

Syllable Inspectors

Domain: Phonics

Objective: To distinguish syllable types based on the vowel position or pattern

Target students: K – 1st graders

Materials: Pre-planned words for the syllable type being introduced written on cards¹, vowel posters, rule cards for syllable types, and magnifying glass—real or pretend

Background information for this activity:

Most words in English are composed of one or a combination of six syllable types. The syllable types are distinguished by the position or pattern of the vowel (V), which indicates how the vowel sound is pronounced. The six syllable types are:

- **Closed** (VC, CVC)—at, Ed, it, on, up; cap, bit, pet, tot, cut (short vowel sound)
- **Open** (CV)—be, I, my (long vowel sound)
- **Silent e** (VCe)—cape, bite, Pete, tote, cute (long vowel sound)
- **Vowel teams** (VV)
 - **Talker Pattern**—rain, boat (long vowel sound)
 - **Whiner Pattern**—boil, boy (vowel sound is neither long nor short but a different sound called a diphthong)
- **R-controlled** (Vr)—far, for, her, fir, fur,
- **Consonant-le** (C-le)—*candle*, *table*, *gurgle*

Knowledge of the syllable types helps readers know how to pronounce the vowel sound within the combination of letters.

How to do activity:

This activity—***Syllable Inspectors***—is designed to teach students to “inspect” the pattern of letters to determine the pronunciation of the vowel sound. Introduce each syllable pattern with the following basic steps:

1. Tell students that they are going to inspect words to learn what sound to say for the vowel letter(s) in them. Knowing how to inspect the vowel and the consonant(s) that may come after the vowel helps us read and spell new words.
2. Review the vowels sounds (e.g., short, long, r-controlled) that are the focus of the targeted syllable pattern for the lesson.
3. Display a word as a model of the pattern. Use the magnifying glass to inspect the word to identify the pattern of letters to determine the position—and therefore the sound—represented by the vowel letter(s).
4. Tell the Syllable Story that describes the pattern of letters that we *see* and the vowel sound that we *hear*.
5. Post the syllable pattern rule card for the specific pattern you are teaching. Review the characteristics on the rule card while using the model word to illustrate how it works.
6. Practice with additional words from the pre-planned list of words.
7. Sort words/syllables according to their syllable types as a way to check for understanding of the targeted patterns.

Closed syllables

The pre-planned words to introduce the Closed Syllable pattern include:

Closed syllables—at, cat, mat, sat, mast, map, dad, sad, mad, it, sit, did, in, tin, dim, mint, mist, sis, hat, hit, him, had, hid, hit, tint

Non-closed syllables—see, too, be, my, I

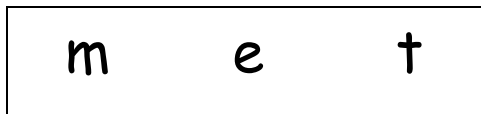
1. Tell students that they are going to inspect—that is, look closely at—some words to learn why the vowel sounds say their short sound. Knowing how to inspect the vowel in words helps us read and spell new words.
2. Review the short sounds for the vowels using the vowel posters and gestures to cue those sounds: **apple** - / ă /, **itch** - / i /, **echo** - / e /, **octopus** - / o /, **up** - / u /.
3. Display the word **cat**. Have students identify the vowel sound (/ ă / as in **apple**). Display the word **in**. Have students identify the vowel sound (/ i / as in **itch**).
4. Use the magnifying glass to inspect the word and discuss the conditions that make the vowel sound short. Tell the story for Closed Syllables: When one vowel is followed by one or more consonants, the vowel sound is usually short. When we *see* these conditions in a word, the vowel sound we *hear* is usually short.
5. Show the syllable pattern rule card for Closed Syllables. Review the characteristics on the rule card while using the model word to illustrate how it works.
6. Display other closed syllable words. Have students take turns using the magnifying glass to inspect each word to see if the word follows the pattern for a closed syllable. Continue until students are accurately and consistently recognizing that the words have one vowel followed by at least one consonant. Explain that these are closed syllables—the vowel is closed in by the consonant at the end.
7. Display **see**. Inspect the word to determine if it follows the pattern for a closed syllable. Help students to see that **see** has two vowel letters and no consonant after the vowels. The word **see** doesn't follow the pattern for a closed syllable.
8. Pass out closed syllable and non-closed syllable word cards to the students. Practice being Syllable Inspectors to decide if each word is a closed syllable word or not. Sort the words on a bulletin board, pocket chart or into columns on the floor or table as either closed syllables and non-closed syllables.
9. After all of the words are sorted, read the list of closed syllable words and review the closed syllable conditions-- one vowel with one or more consonants after the vowel. When we see these conditions in a word, the vowel sound is usually short.

