

★ LESSON 136: THE BIRDS' CHRISTMAS TREE • VOWEL PHONICS & HOMOPHONES

PAGE 73 • DIACRITICS • SEA VS. SEE

1 Reading Passage • The Norwegian Custom of the Birds' Christmas Sheaf

Read • Listen • Phonics Exploration

"Birds' Christmas Tree" (Wheeler's Story of Scandinavian Benevolence):

Listen to Story

"Did you ever see a "Birds' Christmas Tree"? If you ever go to Norway, you will see many of them. I spent one winter there, and I saw a sheaf of grain on the roof of nearly every barn. The sheaf was tied to the top of a tall pole. I was told that these sheaves of grain are always put up at Christmas for the birds. Each year the old sheaf is taken down, and a fresh one is put up in its place. Is it not a pretty custom to give the birds a Christmas tree?"

A. Words with digraph ea = ē (/i:/): Copy words from passage:

Passage words: *sheaf, nearly, sheaves, each, year*

B. Wheeler's Diacritic Sound Contrasts: Study Vowel Pairs

did / bird dīd / bīrd	top / told tōp / tōld	roof rōōf	saw / barn sāw / bārnn
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2 Learn to Spell the Following 8 Words • 26px Standard Penmanship

8 Target Words • Audio TTS • Midline Precision

Study & Copy: Study the pronunciation and orthography of each word. Note capital letter for *Norway* and *Christmas* (silent t). Copy each word carefully on its 26px handwriting line.

Norway	winter	always	taken
Christmas	nearly	custom	pretty

3 Homophones • sea vs. see • Poetic Dictation Cloze

Supply Missing Homophones • Write from Dictation

Homophones: sea (noun: ocean) see (verb: perceive) Listen to Poem

Little waves, I've brought the boat
Father made for me,
For I want to _____ it float
On your silver _____.

Fill each blank with *sea* or *see*, then transcribe the complete 4-line poem below.

Write the complete stanza from dictation on the standard 26px handwriting tracks:

1 Orthographic & Etymological Matrix (8 Core Words + 2 Homophones)

Linguistic Breakdown • Historical Orthography

WORD	IPA	ORTHOGRAPHIC KEY	GRAMMAR / CATEGORY	PHONETIC & HISTORICAL ETYMOLOGY
Norway	/ˈnɔːrweɪ/	Capital N; -way = /eɪ/	Proper Noun (Country)	Old Norse <i>Norðrvegr</i> ("the northern way"). Proper geographical name requiring capitalization.
Christmas	/ˈkrɪsməs/	Silent t; Ch = /k/	Proper Noun (Holiday)	Old English <i>Crīstes mæsse</i> ("Christ's Mass"). Greek initial <i>ch</i> ; middle <i>t</i> silenced.
winter	/ˈwɪntər/	Closed short ɪ; -er	Noun (Season)	Old English <i>winter</i> (related to "wet", the rainy season). Stable Germanic base with agentive/seasonal suffix.
nearly	/ˈnɪərli/	ea = ē (/i:/); suffix -ly	Adverb of Degree	Old English <i>nēar</i> (comparative of <i>nēah</i> "nigh") + adverbial suffix <i>-ly</i> . Root contains long vowel digraph <i>ea</i> .
always	/ˈɔːlweɪz/	Single l prefix al-; -ways	Adverb of Frequency	Old English <i>ealne weg</i> ("all the way"). Prefix rule: <i>all</i> drops one /l/ in compounds (always, although, almost).
custom	/ˈkʌstəm/	Short ʊ; -om = /əm/	Noun (Tradition/Habit)	Old French <i>costume</i> , Latin <i>consuetudo</i> (habit, practice). Unaccented Latinate ending reduced to schwa.
taken	/ˈteɪkən/	Open syllable tā-; -en	Past Participle Verb	Old Norse <i>taka</i> . Irregular strong past participle forming passive construction ("is taken down").
pretty	/ˈprɪti/	e sounded as /ɪ/; tt	Adjective / Adverb	Old English <i>prættig</i> (clever, cunning). Historical vowel shift: written <i>e</i> articulated as short <i>ɪ</i> /ɪ/.
sea	/si:/	Digraph ea = ē (/i:/)	Noun (Ocean expanse)	Old English <i>sǣ</i> . Homophone for <i>see</i> . Body of salt water governed by preposition: "on your silver sea".
see	/si:/	Digraph ee = ē (/i:/)	Transitive Verb	Old English <i>sēon</i> . Homophone for <i>sea</i> . Perception verb taking bare infinitive complement: "want to see it float".

