

“VOWEL PHONEMES THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF READING”

Vowel sounds are the speech sounds we make when the air flows freely through the mouth, without being blocked by the lips, teeth, or tongue. They are the main part of a syllable – the bit of the word that gives it its ‘voice’ or centre.

Vowel sounds are the building blocks of reading. When children understand them, they can unlock words, spot patterns in spelling, and read with confidence.



/ă/

Studying phonemes enables us to accurately identify and differentiate between words. Small changes in phonemes can completely alter the meaning of a word. For example, the difference between "bin" and "bun" lies in the medial vowel phoneme (/i/ versus /u/).





VOWEL VALLEY

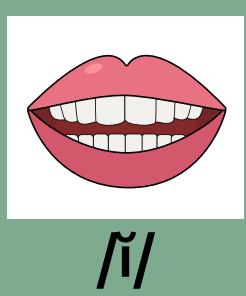
Vowel phonemes differ in terms of how they are produced. The position and shape of the tongue, the openness of the mouth, and the placement of the lips all contribute to the articulation of vowel sounds.



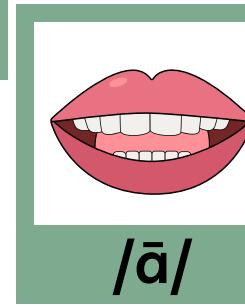
They are often displayed as a V-shaped valley because they are organized based on the position of the tongue, jaw, and lips when producing the sounds.



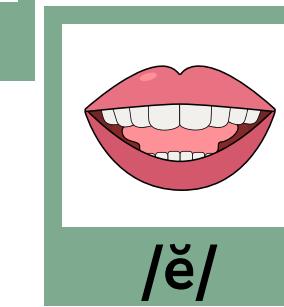
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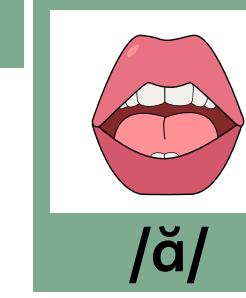
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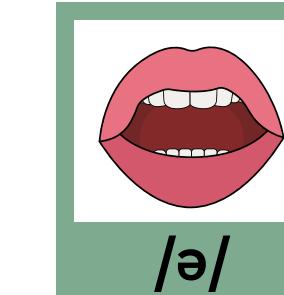
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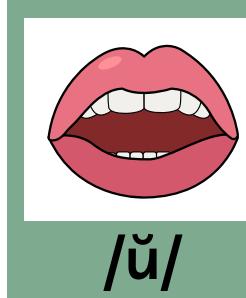
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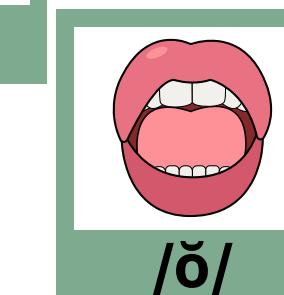
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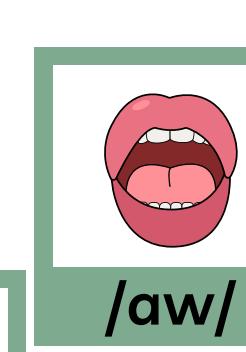
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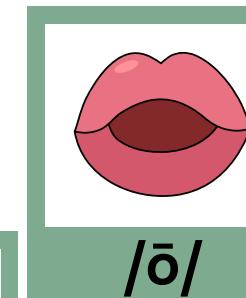
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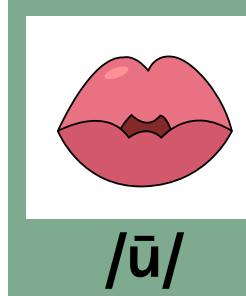
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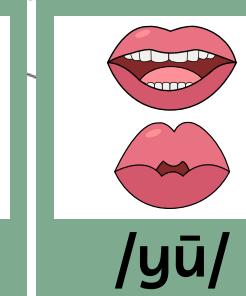
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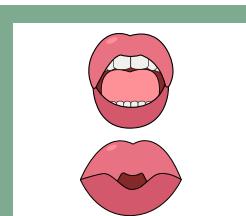


