

# Focus 1



# The English Vowel System



### **Language Objectives:**

◆ to **understand** and **hear** the contrasting vowel sounds of English

**Approx Time:** 90 minutes

### **Materials:**

- ◆ Unstressed Vowel SLIDE
- ◆ Mouth SLIDE
- ◆ /I/ & /ε/ SLIDE
- ◆ Pronunciation Journey Worksheet for each learner
- ◆ /ε/&/ɔ/ SLIDE
- ◆ Listening Discrimination Worksheet/SLIDE
- ◆ /I/&/i<sup>y</sup>/ SLIDE
- ◆ Bingo Card for each learner
- ◆ /o<sup>w</sup>/ & /ʌ/ SLIDE
- ◆ Pronunciation Snap Cards for each pair
- ◆ Vowel Chart SLIDE/Resource Sheet
- ◆ Pronunciation Assessment Page

## English Vowel System

### **Instructions:**

#### **Part A:** *Introduction*

1. A Spanish speaking language professor once said that English was his favourite language because of its musical sounds like songs – *that beautiful singing of birds!*
2. Explain to the learners that pronunciation has two main aspects:
  - The ‘melody’ and tone of phrases, sentences and longer pieces of language (also called ‘prosody’).
  - The individual sounds of vowels and consonants – the smaller pieces
3. In this course we will look at the smaller pieces – the individual sounds and the vowels in particular, Aa, Ee, Ii, Oo, Uu.

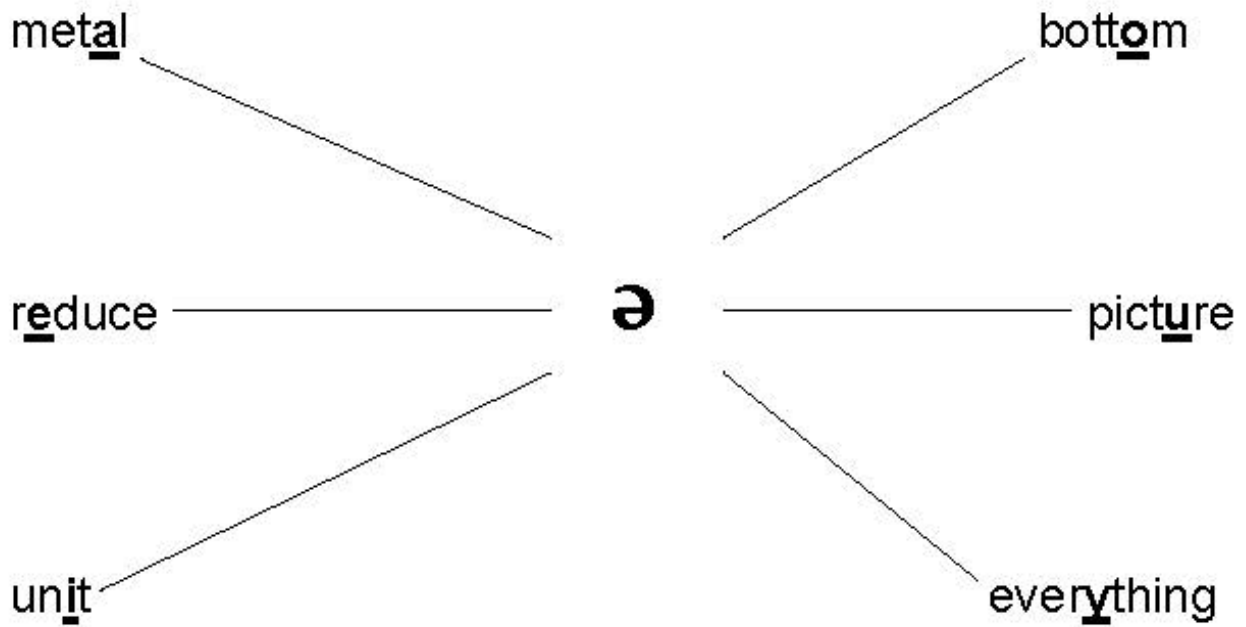
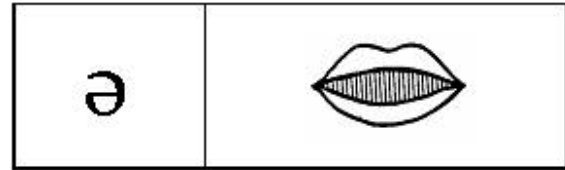
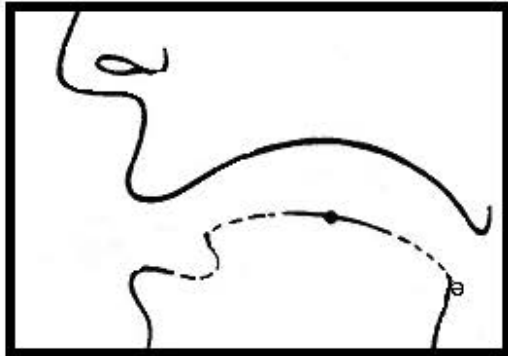


