spoken English helps us acquire the sounds of spoken English
- Our name takes on different pronunciations depending on the speaker's first language
- Let's use our own names to explore the sounds of English!

What color is each name?

- Ana
 - David
 - Isabelle
 - Michael
 - Eshetu
 - Kofi
 - José
- Ana – BLACK OR OLIVE
 - David – GRAY
 - Isabelle – RED
 - OR: Isabelle - SILVER
 - Michael – WHITE
 - Eshetu – RED OR GRAY
 - Kofi – ROSE
 - José - GRAY

OLIVE SOCK

HARD BONIFACIO
DOLLAR

TOMAS

SUSANA
ZAHRA

CONDOR

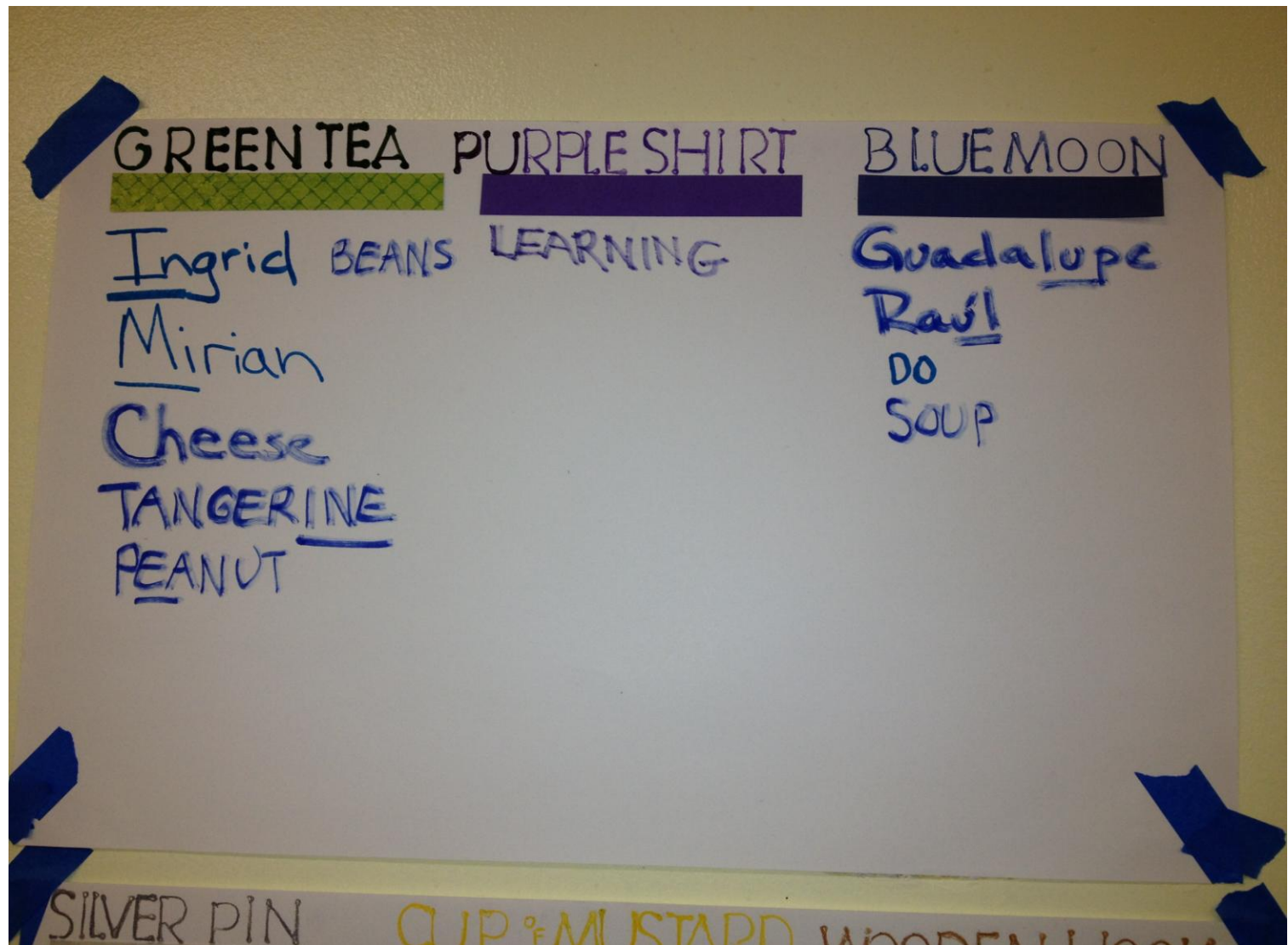
SUADA

AMA

Problem

Here, beginning students have collected their OLIVE names on a wall poster

This class completed the NAMES activity and added their names to their wall chart.