Open syllables

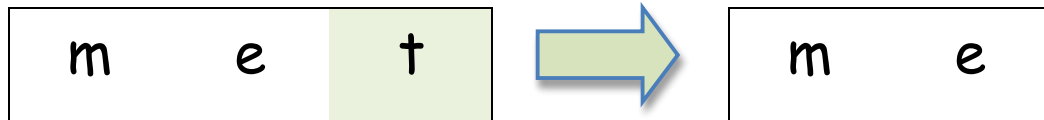
The pre-planned words to introduce the Open Syllable pattern include: met (me), not (no), got (go), bet (be), hit (hi).

The words should be written on index cards or strips of paper so that the final letter (see shaded box in #5 below) can be folded back after the vowel to change from the closed to the open syllable pattern. Make two of each card—one that will be left as a closed syllable and one that will be folded back to create an open syllable.

1. Tell students that they are going to continue to be Syllable Inspectors to learn what the vowel sounds are in words.
2. Review the short and long sounds for the vowels: **apple** - / ă /, **itch** - / i /, **echo** - / e /, **octopus** - / o /, **up** - / u /; **acorn** - / a /, **eagle** / e /, **ice cream** - / i /, **overalls** - / o /, **unicorn** - / u /.
3. Review the conditions for a closed syllable: one vowel with one or more consonants after the vowel. When we see these conditions in a word, the vowel sound is usually short.
4. Display the word **met**. Have students inspect the word to determine if it is a closed syllable. Tell the story to review the conditions for Closed Syllables.



5. Fold the **t** back on the duplicate card of the word **met**. Use the magnifying glass to inspect the word and discuss the conditions that make the vowel sound long. Tell the story for Open Syllables: When one vowel letter is at the end of a syllable with NO consonants after it, the vowel sound is long. When we *see* these conditions in a word, the vowel sound we *hear* is usually long.



6. Show the syllable pattern rule card for Open Syllables. Review the characteristics on the rule card while using the model word to illustrate how it works.
7. Illustrate the change from closed to open syllable with another one of the words on the pre-planned cards. Continue with the remaining pre-planned cards having students use the magnifying glass to be Syllable Inspectors.
8. Sort the words on a bulletin board, pocket chart or into columns on the floor or table as either closed syllables or open syllables.
9. After all of the words are sorted, read the list of closed syllable words and review the conditions for closed syllables—one vowel with one or more consonants after the vowel. When we see these conditions in a word, the vowel sound is usually short. Review conditions for open syllables—one vowel with NO consonants after the vowel. The vowel sound is usually long.

Silent e Syllable

The pre-planned words to introduce the Silent e Syllable pattern include:

cap – cape, bit – bite, pet – Pete, tot – tote, cut – cute.

Another set of words to practice the relationship between Closed and Silent e Syllables:

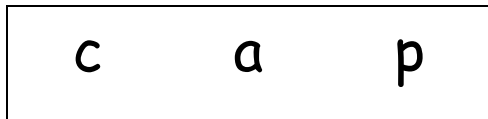
at – ate, tap – tape, hop – hope, us – use, rid – ride

Additional Silent e Syllable words:

make, bake, hike, tame, came, late, cube, kite, time, here

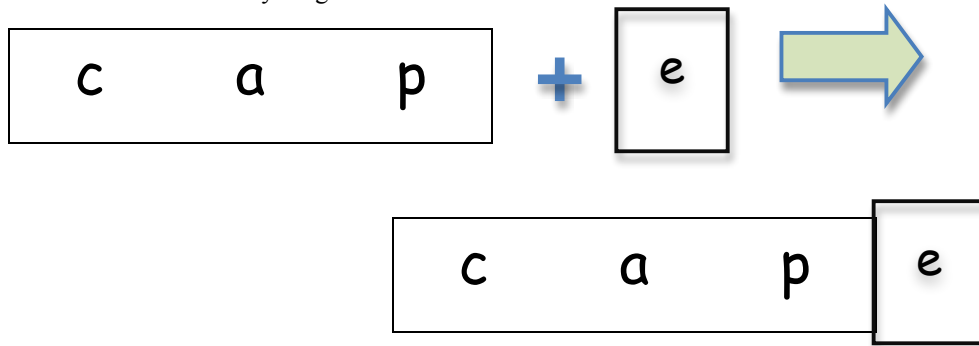
Index card with “e” written on it

1. Tell students that they are going to continue to be Syllable Inspectors to learn what the vowel sounds are in words.
2. Review the short and long sounds for the vowels: **apple** - / ă /, **itch** - / i /, **echo** - / e /, **octopus** - / o /, **up** - / u /; **acorn** - / a /, **eagle** / e /, **ice cream** - / i /, **overalls** - / o /, **unicorn** - / u /.
3. Use the Syllable Rule Card to review the conditions for Closed Syllable: one vowel with one or more consonants after the vowel. When we see these conditions in a word, the vowel sound is usually short.
4. Display the word **cap**. Have students inspect the word to determine if it is a Closed Syllable. Review the story for Closed syllables.



5. Place the index card with the letter “e” at the end of the word and say the word **cape**. Use the magnifying glass to inspect the word and discuss the impact of adding the letter “e” at the end. Tell the story for the Silent e Syllable: When a word has a vowel followed by a consonant followed by a final e, the e at the end signals the other vowel to say its name—it’s long sound. The

final **e** gives away its power, so it is silent. When we *see* these conditions in a word, the vowel sound we *hear* is usually long.



6. Show the syllable pattern rule card for the Silent e Syllable. Review the characteristics on the rule card while using the model word to illustrate how it works.
7. Illustrate the change from Closed to Silent e Syllable with another one of the word pairs on the pre-planned cards. Continue with the remaining pre-planned cards having students use the magnifying glass to be Syllable Inspectors.
8. Sort the words on a bulletin board, pocket chart or into columns on the floor or table as either Closed Syllables or Silent e Syllables.
9. After all of the words are sorted, read the list of Closed Syllable words and review the conditions for Closed Syllables—one vowel with one or more consonants after the vowel. When we see these conditions in a word, the vowel sound is usually short. Review conditions for Silent e Syllables—when one vowel is followed by a consonant and then an “e,” the first vowel sound is usually long and the final “e” is silent.

Vowel Team Syllables

Vowel Teams are divided into two groups—each with a distinctive difference.

- The vowel sound in one group of vowel teams is the long sound (i.e., the name of the first vowel). These vowel teams include: **ai, ay, ee, ea, ie, oe, ow** (/ o /), **ui**, and **ue**. For instructional purposes, this group is called “Talkers” because the first vowel says its name.
- In the other group of vowel teams, the vowel sound is neither short nor long but different; this group of vowel teams is called diphthongs. These vowel teams include: **ow, au, aw, oi, oy, oo** (boo and book), **ew**. The sounds represented by these vowel teams are whiney sounds, so this group is called “Whiners.”

To help students learn words in each group. Introduce them separately and practice them until students recognize the words in one group (e.g., Talkers) before introducing the other group (e.g., Whiners). This is especially important for the purpose of spelling. It can be confusing to introduce too many teams at the same time.

Preplanned words to introduce Vowel Teams – Talkers: rain, train, brain, faint, paint; say, stay, pay, gray, tray; tree, bee, see, free, green, seem; tie, pie, lie; toe, doe, Joe; mow, blow, snow, glow; suit, fruit; blue, glue, true

1. Tell students that they are going to inspect some words to learn another way that vowels look when they say their long sounds. Knowing how to inspect the vowels in words helps us read and spell new words.
2. Review the long sounds for the vowels using the vowel posters to cue these sounds: **acorn** - / a /, **eagle** / e /, **ice cream** - / i /, **overalls** - / o /, **unicorn** - / u /
3. Display and say the word **rain**. Have students identify the vowel sound (/ a / as in **acorn**).

4. Use the magnifying glass to inspect the word and discuss the conditions that make the vowel say its long sound. Tell the story for the Talkers on the Vowel Team: When we see two vowels side-by-side in a word, sometimes the first one says its name, which is the long sound. When we *see* these conditions, the vowel sound we *hear* is usually long.
5. Show the syllable pattern rule card for Vowel Team – Talkers. Review the characteristics on the rule card while using the model word to illustrate how it works.
6. Display other Vowel Team – Talkers words. Have students take turns using the magnifying glass to inspect each word to see if the word follows the pattern for a Vowel Team – Talker. Continue until students are accurately and consistently recognizing that the words that have two vowel letters side-by-side say the name of the first vowel letter. This is the long sound.

