

The Sounds of Lenape

We have been trying to perfect the easiest orthography possible to use in spelling Lenape words. It is mainly a phonetic alphabet, that is, each letter has only one sound. The alphabet is as follows:

a - ch - e - h - i - k - l - m - n

o - p - s - sh - t - u - w - x - y

The following are the vowels, all the rest are consonants:

a - e - i - o - u

The vowels are further divided by the use of accent marks. The accent marks are only to show vowel quality, and once you have learned the word, they need not be used in normal writing.

a - à - e - è - ë - i - ì - o - ò - u - ù

The accent marks used are:

- ˘ = used to show a variant pronunciation of a vowel
- ë = used on -e- to show that it is the neutral vowel
- ' = used to separate two sounds which would otherwise be pronounced differently if they were together

Vowels

| Vowel | Lenape Word | English Translation | Comments |
|----------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| a | ahas | crow | like the -a- in English "father" |
| | hatapi | bow | |
| à | làpi | again | like the -u- in English "cup" |
| | ntàpi | I am here | |
| e | eyok | they go | like the -a- in English "fate" |
| | newa | four | |

| | | | |
|----------|----------------|-----------------------------|---|
| è | wèmi | all | like the -e- in English "net" |
| | tèpi | enough | |
| ë | ntëmpëm | my brain | like the -a- in English "sofa" |
| | sëke | it s black | |
| i | ila | warrior | like the -i- in English "machine" |
| | nitis | my friend | (this word is used only by a man speaking of another man) |
| ì | kìtkil | he is huge | like the -i- in English "it" |
| | kìtpùl | industrious person | |
| o | konait | perhaps | like the -o- in English "open" |
| | shohpe | shore | |
| ò | òk | and | like the -o- in English "for" |
| | òkwes | fox | |
| u | hus | bucket | like the -oo- in English "fool" |
| | chusku | he wades through the water | |
| ù | hùkòn | pot-hook | like the -u- in English "pull" |
| | tùkwim | black walnut (the nut only) | |

Consonants

| Consonant | Lenape Word | English Translation | Comments |
|------------------|--------------------|--|--|
| ch | chinkwe | bobcat | like the -ch- in English "church" |
| | chimhe | he rows a boat, or, he paddles a canoe | |
| h | hàkhàkw | bottle | like the -h- in English "hand" |
| | hàtës | sinew | |
| k | ku | no | like the -k- in English "hawk" |
| | kwis | your son | |
| l | lòkëwe | yesterday | Like the -l- in English "lip" (This -L- sound in Lenape comes at the |

| | | | |
|------------|----------------|-------------------------|---|
| | | | beginning of a word or in the middle of a word before another consonant, except for -h- or -x-) |
| | lukàt | flour (made from wheat) | |
| l | òl | egg | This -L- sound in Lenape comes at the end of a word or in the middle of a word between vowels or before -h- or -x-. There is no equivalent sound in English, (this -L- is voiceless). If you feel your throat when pronouncing the -L- in the English word 'lot' you will feel a vibration. This is voicing. Now, start to say 'lot' but just let the air pass over your tongue with no vibration of the vocal cords. This is the sound of the voiceless -L-. |
| | ashëwìl | he swims | (the voiceless -L-) |
| m | mitkëm | pole | like the -m- in English "met" |
| | mùxul | canoe or boat | |
| n | nux | my father | like the -n- in English "net" |
| | ni | I or me or my | |
| s | sànkwe | weasel | like the -s- in English "sick" |
| | sipu | stream | |
| sh | shëwàn | it is salty | like the -sh- in English "shoe" |
| | shiki | it is pretty | |
| s'h | ans´ha | dip it up | like the -s- + -h- in English "kiss her" |
| t | tòke | it is soft | like the -t- in English "ten" |
| | tëme | wolf | |
| w | wil | head | like the -w- in English "work" |
| | wikhè | he builds a house | |
| x | xanikw | squirrel | like the -ch- in German "kochen" |
| | òxe | it is daylight | |
| y | yuh | alright or okay | like the -y- in English "yes" |
| | yukwe | now | |

Special Consonant Combinations

| Letters | At the beginning of a word | At the end of a word, or in the middle of a word before a vowel or before -h- or -x- | In the middle of a word before any consonant except -h- or -x- |
|---------------|--|--|--|
| m + p | like the -b- in English "back" Lenape Example: mpa = I come mpisun = medicine | like the -mb- in English "ember" Lenape Example: hèmpës = shirt | like the -mp- in English "hemp" Lenape Example: aonhèmpse = she has a blue dress |
| n + ch | like the -j- in English "jungle" Lenape Example: nchuski = I wade nchu = friend (man speaking to man only) | like the -ng- in English "engine" Lenape Example: pënchi = he enters something through a small opening | like the -nch- in English "pinch" Lenape Example: mpënchtunèna = I put my finger in his mouth |
| n + k | like the -g- in English "go" Lenape Example: nkata = I want nkwis = my son | like the -ng- in English "anger" Lenape Example: winkàn = it tastes good | like the -nk- in English "tank" Lenape Example: pëpankpe = it drips |
| n + s | like the -z- in English "zero" Lenape Example: nsùkwis = my mother-in-law nsit = my foot | like the -ns- in English "answer" Lenape Example: answikàn = a fish net [note that the n + s combination will nasalize the preceding vowel] | like the -ns- in English "answer" Lenape Example: anskan = last dance after a stomp dance [note that the n + s combination will nasalize the preceding vowel] |

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|---------------|--|---|---|
| n + sh | Like Eng. -z- in Azure, or -s- in Measure Lenape Example: nshis = my uncle nshimwi = I flee | like the -nsh- in English "kinship" Lenape Example: manshapi = a bead [note that the n + sh combination will nasalize the preceding vowel] | like the -nsh- in English "kinship" Lenape Example: panshpèkw = cantaloupe [note that the n + sh combination will nasalize the preceding vowel] |
| n + t | like the -d- in English "dip" Lenape Example: nta = I go ntakohchi = I am cold | like the -nd- in English "wind" Lenape Example: ènta = when | like the -nt- in English "winter" Lenape Example: këntka = you dance |

Stress

In Lenape the stress normally falls on the vowel in the next to last syllable, as in the words salàpòn (frybread) and tìpas (chicken). If the vowel in the next to last syllable is an -ë- the stress will often be placed on the preceding syllable.