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Identifying the “color” of phrases.

feed the cat

See you later. . . is gray

Let's get together. is red

on the table. . . is gray

I like it. . . is white

Nice to meet you. . . is green

Thank you. . . is gray

in the evening. . . is green

I don't know. . . is rose

Teaching Vocabulary: Study by Color



GREEN TEA	WHITE TIE	BLUE MOON
SILVER PIN	TURQUOISE TOY	WOODEN HOOK
GRAY DAY	PURPLE SHIRT	ROSE COAT
RED DRESS	A CUP OF MUSTARD	BROWN COW
BLACK CAT	OLIVE SOCK	AUBURN DOG / ORANGE DOOR

Strategy:

Create a Color Vowel Word List

This graphic organizer helps learners visualize how words sound.

- Use one per topic or lesson
- Collect them
- Review often

Color Vowel Word List

The image displays two educational materials related to color and vowel recognition. On the left is a 'Color Vowel Chart' with various colored squares and associated words. On the right is a 'Color Vowel Word List Worksheet' with a grid for writing words and a black marker resting on it.

Color Vowel Chart

green tea	purple shirt	blue
silver pin	a cup of mustard	wooden
gray day	rose	brown
red dress	olive sock	auburn dog
black cat		
white tie		

Color Vowel Word List Worksheet

GREEN TEA	WHITE TIE nice	BLUE MOON super
SILVER PIN interesting	TURQUOISE TOY	WOODEN HOOK good
GRAY DAY	PURPLE SHIRT	ROSE COAT
RED DRESS friendly impressive	A CUP OF MUSTARD	BROWN COW
BLACK CAT happy fantastic	OLIVE SOCK strong	AUBURN DOG ORANGE

The Color Vowel Chart
www.colorvowelchart.org

Color Vowel Word List: Food

<p>Green Tea</p> <p>peaches fajitas beans cheese peanut butter zucchini</p>	<p>White Tie</p> <p>papaya ice cream pineapple limes rice</p>	<p>Blue Moon</p> <p>cucumbers blueberries noodles tuna soup juice</p>
<p>Silver Pin</p> <p>chicken shrimp fish a carton of milk</p>	<p>Turquoise Toy</p> <p>oil oysters</p>	<p>Wooden Hook</p> <p>cookies sugar pudding</p>
<p>Gray Day</p> <p>mangoes potatoes grapes raisins a dozen eggs grapefruit</p>	<p>Purple Shirt</p> <p>turnips burger</p>	<p>Rose Coat</p> <p>goat cheese oatmeal soda coconut</p>
<p>Red Dress</p> <p>a head of lettuce a loaf of bread a bottle of ketchup</p>	<p>A Cup of Mustard</p> <p>mushrooms onions a jar of honey</p>	<p>Brown Cow</p> <p>flour flowers</p>
<p>Black Cat</p> <p>apples yams cabbage radishes a bunch of bananas</p>	<p>Olive Sock</p> <p>hotdogs avocados pasta squash almonds popcorn</p>	<p>Auburn Dog</p> <p>sausage oranges strawberries</p>

Strategy: Focus on Word Forms

- photo, photograph = rose
- photographer = olive
- photographic = black

Vocabulary practice that's **auditory**,
visual and **kinesthetic**.



BLUE MOON

c <u>u</u> cumber	scr <u>e</u> wdriver
m <u>u</u> sical	h <u>u</u> mid
h <u>u</u> morous	H <u>o</u> nd <u>u</u> ras
Cam <u>e</u> ro <u>o</u> n	to <u>o</u> thache
V <u>a</u> nc <u>o</u> u <u>v</u> er	m <u>o</u> vie
n <u>e</u> wsp <u>a</u> per	c <u>o</u> ol
s <u>o</u> up	f <u>l</u> u
l <u>o</u> se	T <u>u</u> esday
l <u>o</u> ose	f <u>u</u> ture
u <u>s</u> e	m <u>o</u> ver
t <u>o</u> ols	con <u>s</u> umer
	tr <u>u</u> thful

Strategy :