## Beautiful Singing of Birds!

- melody
- individual sounds
  - ◆ consonants
  - ◆ vowels

**Aa Ee Ii Oo Uu**

4. Using David Crystal in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of The English Language* (2004) introduce the following ideas:
- We are used to seeing the written language as a sequence of letters, separated by small segments of space. This is how we were taught to write. We learned to call five of these letters ‘vowels’ (A E I O U), and the others ‘consonants’. We may have learned that letter Y is also ‘sometimes’ used as a vowel.
  - However, the origins of the written language lie in the spoken language, not the other way round. But we tend to think of speech using the frame of reference which belongs to writing.
  - Remind the learners that we have names for the letters of the alphabet which we use for spelling words. We have only 5 vowel letters (Aa Ee Ii Oo Uu) in written English.
  - Review the pronunciation of the names of the letters of the alphabet /e<sup>y</sup>/ /i<sup>y</sup>/ /ay /o<sup>w</sup>/ /u<sup>w</sup>/.
  - When we are speaking English we do not refer to just the spelling of words to know how to pronounce a word.
  - Spelling of words is for reading NOT for speaking, many dialect speakers of English can read the same words and get the meaning but pronounce the words quite differently.
5. Although we have only 5 vowel letters (Aa Ee Ii Oo Uu) in written English, we have more than 15 vowel sounds in spoken Canadian English. We will represent these sounds in written form through the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).
6. Remind the learners that in spoken English, all individual sounds are affected by the sounds that are surrounding them and the rhythm of the phrases they are in.
- **all unstressed syllables have unclear vowel sounds**  
(Use the **Unstressed Vowel SLIDE** to illustrate)



