**Word Stress - Lesson Objectives**

1. Learners will hear and produce word stress in two-syllable words
2. Learners will hear and produce unstressed syllables with schwa.
3. Learners will retell fables with varying degrees of linguistic assistance

**Rationale**

This lesson introduces word stress and its associated vowel sound, schwa. The lesson uses two-syllable words only, some of which have a STRONG-weak pattern and other which have a weak-STRONG pattern. There is no attempt made to predict word stress by using suffixes and prefixes. Rather, the attention is on recognizing word stress as an important feature in English pronunciation and in beginning to use variations in syllable length to mark stress.

The second important reason for this lesson is to introduce the unstressed vowel schwa [ə]. Schwa is the most common vowel in English (33% of the total vowels in one study of speech). It is a sound that can be spelled with any vowel letter or group of letters. And it is almost completely associated with unstressed syllables. As such, it is really a rhythmic feature of English and is not a vowel just like all the other vowels. For this reason, schwa is introduced in relation to word stress and not in Lesson 3, which focused on vowel and consonant sounds.

Finally, this lesson tries to move speaking practice beyond the sentence level by using retellings of Aesop’s fables. The gist of these stories is well-known in many cultures. We use them to scaffold controlled to freer speaking practice, moving from a story that is retold from full sentences, to one that is retold by...
reconstructing sentences from key words written out, to retelling from listening. While the first story is told with a written text only, the second and third ones make use of pictures to help students retell the story and move away from complete dependence on written texts.

Finally, the emphasis on moving pronunciation of word-stress beyond the word level by embedding normal words in sentences and discourse level texts is an example of using bridging activities to encourage pronunciation practice while concentrating on other aspects of language and communication.

Outline of the lesson

I. Warmup – Cloze listening

II. Word stress
   Exercise 1 – Counting the number of syllables

III. Syllables
   Exercise 2 – Listening and marking word stress

IV. Stressed Syllables
   Exercise 3 – Saying word stress with rubber bands

V. Unstressed syllables
   Exercise 4 – Listen for unstressed syllables (word-level)
   Exercise 5 – Listen for unstressed syllables (sentence-level)
   Exercise 6 – Retelling the fable from full sentences

VI. Communicative Practice
   Exercise 7 – Retelling the fable from listening, written words and pictures
   Exercise 8 – Retelling the fable from listening and pictures

© Pronunciation for a Purpose (Levis & Muller-Levis, n.d.)
WORD STRESS - WARMUP  (Teacher’s Manual)

This listening exercise asks students to listen for 2 syllable words with two possible stress patterns, weak-STRONG, STRONG-weak. After listening, the students can come up with the meaning (moral) of the story in pairs or small groups. A possible moral (from the tortoise’s point of view) is given below. Students may come up with many other ways of expressing the moral that are equally valid.

A hare once boasted of how fast he was. “I always win when I go my fastest,” he declared. I challenge any of you here to race with me.” The tortoise replied quietly, “I accept your challenge. All of the creatures in the forest laughed to themselves. The hare said, “That’s a good joke. I could dance circles around you the whole way.” “I suggest that you keep your boasting to yourself till you’ve finished the race,” answered the tortoise. So, a course around a village was fixed and the race started. The hare took off right away and was soon out of sight. The tortoise was far behind, and the hare lay down to take a nap. The tortoise plodded on. When the hare awoke from his nap, he was startled to see the tortoise just about to cross the finish line. The foolish rabbit again ran as fast as he could, but the tortoise won the race instead.

Moral: Slow and steady wins the race

The underlined words in this exercise will be used for pronunciation practice on word stress later in the lesson, but this first exercise should be used only to discuss meaning and for the listening task. We want students to understand the fable and be able to talk about it in English. Although this lesson is a pronunciation lesson, we start with meaning not accuracy. Why start with meaning? The main reason is that no one pronounces just to pronounce. We pronounce to communicate. So we start the lesson with communication.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Phonetic transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. BOAST-ed</td>
<td>/ˈbostəd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. FAST-est</td>
<td>/ˈfæstəst/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ac-CEPT</td>
<td>/əkˈsɛpt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. them-SELVES</td>
<td>/ðɛmˈsɛlvz/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. a-ROUND</td>
<td>/əˈraʊnd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. sug-GEST</td>
<td>/səˈdʒɛst/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. your-SELF</td>
<td>/jərˈsɛlf/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. FIN-ished</td>
<td>/fɪnɪʃt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. VIL-lage</td>
<td>/vɪlɪdʒ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. START-ed</td>
<td>/ˈstɑrtəd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. be-HIND</td>
<td>/bɪˈhaɪnd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. a-WOKE</td>
<td>/əˈwɔk/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. STAR-tled</td>
<td>/stɑː(r)ɪtəld/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. FOOL-ish</td>
<td>/ˈfʊlɪʃ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Syllables (Teacher’s Manual)

Counting Syllables

This lesson starts with syllable counts using words from the fable. If learners do not recognize how many syllables a word has, they will not make sense of word stress. While syllables are measured by the beats created by vowel sounds, notice that the number of syllables is rarely equal to the number of vowel letters.