Flooding for Sound Awareness

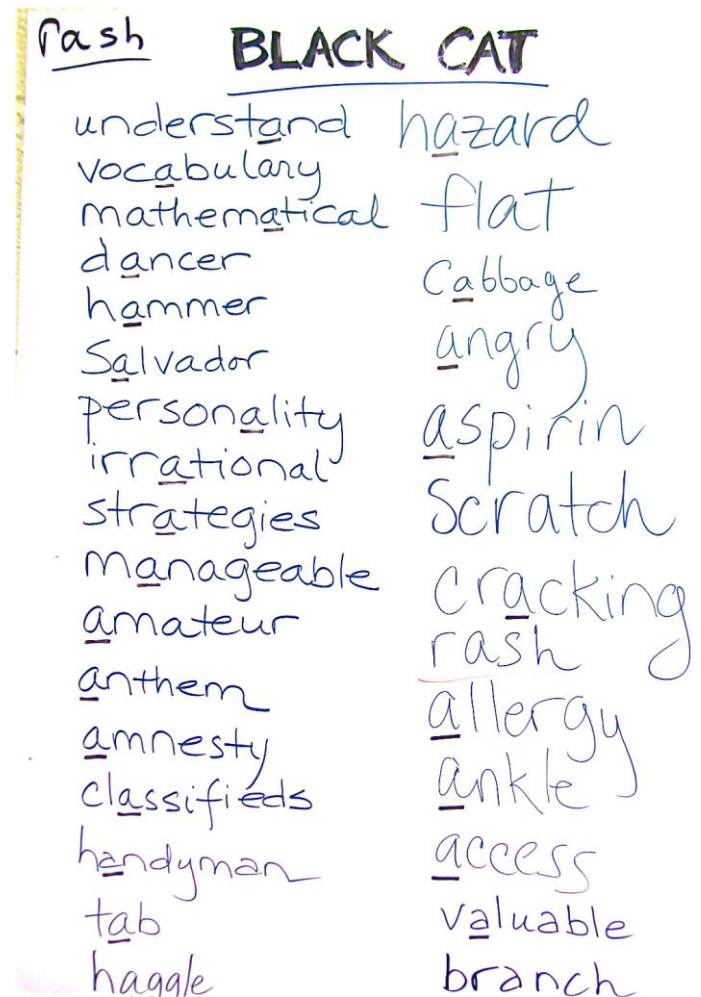
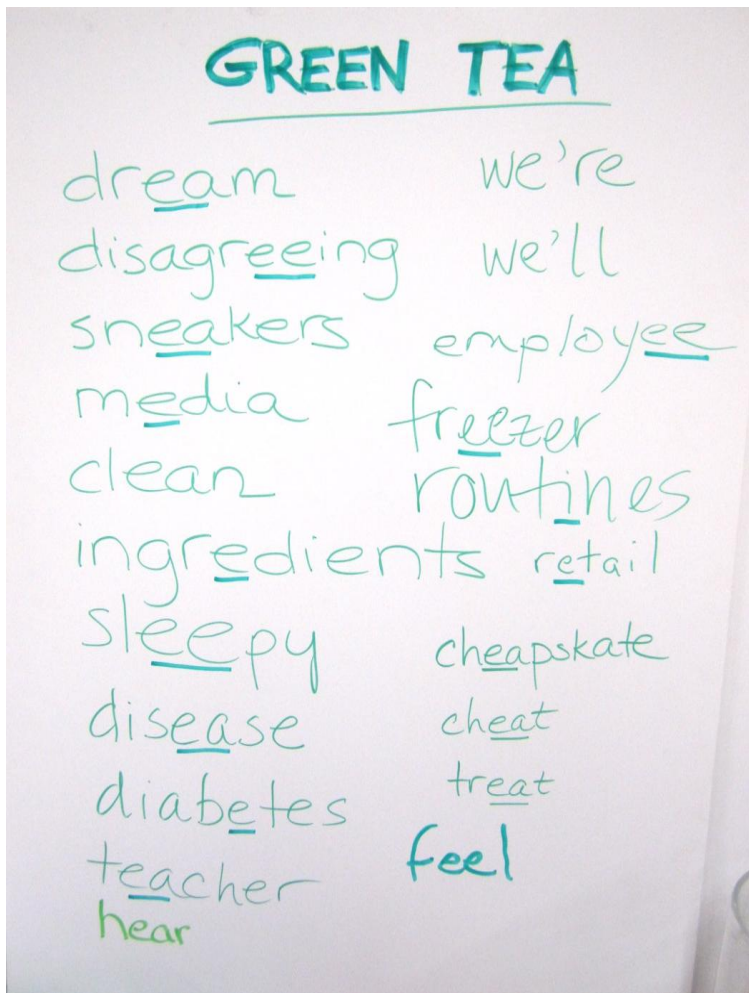
Create

Color Vowel Posters

Collect words by Color.