§ 1. Wheeler's Diacritic Markings & Vowel Contrasts

- **Digraph ea = ē (/i:/)**: In the reading passage, students isolate: *sheaf*, *nearly*, *sheaves*, *each*, *year*.
- **Short i vs. Tilde ī**: Contrast *dīd* (/dɪd/, closed short vowel) with *bīrd* (/bɜːr/, r-controlled vowel marked with a tilde *ī* in 19th-century phonics).
- **Short ɔ vs. Long ȝ**: *tȝp* (/tɔp/ or /tɑːp/) vs. *tōld* (/tould/, vowel lengthened before /ld/).
- **Broad â vs. Italian ä**: *sāw* (/sɔː/, broad sound of a) vs. *bärn* (/bɑːrn/, two-dot Italian a).

🕒 2. Cultural & Grammatical Insights (Julenek Custom)

- **The Norwegian Julenek**: In Norway, the Christmas sheaf (*julenek*) of unthreshed oats is mounted on a tall pole outside barns so birds may feast during harsh Arctic winters.
- **Irregular Plural (sheaf → sheaves)**: Voicing of terminal /f/ to /v/ with *ves* suffix, parallel to *calf/calves, leaf/leaves, half/halves*.
- **Orthographic Law**: *Christmas* retains the silent *t* from *Christ*; *always* drops one *l* from *all*; *pretty* undergoes vowel reduction to /ɪ/.

2 Wheeler's Poetic Dictation Model & Syntactic Analysis

Homophone Pair: sea (noun) vs. see (verb) • Rhyme Resolution

"The Little Boat" (Poetic Master Key for Verbatim Dictation)

Syntactic Function Breakdown

"Little waves, I've brought the boat / Father made for me, / For I want to see [verb of sight] it float / On your silver sea [noun, marine expanse]."

Oral Dictation Sentences (5 Master Speller Sentences for Classroom Drill)

DAILY PEDAGOGICAL DRILL

1. In **Norway**, children tie a fresh **sheaf** of golden grain to the **roof** of the **barn**.
2. It is **always** a **pretty custom** to remember the hungry **birds** at **Christmas**.
3. The old **sheaf** of **winter** grain was **taken** down from the top of the tall pole.
4. I want to **see** the little wooden boat float upon the rolling waves of the silver **sea**.
5. Did you **see** that **nearly** every child brought food for the birds in the cold **winter**?

Evaluative Scoring Rubric (20 Points Total)

Mastery Assessment

- **1. Orthographic Accuracy (8 pts)**: Spells 8 core words with zero errors, including capital letters for *Norway* and *Christmas*, and silent *t*.
- **2. Homophone Discrimination (6 pts)**: Accurately completes the cloze stanza using *see* (verb) and *sea* (noun) without syntactic confusion.
- **3. Vowel Analysis & Extraction (3 pts)**: Correctly identifies and extracts *ea* = *ē* words from the Scandinavian reading passage.
- **4. 26px Penmanship Baseline (3 pts)**: Letter bodies rest firmly on 26px baseline; lowercase letters align to the 13px dashed midline.

Socratic Discussion Prompts

Oral Inquiry

1. **Homophone Riddle**: "Close your eyes and listen to 'sea' and 'see'. They sound identical! How can you tell from the poem which one belongs in 'silver sea'?"
2. **Phonetic Detective**: "Say the word 'Christmas'. Which consonant do your fingers write that your tongue does not speak? Why is it there?"
3. **Vowel Mystery**: "Look at 'pretty'. If you read it by regular phonics rules, how would it sound? What vowel sound does it actually borrow?"