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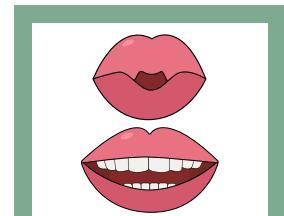


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Diphthongs

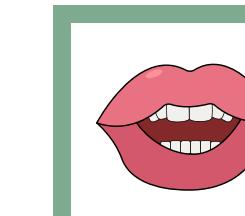


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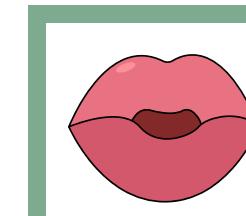


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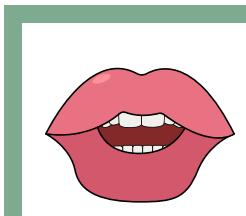
r-controlled vowels



/ar/



/or/

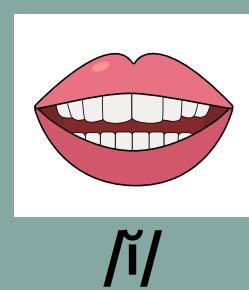


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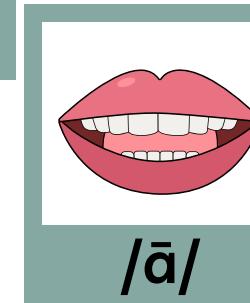
Vowel Valley



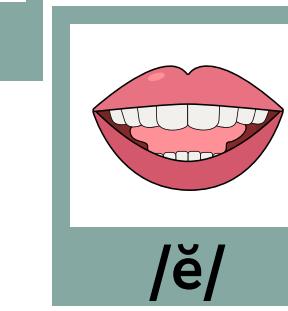
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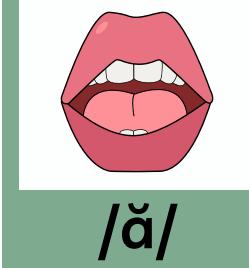
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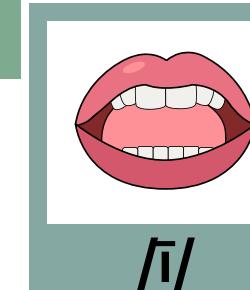
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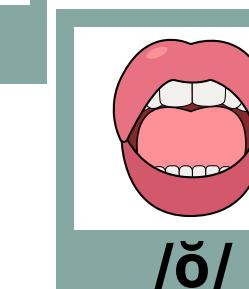
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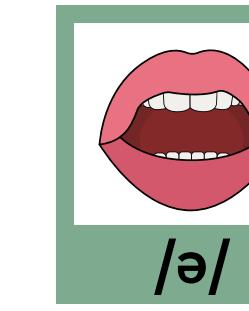
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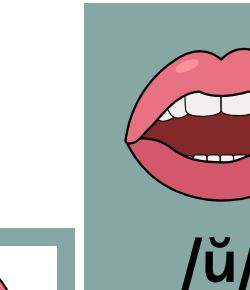
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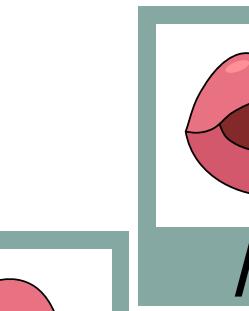
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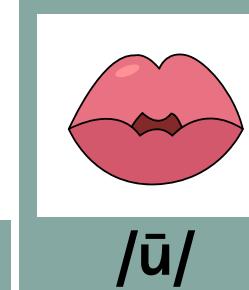
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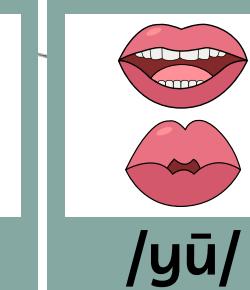
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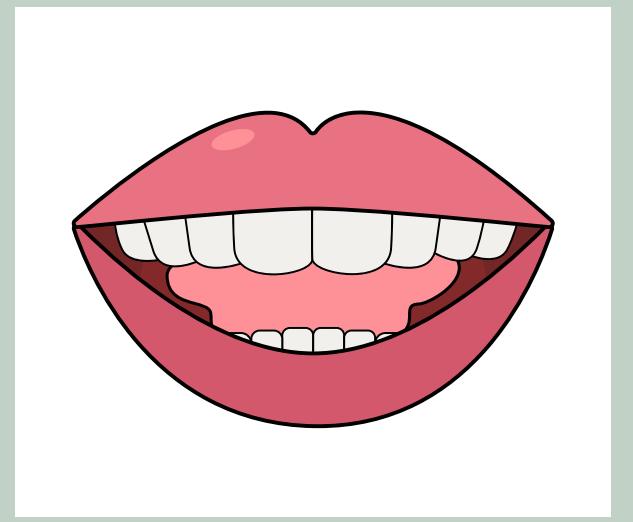
The tongue gradually drops, and the mouth opens slightly wider, until the low middle vowel /ō/ is formed.