- Practice all words of the same color together.
- Notice the variety of spelling patterns that can create that Color Vowel

Examples: Color Vowel Wall Charts



Simplifying Classroom Discussions



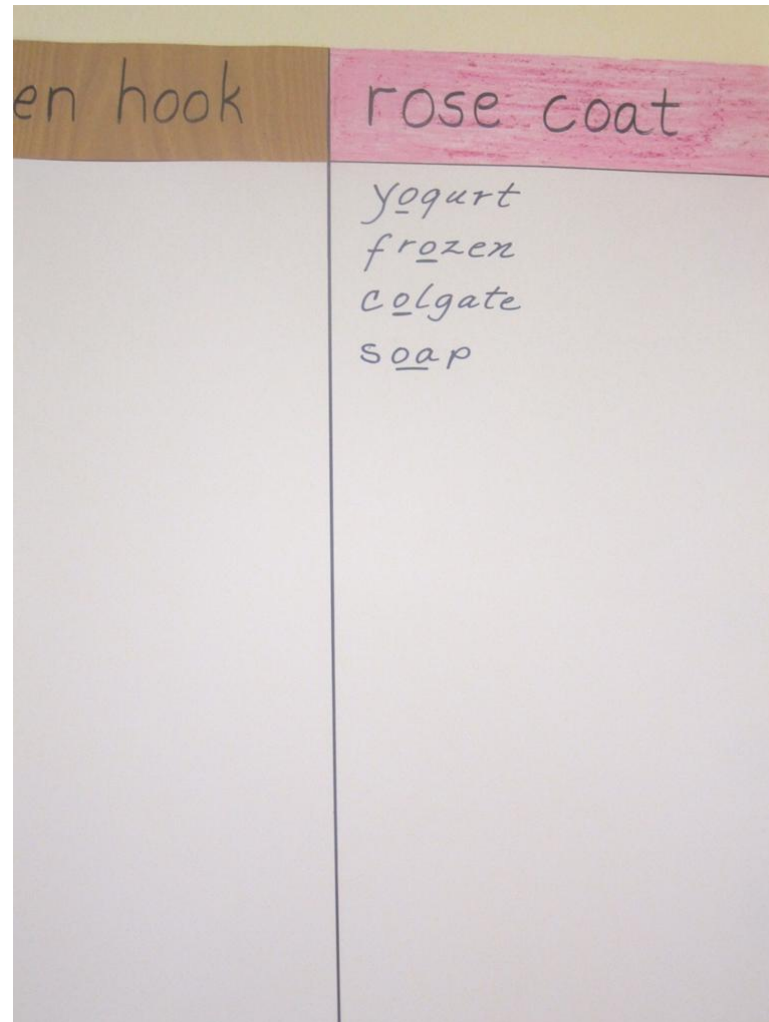
Students add new words to the posters and to their personal word lists.



Another example: a word wall from a lower level class.

Green Tea	Silver Pin	Gray day	red dress	bla
<u>tea</u> meat jeans Fever	chicken nickel	cake	<u>eggs</u> dress sweater head	cra

Some teachers like using colored markers, but once students have learned the vowel sounds associated with the colors, you don't need colored markers.



More examples: Color Vowel Word Lists

*Different classes
have different
styles.*

GREEN
BEAN KEY
OBSCENE Tweet
MOEBA nALvee
EVENING GLEAN
SPEAKing
SMITHerEENS
TREATED

SILVER
INSIPid HE.ro
SIEVE PILFee
WINTER
VIcool SHIFTEd
ILLiterate
INDIVIDUAL i
RIVendell
FINGERboard
DINNER

GRAY
PRAY FADE
CrAyons
PACE FasciNATION
toQUACIOUS doNAtion
MAple FATEful
BRave GAUGE
d-is MAY

RED Expression
LEOPARD CoNTEntion
FrED DECK
proJection
QUESTion HEIFER
deLECtable
REsonANCE
ProJEction
reDEFinition

BLACK
emBARrassed SAAd
Landscape exAmine
LANCunne

GREEN
green tea
silver pin
gray day
red dress
white tie
purple shirt
a cup of mustard
black cat
olive sock
blue moon
wooden hock
rose coat
brown cow
auburn dog
turquoise toy

PURPLE
SERious pUlchrose
FURt VERTex
BERT LURking
CURLY PURfing
TURgid Slurp
MYRRH
JOURNALIST
TURbin