Preplanned words to introduce Vowel Teams—Whiners: now, how, cow, howl, plow, growl; fault, vault, maul, auto; saw, raw, paw, claw; oil, boil, soil, spoil; boy, soy, toy, ploy; boo, soon, spoon, fool, pool; book, look, cook, took

1. Tell students that they are going to inspect some words to learn another sound for Vowel Teams. Knowing how to inspect the vowels in words helps us read and spell new words.
2. Review the short and long sounds for the vowels: **apple** - / ă /, **itch** - / i /, **echo** - / e /, **octopus** - / o /, **up** - / u /; **acorn** - / a /, **eagle** / e /, **ice cream** - / i /, **overalls** - / o /, **unicorn** - / u /. Explain that there are some Vowel Teams that say very different sounds, called diphthongs. Diphthong sounds aren't long or short.
3. Display and say the word **now**. Have students identify the vowel sound (/ ow /). Point out that the letter **o** isn't saying its name (/ o /) or short sound (/ o /).
4. Use the magnifying glass to inspect the word and discuss the conditions that make the vowel say this different sound. Tell the story for the Whiners on the Vowel Team: Sometimes when we see two vowels side-by-side in a word, they make a funny whining sound, like when you fall down and say “ow,” “aw,” and “oi.” When we *see* these conditions, the vowel sound we *hear* may be a whiny one.
5. Show the syllable pattern rule card for Vowel Team – Whiners. Review the characteristics on the rule card while using the model word to illustrate how it works.
6. Display other Vowel Team – Whiner words. Have students take turns using the magnifying glass to inspect each word to see if the word follows the pattern for a Vowel Team – Whiner. Continue until students are accurately and consistently recognizing that these words that have two vowel letters side-by-side say the diphthong, that is whiny, sound.

After students are reading each group of Vowel Team words accurately (i.e., the Talker group and the Whiner group), mix together the words from the preplanned cards from both groups. Have students sort the words into the Talkers and the Whiners.

R-controlled (Bossy r) Syllable

The pre-planned words to introduce the R-controlled Syllable pattern include:

ar—rat, art, ram, arm, car, star, cart, bar, dart, part, chart, shark, hard, yard
 or—rob, orb (use this pair for introduction); or, cord, corn, born, horn, morn, torn, for, fort
 er—her, fern, clerk
 ir—fir, first, skirt
 ur—fur, turn, hurt

Index card with “r” written on it

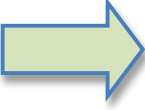
1. Tell students that they are going to continue to be Syllable Inspectors to learn what the vowel sounds are in words they read and spell.

- Review the long sounds for the vowels **acorn** - / a /, **eagle** / e /, **ice cream** - / i /, **overalls** - / o /, **unicorn** - / u / and the short sounds for the vowels **apple** - / ă /, **itch** - / i /, **echo** - / e /, **octopus** - / o /, **up** - / u /.
- Display the letter **r**. Explain that sometimes **r** partners with vowels. Tell the story of how **r** came to work with the vowels: **R** wanted to be important like the vowels and wished his name could be a sound heard in words too. **R** had an idea. It offered to help the vowels. The vowels were worried because the **r** was fond of being bossy. (Write the word **rat** on the board or a piece of chart paper.)

r	a	t
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- Continue the story about how the **r** came to work with the vowels. Tell students that the vowel **a** was especially doubtful; she said, “I smell a rat!” But **r** didn’t give up. “I really want to be helpful, so he offered to let the vowel be first in words. (Write the word **art** next to the word **rat** emphasizing the order of the letters **a** and **r**.)

r	a	t
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a	r	t
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Sure enough, as soon as **a** moved in front of **r** she noticed she could no longer say her short sound. Instead, she said something completely unexpected... / ar /. “What’s going on?” she asked. “I can’t even hear myself anymore. In fact all I hear is your name **r**.” **R** just smiled.

Then **a** said, “I’ve heard enough. I’m leaving.” Suddenly **r** realized that with the **a** gone there was no long a word (**rt**). Every word needs a vowel. **R** couldn’t say its name unless **a** came before him. **R** had to think of a way to get **a** to stay.