The mouth starts to close, and the tongue rises toward the roof of the mouth as the vowels in the back part of the sequence are spoken.

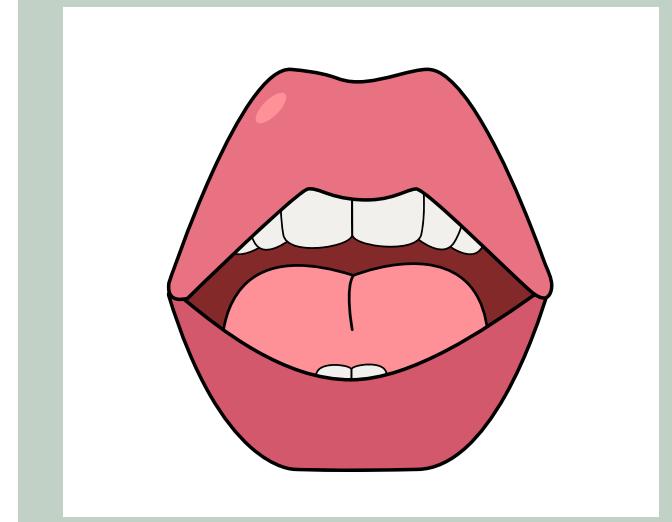
MONOPHTHONGS

Monophthongs are pure vowel sounds that have a consistent and unchanging quality throughout their pronunciation. They are characterized by a single, stable vowel sound.

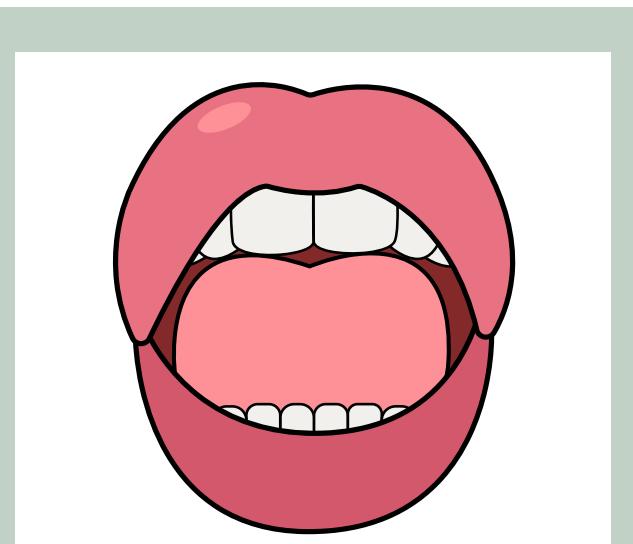
In English, examples of monophthongs include /ɛ/ as in "bed," /ă/ as in "cat," /ō/ as in "dog," and /ə/ as in "about."