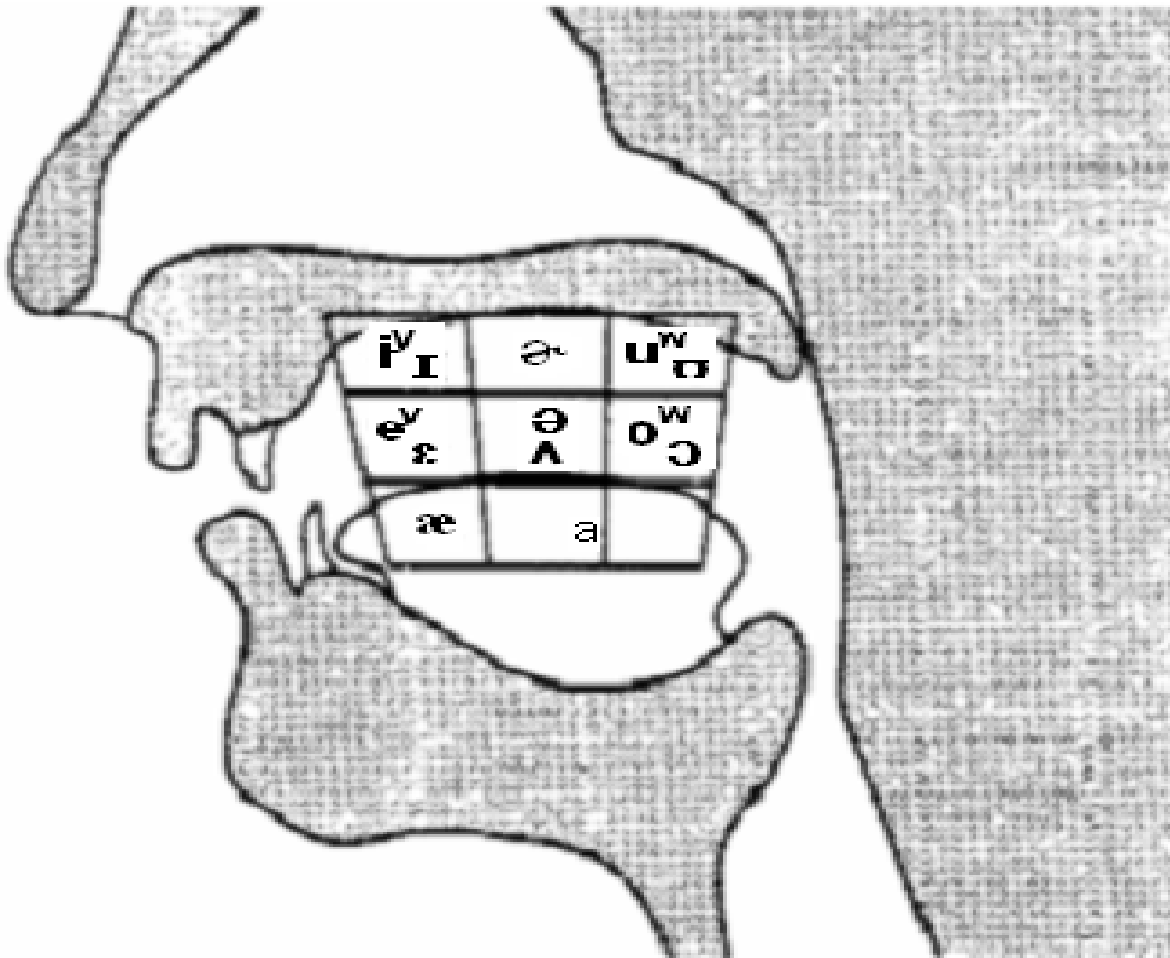
- adapted from *Vowel Dimensions*, Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1983.

Unstressed Vowel SLIDE

**Part B:** *Four Characteristics of Vowel Sounds*

1. We are going to examine the pronunciation of English vowels in stressed syllables.
2. All 15 of the vowel sounds are made with a continuing flow of voiced air.
3. However, each sound has 4 distinguishing properties that need to be in place:  
(use the **Mouth SLIDE** to illustrate):
  - height of tongue
  - placement of tongue – back or front
  - tenseness of mouth muscles
  - roundness of lips



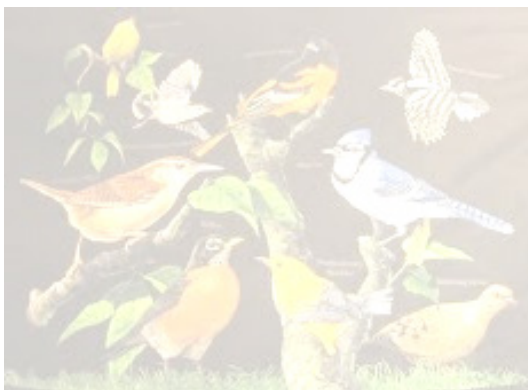


1. Height of tongue
2. Placement of tongue – back or front
3. Tenseness of mouth muscles
4. Roundness of lips

Mouth SLIDE

**Part C:** *Height of Tongue*

1. How high or low the tongue is in the mouth is a factor in producing contrasting vowel sounds. [To illustrate this, show the class how dropping the lower jaw opens the mouth more, thus lowering the tongue.]
2. Demonstrate by comparing the sounds /I/ as in *silver* and /ε/ as in *red*.
  - Use the /I/ & /ε/ **SLIDE** of the 2 sounds.
  - Read the words across while the learners listen to the contrast.
  - Help them to notice the lower position of the lips for /ε/.
  - Have the learners read the words with you.
  - Read one of the words from each pair and ask the learners to raise their left hand or right hand to indicate which one they hear.