How do we define a syllable?

Syllables include a vowel sound. They may also have one or more consonants before and after the vowel sound. So, is and this both have one vowel sound and one syllable. Thrifty has two vowel sounds and two syllables, and mythical has three.

How do we divide words into syllables?

Dictionaries and linguists argue about how to divide syllables. If possible, syllables begin with a consonant sound (be.gin), but some consonants seem to be the end of one syllable and the beginning of another. (fi.nish or fin.nish). It doesn't really matter which system we use in teaching pronunciation. The key is to know how many vowel sounds are in a word.

Exercise 1

Count the number of syllables in each word. Write the number in the blank.

This lesson starts with syllable counts using words from the fable. If learners do not recognize how many syllables a word has, they will not make sense of word stress.

© Pronunciation for a Purpose (Levis & Muller-Levis, n.d.)
While syllables are measured by the beats created by vowel sounds, notice that the number of syllables is rarely equal to the number of vowel letters.

EX:  race  1  6. replied  2  11. quietly  3

1. forest  2  7. answered  2  12. instead  2
2. animals  3  8. finished  2  13. course  1
3. mountain  2  9. tortoise  2  14. declared  2
4. decided  3  10. laughed  1  15. entire  2
5. joke  1

**Words in Phonetic Transcription**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-syllable</th>
<th>2-syllable</th>
<th>3-syllable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>laughed</td>
<td>/læft/</td>
<td>FOR-est</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hare</td>
<td>/haːr/</td>
<td>de-CLARED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joke</td>
<td>/dʒoʊk/</td>
<td>MOUN-tain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>course</td>
<td>/kɔrs/</td>
<td>in-STEAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>re-PLIED</td>
<td>/riˈpleɪd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOR-toise</td>
<td>/ˈtɔrtɔs/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>en-TIRE</td>
<td>/ɛnˈtaɪr/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AN-swered</td>
<td>/ˈænsərd/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stressed Syllables (Teacher’s Manual)

Stress is marked with several different features of speech, but not all features are always noticeable. The four features that are important, in order of importance, are:

- Stressed syllables (sometimes called strong syllables) have clear vowel sounds
- Stressed syllables are longer, that is, they take more time to say.
- Stressed syllables may be spoken with a change in pitch.

Stressed syllables are spoken with greater energy.

Exercise 2

This exercise asks learners to mark stress using the markings used in PFP. There are other ways to mark stress, but we write the stressed syllables in CAPITAL letters. Although writing needs rules to determine where syllables end, in speaking this is not necessary and we do not worry about dividing syllables. Instead, the vowel is the key.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Phonetic Transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sur-PRISE</td>
<td>/sə(r)ˈpraɪz/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be-HIND</td>
<td>/bɪˈhaɪnd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>them-SELVES</td>
<td>/ðɛmˈsɛlvz/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sud-DEN</td>
<td>/ˈsʌdən/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>re-WARD</td>
<td>/rɪˈwɔːrd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-GAIN</td>
<td>/əˈɡɛn/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTH-er</td>
<td>/ˈʌðər/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Pronunciation for a Purpose (Levis & Muller-Levis, n.d.)
Exercise 3

This exercise practices stress in conjunction with some kind of physical action, in this case stretching a rubber-band between your thumbs. The purpose of the physical action is to “embody” the syllable length that marks stress. (Pitch is not important, even though it may be noticeable on single words because words behave as their own “sentences” when spoken alone.)

Stressed syllables are written in CAPITAL letters.

- MOUN-tain /ˈmaʊntən/
- con-TAIN /kənˈteɪn/
- EI-ther /ˈaɪðər/ or /ˈiːdər/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOrest</td>
<td>/ˈfɔːrst/</td>
<td>asSURED</td>
<td>/əˈʃʊrd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUSband</td>
<td>/ˈhʌzbɔnd/</td>
<td>beCAME</td>
<td>/brˈkeɪm/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIther</td>
<td>/ˈaɪðər/ or /ˈiːdər/</td>
<td>dePRIVE</td>
<td>/diˈprɪv/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUple</td>
<td>/ˈkʌpəl/</td>
<td>themSELVES</td>
<td>/ðɛmˈsɛlvz/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUDden</td>
<td>/ˈsʌdən/</td>
<td>aROUND</td>
<td>/əˈraʊnd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLODded</td>
<td>/ˈplɔdəd/</td>
<td>beHIND</td>
<td>/brˈhænd/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHALlenge</td>
<td>/ˈtʃæləndʒ/</td>
<td>aWAY</td>
<td>/əˈweɪ/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOMAn</td>
<td>/ˈwʊmən/</td>
<td>beFORE</td>
<td>/brˈfɔr/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOLish</td>
<td>/ˈfʊlɪʃ/</td>
<td>aGAIN</td>
<td>/əˈgɛn/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unstressed Syllables (Teacher’s Manual)