MUSTARD
BUMbling
LOVER GUT
BROwN RUST problem
CoNUNdum
BLOOD Custard
COMFORTABLE
FIlUStand
CLUster

OLIVE
Caught Biotic
PROPERTY

BLUE
Ecu conclusion
ToMBstones
Saloon nEW
sOCUSE SHOE
ACUTE JEWELry
USual pArsonBuro
DEW
DOable
nEW

WOODEN
WOULD
LOOK COULD
WOLF
COOKing
BULlet
SOot ROCKie
STOOD
woman
ROSE
SCROLL
Pros
OATH
BOARDER (LONAtion)
DEVEtEd
enTHRONE
SEW
ENORMOUS
NOse

BROWN
SHOUTED
BOUts
COWBOYS
VOWel
COWard
CLOUDy
Soud
FOot
VOWEL
CLOUD
BOUGH

AUBURN
THOUGHT
COUGH
CAught
ORANGE
Auto on
TAUGHTer
Board
Fillot

Here students are surrounded by Color Vowel wall charts.



By practicing all
of the words of
the same
Color Vowel,
learners form
greater *sound*
awareness.



The Shape of the Color Vowel Chart



VOWEL YOGA: Understanding the Shape of the Chart

Begin at **GREEN TEA**, the high front vowel. Notice how Karen's mouth is "smiling" and wide as she says **GREEN TEA**.



Move down to BLACK CAT. Notice the shape of Karen's mouth. The jaw is lower, as is BLACK CAT's position in the chart.



Notice the shape of the mouth for the high back vowel **BLUE MOON**.



You can help students form the challenging American English /r/ sound by beginning at **OLIVE SOCK**, moving through **A CUP OF MUSTARD** and **PURPLE SHIRT** to the superscript /r/.



Schwa:

the most common sound in English



banana ba **NA** na

Listen to how the two unstressed vowels reduce to schwa. A great example of how one letter - "a" - can behave in two different ways in the same word!





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Let's talk about the y's and the w's.

GREEN, GRAY. WHITE, ROSE, BLUE. BROWN AND TURQUOISE are moving vowels,
The Color Vowel Chart indicates this movement by the superscript ^y or ^w which indicates the **direction**
of the movement.

MOVING VOWELS

IPA Symbol	Color Vowel Chart Symbol and Color
i	i ^y GREEN
eɪ	e ^y GRAY
aɪ	a ^y WHITE
oʊ	o ^w ROSE
u	u ^w BLUE
aʊ	a ^w BROWN
ɔɪ	ɔ ^y TURQUOISE

All of these vowels are moving vowels

(sometimes called tense vowels, diphthongs, glides).

The Color Vowel Chart indicates that movement by the superscript ^y or ^w which indicates the direction of the movement.

STILL VOWELS

ɪ	ɪ SILVER
ɛ	ɛ RED
æ	æ BLACK
ɑ	ɑ OLIVE
ɔ	ɔ AUBURN
ʌ	ʌ MUSTARD
ɜ	ɜ PURPLE
ʊ	ʊ WOODEN

- These vowels are still, non-moving vowels (sometimes called lax vowels or monophthongs)

Notice again how the chart uses watermarks (y r w)
at the top and superscripts ^y and ^w
to remind students of the direction of the movement.



LINKING WITH /y/ AND /w/

- The ^y's and ^w's also serve as a reminder about **vowel-to-vowel linking**, both within words and between words.

Examples

- Within words: *vari^yation, situ^wation*
- Between words: *see^yit, do^wit*

What is the “r” for?

Try identifying the color of these words:

- *here*
- *there*
- *far*
- *fare*
- *sorry*
- *blurry*

Answers

- *here*= green → purple
- *there*=red → purple
- *far*=olive → purple
- *fare*=red/gray → purple
- *sorry*=olive → purple
- *blurry*=purple

there, care, bear, stair



Using the Chart in a Grammar Class

TEACHER: So what color is “read” in the present tense?

STUDENT: GREEN

T: What color is “read” in the past tense?

S: RED

T: What color is “said”?

S: RED

T: What about “say”?

S: GRAY

A few suggestions for introducing the chart. . .

- With very low level students, you don't need to talk about it much, just **use** it.
- More advanced students will benefit from some explanation of the shape of the chart and the movement.
- Look for lessons on how to introduce the chart on the back of the Color Vowel poster.



Indonesia
color vowel
cards are taped
to the
whiteboard

Haiti →
Students will
write their
words on
colored pieces
of paper

The Color Vowel Chart
adapts to its teaching
environment!



Thank you!

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