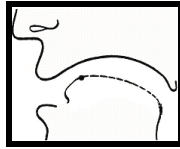




/ɪ/ as in silver



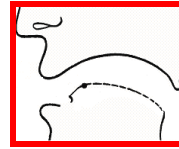
Flicker



/ɛ/ as in red



Wren



thin

will

him

mitt

sit

rid

then

well

hem

met

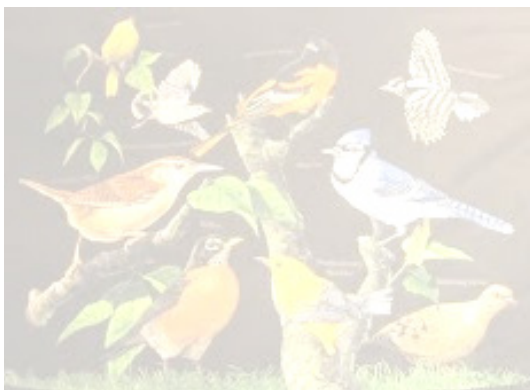
set

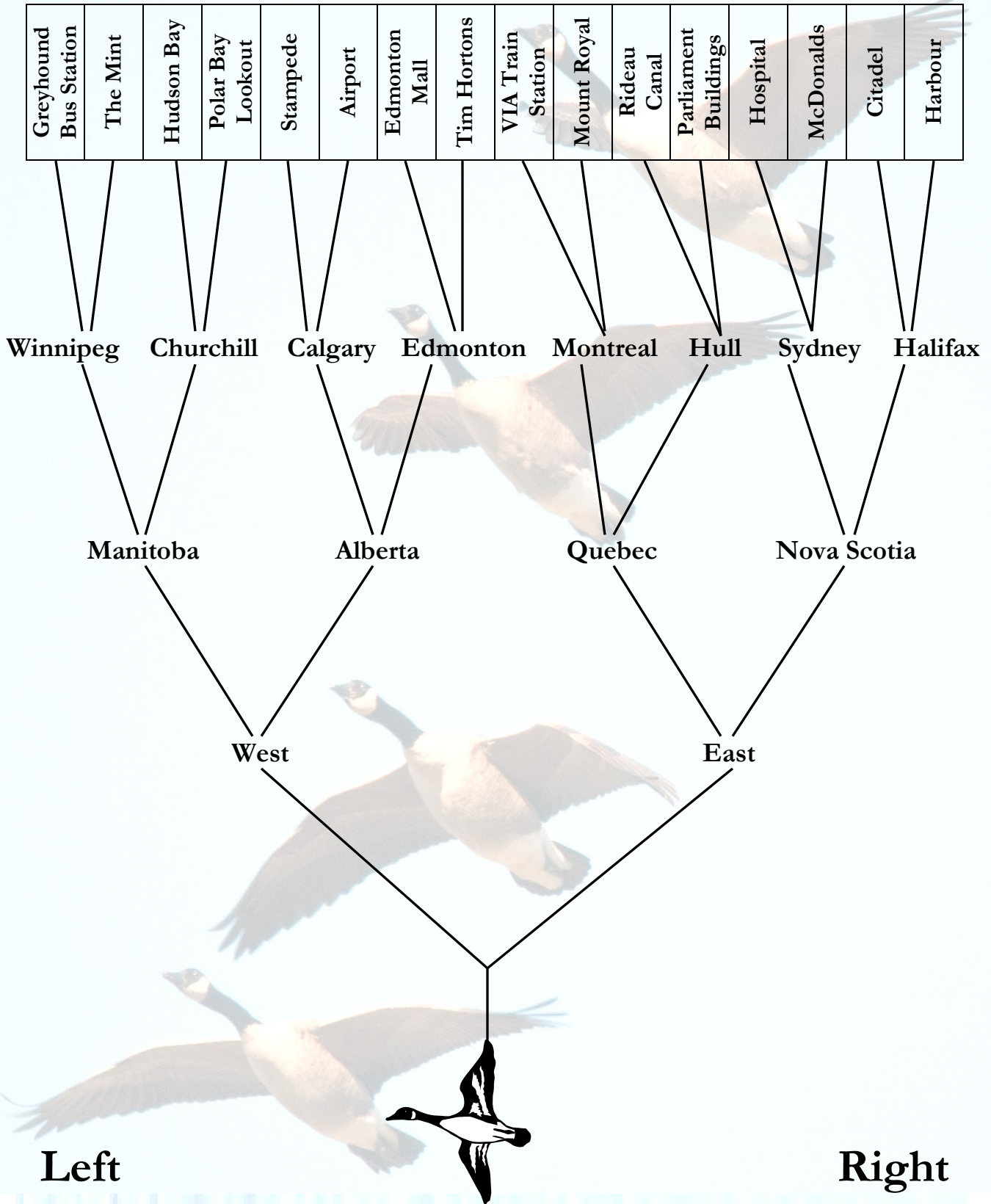
red

- Adapted from *Vowel Dimensions*. Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1983.