R said, “Together we’ve made a completely new vowel sound... / ar /. Together we can make lots of new words: **far**, **star**, **cart** (write these words on the board or chart paper).

A was happy because she found that she could be part of the new sound with **r** and still have her short sound if she changed position to come after **r** (**art** to **rat**).

- Show the syllable pattern rule card for the R-controlled Syllable. Review the characteristics on the rule card: The **r** is **bossy** and takes over the sound of the vowel. The vowel can’t say its short or long sound, but says a sound with the **r**.
- Illustrate the change from Closed to R-controlled with another preplanned words for **ar** (**ram**). Illustrate how reversing the order of the letters **r** and **a**, the word becomes **arm**.
- Continue with the remaining pre-planned cards having students use the magnifying glass to look for the **ar** combination. Be sure to have students practice saying the sound / ar /.

Follow the same procedure to introduce the other r-controlled vowel patterns and corresponding sounds: **or** (/ or /); **er**, **ir**, **ur** (/ er /)¹. Use the syllable pattern rule card for the R-controlled Syllable to review the letter patterns and corresponding pronunciations. Use the following story to explain why there are only three bossy r sounds even though there are five vowels.

Continue the story about how the **r** came to work with the vowels. Tell students that the vowel **o** was also lucky and got to form a new vowel sound that is also a word – **or**. Naturally the

remaining vowels **e**, **i**, and **u** pestered **r** for a chance to pair up to create a new vowel sound. By now **r** began to realize that with increased importance comes more work. He was tired! Finally **r** announced he would only make one additional sound—/ *er* /. The remaining vowels were left to figure out who would get the last sound. After a lot of bickering, they concluded it was only fair to share the / *er* / sound, which is why **er**, **ir**, and **ur** all sound the same.

¹There are three spellings for the / *er* / sound: **er**, **ir**, **ur**. Unfortunately there are no rules to help choose the correct spelling. The recommendation is to choose **er** first because it is the most frequently used of the three spellings, followed by **ir** and finally **ur**.

Consonant – le Syllable

The Consonant – le Syllable is *always* the final syllable in a multi-syllable word—it never stands alone as a word, therefore this type of syllable always joins with another type of syllable to make a word. For this reason, the preplanned word lists for Syllable Inspector are organized according to the first syllable in the words—Closed, Open, or R-controlled; the second (final) syllable in each word is the Consonant – le Syllable.

The preplanned words to introduce the Closed + Consonant - le Syllable pattern include – *candle*, *handle*, *simple*, *uncle*, *bubble*, *jungle* (Write each syllable on a separate card—can + dle, and so on.)

The preplanned words to introduce the Open + Consonant - le Syllable pattern include – *table*, *cradle*, *title*, *fable*, *idle* (Write each syllable on a separate card—ta + ble, and so on.)

The preplanned words to introduce the R-controlled + Consonant - le Syllable pattern include - *marble*, *gurgle*, *purple*, *sparkle*, *hurdle* (Write each syllable on a separate card—mar + ble, and so on.)

To introduce the Consonant – le Syllable pattern, focus on one of the preplanned word lists at a time.

1. Tell students that they are going to continue to be Syllable Inspectors to learn what the vowel sounds are in words they read and spell. Explain that the next syllable pattern is very unusual because it is always combined with another type of syllable to make a longer (i.e., multi-syllable) word.
2. Display the first syllable in **candle** (**can**). Review the story for Closed Syllables: When one vowel is followed by one or more consonants after the vowel, the vowel sound is usually short. When we *see* these conditions in a word, the vowel sound we *hear* is usually short. Have students read the syllable.

c	a	n
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3. Display the second syllable in **candle** (dle). Say the syllable for the students and explain that the vowel sound they hear is between the consonant (**d**) and the **le**, but you don't see the sound you hear. Tell the story for the Consonant - le Syllable: When you see a **consonant + l + e** as the last syllable in a word, the vowel in the syllable doesn't sound like a short or long vowel sound. The "l" bosses the syllable and makes the **e** silent.

c	a	n
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d	l	e
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4. Show the syllable pattern rule card for the Consonant -le Syllable. Review the characteristics on the rule card while using the model word to illustrate how it works.
5. Continue to display the two syllables that make up the words on the preplanned word list. Guide students to inspect each syllable to determine the pattern to know how to say the vowel sound.
6. Follow the same procedure to introduce the other combination of syllables (e.g., Open, R-controlled) with Consonant -le and corresponding sounds.