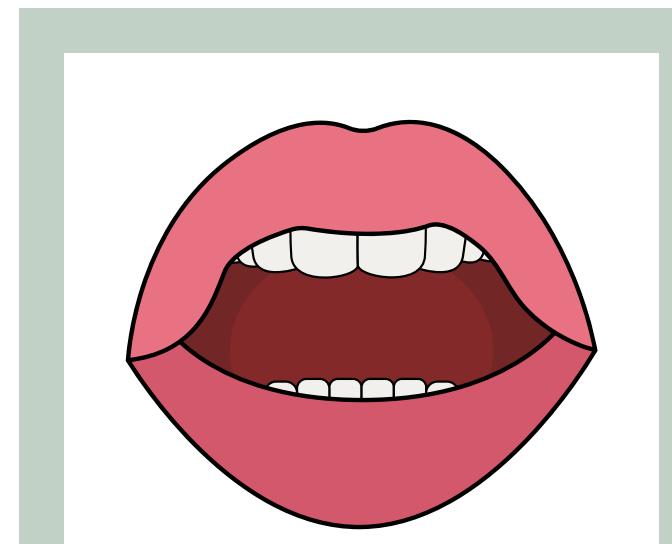
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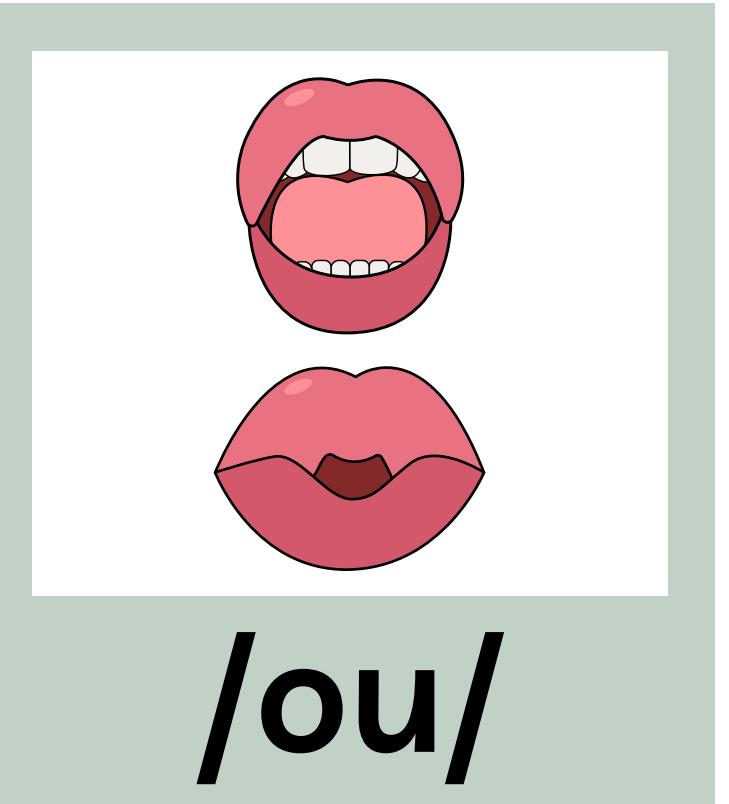


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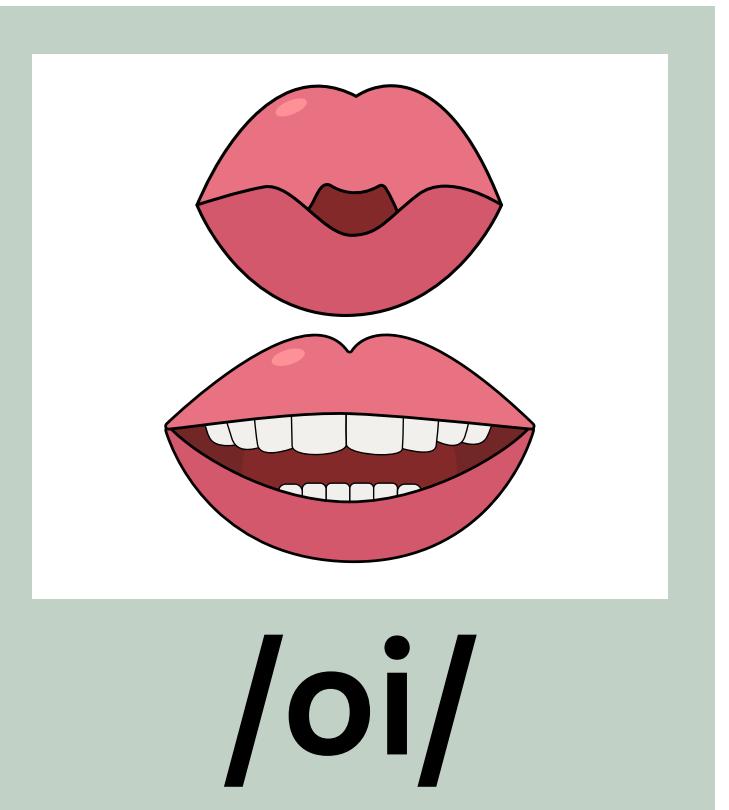
DIPHTHONGS