/ɪ/ & /ɛ/ SLIDE

- Do a pronunciation activity using the **Canada Goose Worksheet**:
  - Everyone puts their finger on the **Canada Goose** at the bottom of their page.
  - If a word with an **/I/ sound** is said, the finger should go left on the journey.
  - If a word with an **/ε/ sound** is said, the finger goes right.
  - After four randomly chosen words have been said, the learners should check that they are in the same final destination as the caller intended.

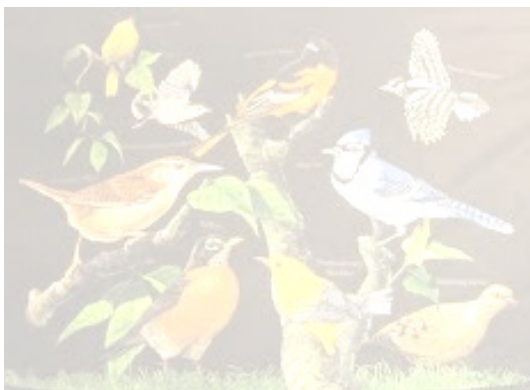




Canada Goose Worksheet

**Part D:** *Placement of Tongue*

1. Another characteristic that is important is whether the front or the back of the tongue is being used. Point out that the lips are more rounded when the back of tongue is used.
2. Demonstrate by comparing the sounds /ɛ/ as in *red* and /ɔ/ as in *bronze*.
  - Use the /ɛ/ & /ɔ/**SLIDE** of the sounds.
  - Read the pairs crosswise while the learners listen to the contrast. Point out the more rounded lips for /ɔ/ as in *bronze*.
  - Have the learners read the words with you.
  - Read one of the words from each pair and ask the learners to raise their left hand or right hand indicating which one they hear.





/ɛ/ as in **red**



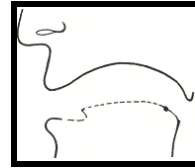
Wren



/ɔ/ as in **bronze**



Robin



set

wetter

Jen

bend

deck

fell

get

hell

red

sought

water

John

bond

dock

fall

got

hall

rod

Adapted from *Teaching American English Pronunciation*, Paul Avery and Susan Elich. Oxford University Press, 1994. & *Vowel Dimensions*, Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1983.

/ɛ/ & /ɔ/ SLIDE

- Do the **Listening Discrimination Worksheet** task: read one of the two words randomly for ten times, and have the learners mark which word they hear as you read them.

**Note to Instructor:** Check off which words you read on a separate **Listening Discrimination Worksheet** to check when done.





		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A	get										
	got										

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
B	fall										
	fell										

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
C	wetter										
	water										

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
D	Jen										
	John										

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
E	bend										
	bond										

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
F	set										
	sought										

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
G	deck										
	dock										

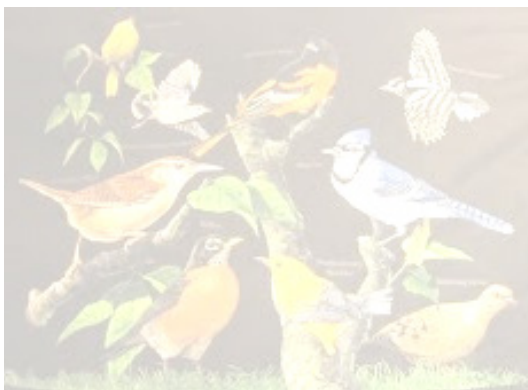
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
H	hell										
	hall										

