

LESSON PLAN GUIDE

PictureBook English Reading Series — Phonics

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Category	Phonics	Title	Phonics Book 15 – Come Closer, Come Closer!
Ages	4-7	Theme	R-Controlled Vowels — ar, or, er, ir, ur

INTRODUCTION OF THE BOOK

In this book, children explore R-controlled vowels — one of the trickiest and most important phonics patterns in English. When the sound /r/ comes after a vowel, the vowel and r together make a special sound: ar says /ar/, or says /or/, and er, ir, and ur all make the same /ur/ sound.

The book uses a wonderful zooming-in format — children first see each scene from a distance, and as the view gradually comes closer, more details and more R-controlled words are revealed on each page. From experience, young ESL learners often find er, ir, and ur particularly challenging, so please spend extra time on this book and encourage repeated reading for confidence and fluency.

R-CONTROLLED VOWEL PATTERNS

Pattern	Sound	Example words	Pattern	Sound	Examples
ar	/ar/ (as in car)	car, garden, star	ir	/ur/ (same as er, ur)	bird, girl
or	/or/ (as in for)	corner, storm, fork	ur	/ur/ (same as er, ir)	under, turn
er	/ur/ (as in her)	closer, water, spider			

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Children will be able to:

- Recognise the five R-controlled vowel patterns — ar, or, er, ir, ur
- Produce the three R-controlled sounds — /ar/, /or/, and /ur/
- Understand that er, ir, and ur all make the same /ur/ sound
- Decode R-controlled words by identifying the vowel + r pattern first
- Read key R-controlled words — closer, garden, under, corner, water, bird, spider

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Introduce the R-controlled concept

Before reading, explain the special rule: 'When r comes after a vowel, the vowel changes its sound completely — it becomes an R-controlled sound!' Show the three key sounds using the reference table above: ar = /ar/ (as in car), or = /or/ (as in corner), and er/ir/ur = /ur/ (as in closer,

bird, under). Point out that er, ir, and ur all sound the same — this is important to emphasise clearly.

2. Mark R-controlled words before reading

Before your child reads each page, ask them to look through the text and identify all the R-controlled words first. Ask: 'Which vowel comes before the r?' This pre-reading activity trains children to look for the pattern actively rather than being surprised by it mid-sentence.

3. Read words without the R-controlled part first

Help your child decode each R-controlled word by covering the R-controlled part and reading the rest of the word first. For example: read 'clos-' first, then add '-er' to make 'closer'. Read 'b-' first, then add '-ird' to make 'bird'. This step-by-step decoding strategy makes R-controlled words feel manageable rather than intimidating.

4. Make flashcards and play the Speed Game

Create word cards for the key R-controlled words: closer, garden, under, corner, water, bird, spider. Use them to play a flashcard game — hold up each card and ask your child to read it as quickly as possible. For an extra challenge, make a list and time how fast your child can read through all seven words. Repeated exposure through the speed game builds automatic recognition.

5. Use the zoom-in format to build vocabulary

As each scene zooms in closer, pause and ask your child what new details they can see. Ask: 'What R-controlled words appear on this page that weren't there before?' The progressive reveal creates natural curiosity and motivates children to keep reading to discover more.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Play an R-Controlled Word Sort. Write the five patterns — ar, or, er, ir, ur — at the top of five columns. Then call out words one at a time — for example: star, corner, girl, turtle, flower, farm, nurse — and ask your child to sort each word into the correct column. This sorting activity makes the pattern recognition active and builds confidence distinguishing er, ir, and ur. For an extra challenge, ask your child to think of their own word for each column.

Try the fun online learning activities for this book on our website!

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TEACHER'S NOTES AND TIPS

R-controlled vowels are genuinely one of the hardest phonics patterns for ESL learners — the /ur/ sound in particular does not exist in many other languages, and distinguishing between er, ir, and ur spellings requires a great deal of exposure and practice. The most important teaching point is that all three spellings — er, ir, ur — make the same sound. Framing this as 'three spellings, one sound' rather than three separate patterns reduces cognitive load significantly. The zoom-in format of the book is a wonderful pedagogical device — it naturally creates repeated encounters with the same R-controlled words at increasing levels of detail, which is exactly the kind of spaced repetition that helps these patterns stick.