In phonics, diphthongs are taught as pairs of vowels like oi, oy, ou and ow that make one joined-up sound, as your mouth glides from one vowel to the next. The tongue and jaw movement change as the sound is produced, resulting in a dynamic, shifting sound quality.

In English, examples of diphthongs include /ou/ as in "cloud" and /oi/ as in "oil."



/ou/

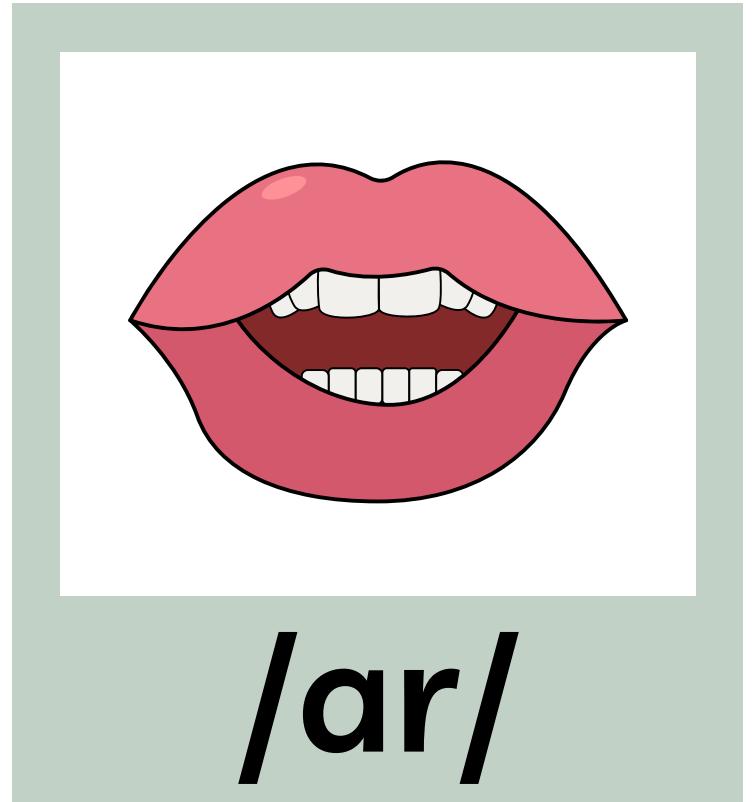


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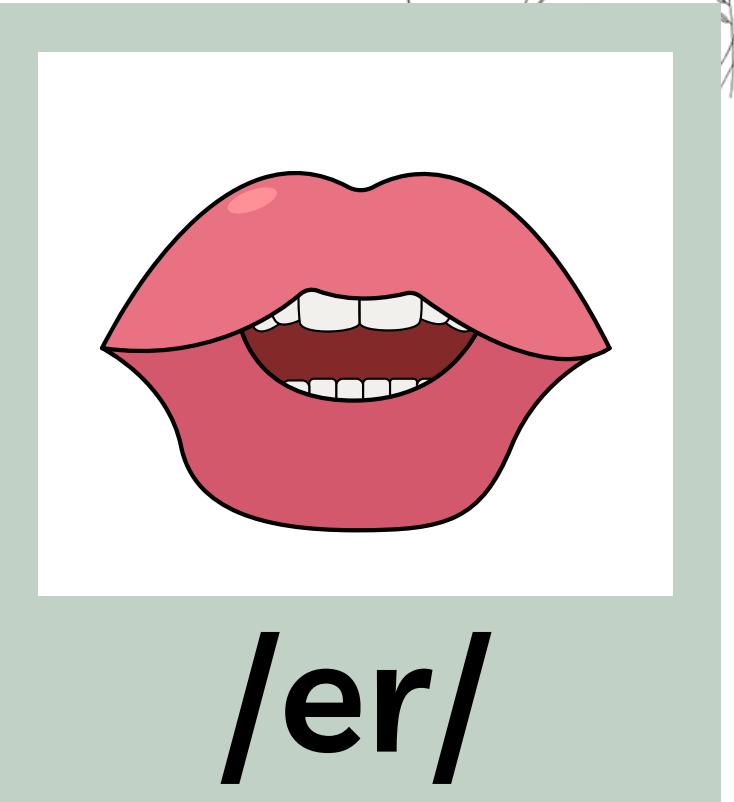
R-CONTROLLED