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I	neck										
	knock										

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
J	pen										
	pawn										

**Part E:** *Tenseness of Mouth Muscles*

1. Whether the muscles of the mouth are tense or relaxed produces different vowel sounds. [Use a rubber band to illustrate tense and relaxed.]
2. Emphasize the glide into the /y /or /w/ sounds in the tense sounds.
3. Demonstrate by comparing /I/as in *silver* & /i<sup>y</sup>/ as in *green* sounds.
  - Use the /I/&/i<sup>y</sup>/ **SLIDE** of the sounds.
  - Read the pairs crosswise while the learners listen to the contrast
  - Point out the movement of the lips tensing into the /y/ sounds in the /i<sup>y</sup>/ as in *green*.
  - Have the learners read the words with you.
  - Read one of the words from each pair and ask the learners to raise their left hand or right hand to indicate which one they hear.







/ɪ/ as in silver



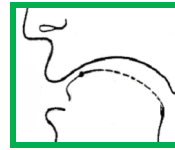
Flicker



/iː/ as in green



Eagle



grin

sit

mitt

bit

his

hit

kill

ship

lip

knit

pit

rim

Tim

wit

green

seat

meat

beat

he's

heat

keel

sheep

leap

neat

Pete

ream

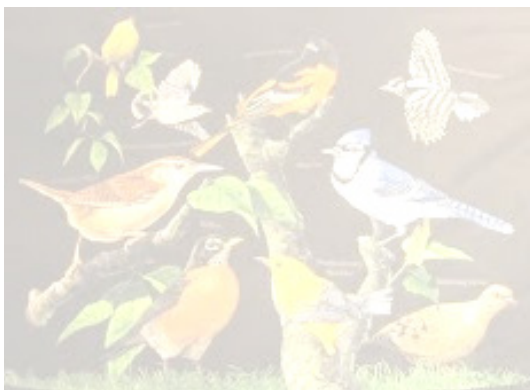
team

wheat

- adapted from *Teaching American English Pronunciation*, Paul Avery and Susan Elrich. Oxford University Press, 1994 & *Vowel Dimensions*, Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1983.

/ɪ/ & /iː/ SLIDE

4. Hand out a **Bingo Card** and markers to each learner.
5. Cut up the **Master List Bingo Words** into an envelope or hat. Pull out and call the words one at a time. [An alternative would be to make an **SLIDE** of the **Master List** that you can mark as you call.]
6. Ask the learners to put a marker on their card over each word they hear.
7. The first learner with five markers in a row calls “Bingo”.
8. The winner reads the five words back for you to check.
9. The winner becomes the caller for the next round.







beat	bet	bit
heat	he's	his
hit	keel	kill
knit	leap	lip
meat	met	mitt
neat	net	pet
Pete	pit	ream
rim	seat	set
sheep	ship	sit
Tom	team	Tim
wet	wheat	wit

Master List Bingo Words /SLIDE

Card 1: /I/ and /iː/

beat	wit	heat	Tim	hit
sit	knit	set	meat	ream
neat	pet		Pete	mitt
rim	lip	sheep	kill	Tom
his	wet	bit	wheat	bet

Card 2: /I/ and /iː/

team	wit	Tim	sit	met
ship	set	ream	pet	leap
seat	mitt		lip	keel
pit	kill	his	bit	he's
net	wet	Tom	sheep	bet



Card 3: /I/ and /iː/

bit	his	kill	lip	mitt
pet	ream	set	sit	Tim
wit	bet	FREE	he's	keel
leap	met	net	pit	seat
ship	team	wheat	wet	Tom

Card 4: /I/ and /iː/

sheep	rim	Pete	neat	meat
knit	hit	heat	beat	ship
sit	met	FREE	mitt	keel
kill	bet	bit	Tom	net
wet	lip	leap	team	Tim

**Part F:** *Roundness of the Lips*

1. How rounded the lips are affects the quality of the vowel [Use your own lips to illustrate this.]
2. The vowels formed using the front of the tongue at the front of the mouth use less rounded lips than the vowel sounds using the back of the tongue. The rounded sounds are /o<sup>w</sup>/ *gold*/, /ʊ/ *wood*/, /u<sup>w</sup>/ *blue* and /ɔ/ *bronze*.
3. Demonstrate by comparing the sounds /o<sup>w</sup>/ as in *gold* & /ʌ/ as in *rust* sound
  - Use the /o<sup>w</sup>/ & /ʌ/ **SLIDE** of the sounds.
  - Read the pairs crosswise while the learners listen to the contrast.
  - Point out the more rounded lips for /o<sup>w</sup>/ as in *gold*, becoming even more tensely rounded on the /w/ sound.
  - Have the learners read the words with you.
  - Read one of the words from each pair and ask the learners to raise their left hand or right hand indicating which one they hear.