This section asks learners to pay attention to unstressed syllables. In words of more than one syllable, there is almost always one or more unstressed syllables. The only exception is in compounds like weekend, where both syllables have some stress. Unstressed syllables are important in making length distinctions between syllables, so that listeners can understand their speech. They are also critically important in understanding the speech of others, since unstressed syllables are, by definition, less clear and less easy to decode.

The greatest difficulty in these exercises is procedural. We want to mark the stressed syllables and so learners may hear perfectly yet mark the wrong syllable.

Exercise 4

Each word has two syllables. Listen and circle the unstressed syllable in each word.

EX: a-lone
1. hus-band
2. shout-ed
3. be-come

4. be-cause
5. vill-age
6. a-gain
7. sup-posed
8. dif-fer
9. rab-bit
10. de-prive

Exercise 5

Listen and highlight the unstressed syllable in each underlined word.

1. A hare once boasted.
2. He declared he was fastest.
3. He challenged everyone.
4. I accept your challenge.
5. The animals lived in the forest.

© Pronunciation for a Purpose (Levis & Muller-Levis, n.d.)
6. He ran around.
7. He suggests that you wait.
8. The race went near a mountain.
9. He ran away.
10. The tortoise started slowly.
11. The tortoise plodded on.
12. The hare was surprised.
13. The rabbit ran again.

**Exercise 6**

This exercise adds to the students’ cognitive demands by asking them to retell the story without all the words being provided. They need to reconstruct the grammar and pay attention to the stress patterns. The exercise is meant to be done in pairs, and students may benefit from watching the teacher and a student model the task.
Communication Practice (Teacher’s Manual)

These two communicative activities ask for greater demands. First, the learners should listen to the story while reading along with the pictures and the words to reconstruct the story, if provided. Then they should retell the story. Because the story is one they have not heard before but which is likely to be familiar, they should have the schema needed to tell the story. (If teachers believe the story is not well known, a pre-listening activity building up a knowledge of the story may be needed.) The second story is another familiar fable, but it does not give students the words needed to reconstruct the story. This makes the task considerably harder.

Exercise 7 (The boy who cried wolf)

This exercise starts with listening at least once, and then should be done in pairs. Students should tell half and listen to the other half, then switch roles. Words are provided to reconstruct the story. Below are the pictures and words for the story.
1. Shepherd/ tended/ sheep/ forest

2. because/ alone/ made up/ plan/ get/ company
3. he/ called/ "Wolf, wolf."

4. villagers/ came/ help/ but/ no wolf
5. a few days later/ tried/ same trick

6. Again/ villagers/ came/ but no wolf
7. Before long/ wolf/ really appear

8. boy/ shouted/ "Wolf, Wolf"/ loudly
9. nobody/ came/ help

**Script and the moral of the story:** Once there was a shepherd who tended sheep near the forest. Because he was always alone, the shepherd made up a plan to get some company. So one day he called “wolf, wolf”. The villagers heard him. And they came to help. But when they arrived, there was no wolf. A few days later the boy tried the same trick again. Once more the villagers came running to help him, but there was still no wolf. The villagers went away. Before long a wolf really did appear. The shepherd boy called: “wolf, wolf” very loudly, but this time, nobody came to help.

The moral of the story is that people won’t believe liars even when they are telling the truth.
Exercise 8 (The goose that laid the golden egg)

This exercise starts with listening at least once, and then should be done in pairs. Students should tell half and listen to the other half, then switch roles. Words are not provided to reconstruct the story, making the task considerably more challenging. Below are the pictures for the story.
© Pronunciation for a Purpose (Levis & Muller–Levis, n.d.)
Script and the moral of the story: Once there was a couple who owned a goose. The goose laid a golden egg everyday. As you can imagine, this made them very very rich. After a while, they started to feel greedy. They began to think that they could get all the gold at once if they cut the goose open and took out the golden eggs. So they killed the goose. But when they cut her open, there were no golden eggs. It was only a goose. So they lost both the eggs and the goose.

The moral of the story is that those who want too much lose everything.