R-controlled vowels occur when a vowel sound is followed by the letter "r." In these cases, the vowel sound is influenced by the presence of the /r/ sound.

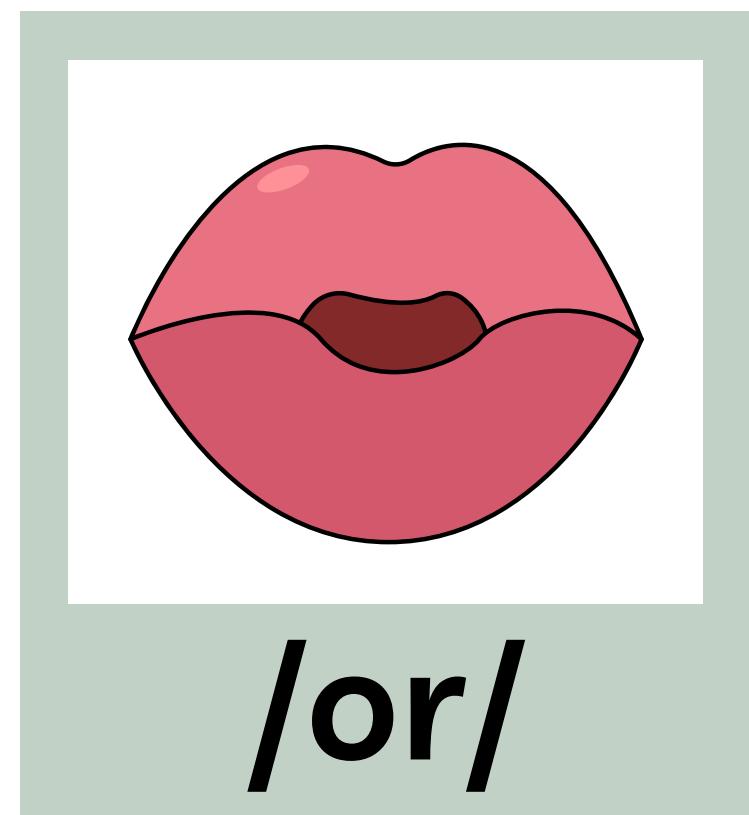
Examples of r-controlled vowels include /ir/ as in "bird," /ar/ as in "car," and /or/ as in "port."



/ar/



/er/



/or/

It's important to note that the number and specific sounds of vowel phonemes can vary across different languages.

The classification and pronunciation of vowel phonemes are influenced by various factors, such as language-specific phonetic patterns, regional accents, and individual speech habits.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1

What are the characteristics of vowel phonemes?

2

Why are vowel phonemes graphically represented in a V-shaped valley?

3

Why is it important to study vowel phonemes?

ANSWERS

1

Vowels are special sounds because they're always made with free-flowing air, they give every word its 'voice,' and they can change depending on how we shape our mouth. Every word we say needs vowels, because they form the heart of syllables.

2

The V-shape is like a map of your mouth. At the top your mouth is closed, at the bottom it's wide open, and the sides show whether the sound is made at the front or back of your mouth. It's a simple picture to help us see where vowel sounds live.

3

Studying vowel sounds is key because they sit at the centre of every word we say. Helping children recognise and use them makes reading, spelling, and speaking much easier – and gives them confidence with language.