

THE COLOR VOWEL APPROACH AS AN EFFECTIVE SOLUTION IN TEACHING SPOKEN ENGLISH

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Summary

In this paper the author highlights the Color Vowel Chart methodology which helps students to understand and articulate the North American English vowel sounds. Moreover, some samples of lesson preparation and introducing The Color Vowel Chart at different levels have been provided.

Key words: The Color Vowel Chart, American (Canadian) spoken English, a primary stressed syllable, a Color Vowel Word List.

When new language is introduced, it is essential that the correct pronunciation is taught. There are different elements of pronunciation which need to be considered depending on the type of language being taught. When teaching individual words or small words and phrases, the sounds and word stress require attention.

The Color Vowel Chart is a pronunciation tool for teaching and learning American (Canadian) spoken English without the use of phonetic symbols. Instead of using phonetic symbols, this method uses colors and key words to represent English vowel sounds. The Color Vowel Chart was created in 1999 by Karen Taylor and co-developed with Shirley Thompson. Now this unique language teaching method is widely used in numerous of TESOL, ESL and literacy programs across the USA. The U.S. Department of State's Office of English Language Programs distributes the Color Vowel Chart to English teachers outside the U.S. through Regional English Language Officers, U.S. Peace Corp Volunteers are trained with the Color Vowel Chart.

To Ukrainian teachers this English teaching approach was introduced by volunteers from Canada and UK during the annual teachers training courses in Khmelnytskyi, Ukraine. American (Canadian) English has 16 vowel sounds, but only 5 vowels. Thus, each letter or letter combination can represent more than one vowel sound. Each sound has a color name and a key word and appears in both words. For example: GRAY DAY represents stressed sound /ei/, GREEN TEA – /i:/, RED DRESS – /e/. Even though a color name and a key word have different spelling patterns, they share the same vowel sound. The Color Vowel Chart moves focus away from spelling, and places the focus on learning to recognize the sound of the stressed vowel. This focus on word stress helps learners first hear and then produce the rhythm that characterizes spoken English.

The Color Vowel Chart does much more than depicting individual vowel sounds. Stress can change the meaning of a word. For example: record (noun) – record (verb), desert (a dry place) – dessert (a sweet snack), message (information) – massage (body work). The Color Vowel Chart helps to identify each English word or phrase according to pronunciation of its primary stressed syllable what enables to speak comprehensibly, listen effectively and read fluently.

The implementation of the Color Vowel Chart into the everyday teaching practice requires taking into consideration the following principles of spoken English:

- Each English word has exactly one stressed syllable. Using the Color Vowel Chart to assign a color to that vowel, we can say, that each word has exactly one color.
- Even if one-syllable word contains more than one vowel letter, it has one vowel sound. For example: life is WHITE, knee is GREEN, and sound is BROWN.
- In multi-syllable words a color is at the nucleus of a primary stressed syllable. For example: nation is GREY while national is BLACK.
- In phrases, the word that receives the focus stress will identify its color. For example: Let's have fun is MUSTARD.

Introducing The Color Vowel Chart is recommended with beginning learners. Most languages do not use stress the same way English does, so helping learners to focus on stress is essential to a strong start in speaking and understanding English.

Lesson preparation may include:

1. The selection of common words that have common sound in the stressed syllable. For example:

GRAY: able, afraid, age, away, baby, cake, contain, escape, expain, famous, labor, lady, maybe, nation, nature, neighbor, straight, paper, potato, station, table, today, Ukraine.

2. Making a Color Vowel Word List on the board or providing copies for students.

Introducing new words may be done through the following steps:

1. Showing The Color Vowel Chart to the students. Drawing their attention to the stressed vowel sound in each word, pointing to the chart. For example: tree, teacher, tree, seat – GREEN.

2. Repeating the words from this section by students.

3. Writing the words on a Color Vowel Word List in students' notebooks.

4. Adding new words to a Color Vowel Word List while studying new vocabulary.

Introducing The Color Vowel Chart at High Intermediate through Advanced Levels may include the following steps:

1. The teacher shows students The Color Vowel Chart, says each color and key word and has students repeat after him/her.

2. The teacher invites students to identify the featured vowel sound in each color and key word, makes sure students are able to hear the featured vowel sound before moving on in the lesson.

3. The teacher facilitates discovery by using the days of the week. Students identify the color of the stressed syllable in each word. For example: Monday and Sunday are both MUSTURD, Tuesday is BLUE, Wednesday is RED.

4. The teacher writes and says each of the words below one by one. Students repeat and then write in their notebooks in the Color Vowel Word List that corresponds to the vowel sound in the stressed syllable of the word or phrase. Students should work in pairs to decide where to place the word. The teacher should stand back during this activity, speaking only to provide model pronunciation.

5. The teacher asks students to cross one word in each line which is not:

WHITE: kite, bird, fly, eye

GREY: rain, pray, say, said

GREEN: leaf, bee, hit, heat

RED: cat, leg, end, egg.

6. The teacher asks students to find a PINK word to each of the following definitions:

- 1) A common adjective that means small or tiny. (little)
- 2) The coldest season in our country. (winter)
- 3) Romantic or affectionate smacking of the lips. (kiss)
- 4) An urban center with tall buildings and dense population. (city)
- 5) Two or more adult female human beings. (women)
- 6) A beautiful present given at a special occasion. (gift)
- 7) Occupation, work or trade where money is exchanged for goods. (business)
- 8) The only way to learn how to speak English. (listen)

7. To conclude the lesson, the teacher may give students a piece of paper each and have them write down one new word or phrase that they personally find difficult to pronounce. The teacher collects the pieces of paper, picks one word and writes it on the board. Then he/she models the pronunciation of the word and has students repeat. The class identifies the stressed syllable, and the teacher underlines the stressed vowel sound in the word on the board. Then students identify the color

of the stressed vowel sound. The teacher does it with a few of the students' words at the end of each lesson, reminding students to write any difficult words in their Color Vowel Word List.

The Color Vowel Chart, posted in the classroom, will become a tool for helping students pronounce words and phrases correctly and can be used with any kind of a lesson. For example, when a student comes upon the word *believe* in a text and asks the teacher how to pronounce it, the teacher might say that it is GREEN, then model the word and have the student to repeat it back.

Sources:

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