**/o<sup>w</sup> / as in gold**



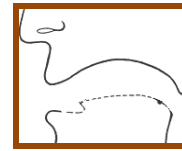
Goldfinch



**/ʌ/ as in rust**



Dove

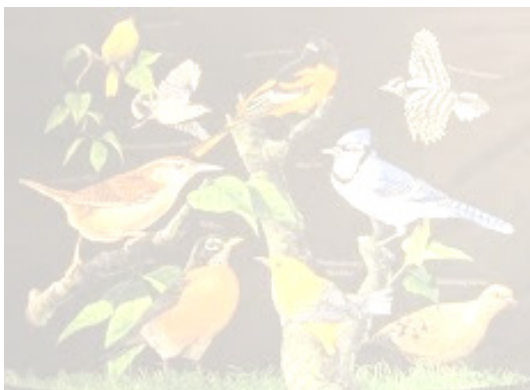


boat  
coat  
code  
dome  
goat  
mode  
known  
wrote  
sewn  
gold  
roast

but  
cut  
cud  
dumb  
gut  
mud  
none  
rut  
sun  
gulled  
rust

Adapted from *Teaching American English Pronunciation*, Paul Avery and Susan Elrich. Oxford University Press, 1994. & *Vowel Dimensions*, Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1983. /o<sup>w</sup>/ & /ʌ/ SLIDE

4. Have the learners form pairs. Give each pair of learners a set of **Pronunciation Snap Cards**.
5. **Explain that the** aim of the activity is to win the most cards (*and to pronounce the words correctly!!*)
  - Divide the cards equally between both partners.
  - Keep the cards face down in a pile.
  - The learners must take turns turning the cards face up in a pile on the table, saying the words aloud.
  - If one learner notices that the vowel sound in the word is the same on the top cards of both piles, this learner must say “SNAP”. This learner then wins the pile of his/her partner.
  - These cards are shuffled and added to the cards in the winner’s hands.
  - When one of the learners is out of cards, the round is over.







boat	boat	coat	coat	code	code	dome	dome
goat	goat	mode	mode	known	known	wrote	wrote
sewn	sewn	but	but	cut	cut	cud	cud
dud	dud	gut	gut	mutt	mutt	none	none

Pronunciation Snap Cards pg 1

rut	so	was	Holy
rut	so	was	Holy
sun	chosen	spoke	up
sun	chosen	spoke	up
up	suffer	know	those
up	suffer	know	those
no	showed	go	suddenly
no	showed	go	suddenly

Pronunciation Snap Cards pg 2

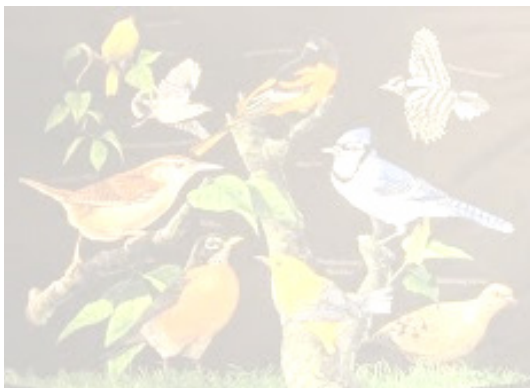


own	own	son	suppose	over
own	own	son	suppose	over
come	come	one	drunk	broke
come	come	one	drunk	broke
brother	brother	blowing	fun	only
brother	brother	blowing	fun	only
mother	mother	whole	under	tongue
mother	mother	whole	under	tongue

Pronunciation Snap Cards pg 3

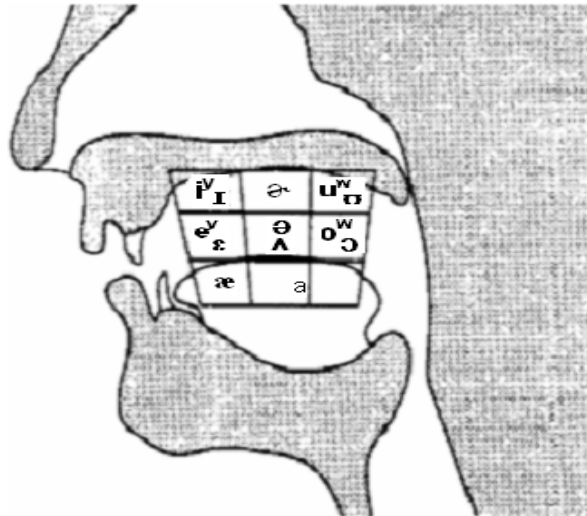
**Part G:** *Producing Vowel Sounds*

1. Present the complete **Vowel Chart SLIDE/Resource Sheet** that illustrates all the vowel sounds.
  - Drill all the sounds and the colour word samples.
2. As you are doing these tasks focusing on the vowel sounds of Canadian English, assess your learners and record any concerns in the appropriate box(s) on the **Pronunciation Assessment Page**.





## Canadian Vowels



		front <i>(unrounded)</i>	central <i>(unrounded)</i>	back <i>(rounded)</i>
<b>high</b>	tense	<b>i<sup>y</sup></b> (beat, green)	ə (bird, purple)	<b>u<sup>w</sup></b> (boot, blue)
	lax	<b>I</b> (bit, silver)		<b>ʊ</b> (book, soot)
<b>mid</b>	tense	<b>e<sup>y</sup></b> (bait, grey)	ə (m <u>a</u> chine, ol <u>i</u> ve)	<b>o<sup>w</sup></b> (boat, gold)
	lax	<b>ε</b> (bet, red)	<b>ʌ</b> (but, rust)	<b>ɔ</b> (bought, bronze)
<b>low</b>	lax	<b>æ</b> (bat, black )		a (pot) [American]

### Five-vowel System of Some Other Languages

	front	central	back
<b>high</b>	i		u
<b>mid</b>	e		o
<b>low</b>		a	

- Adapted from Paul Avery and Susan Elrich. *Teaching American English Pronunciation*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

Vowel Chart SLIDE/Resource Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

First Language \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Pronunciation			
Consonants		Vowels	Prosody
/p/ /b/		beat	Pauses
/t/ /d/		bit	Word Stress
/k/ /g/		bait	Phrase Stress
/f/ /v/		bet	Linking
/ð/ /θ/		bat	Prominence
/s/ /z/		bird	Emphasis
/ʃ/ /tʃ/		but	Statement intonation
/dʒ/ /dʒ/		boot	Yes/no? intonation
/l/ /r/		book	Wh-? intonation
/m/ /n/ /ŋ/		boat	Speed
/y/ /w/		bought	Overall comprehensibility

1. Initial Basic Proficiency:	Pronunciation difficulties may significantly impede communication.
2. Developing Basic Proficiency:	Makes long pauses; pronunciation difficulties often impede communication.
3. Adequate Basic Proficiency:	Pronunciation difficulties still frequently impede communication; sometimes needs assistance.
4. Fluent Basic Proficiency:	Pronunciation difficulties may impede communication; needs only a little assistance.
5. Initial Intermediate Proficiency:	Errors of pronunciation are frequent & sometimes impede communication.
6. Developing Intermediate Proficiency:	Errors of pronunciation are frequent & sometimes impede communication.
7. Adequate Intermediate Proficiency:	Errors of pronunciation still frequent but rarely impede communication.
8. Fluent Intermediate Proficiency:	Errors of pronunciation rarely impede communication.
9. Initial Advanced Proficiency:	Difficulties with pronunciation very rarely impede communication.
10. Developing Advanced Proficiency:	Difficulties with pronunciation very rarely impede communication.
11. Adequate Advanced Proficiency:	Difficulties with pronunciation do not impede communication.
12. Fluent Advanced Proficiency:	Difficulties with pronunciation do not impede communication.

Individual Sounds						Stress/Rhythm Intonation					
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	7	8	9	10	11	12

Pronunciation Assessment Page