



**6th Grade**

# Context Clues

- Define the meaning of unknown words by using context clues and the author's use of definition, restatement and example
- Apply knowledge of connotation and denotation to determine the meaning of words
- Identify analogies and other word relationships, including synonyms and antonyms, to determine the meaning of words

## What Students Need to Know:

- meaning
- unknown words
- context clues
  - definition
  - restatement
  - example
- connotation
- denotation
- analogies
  - synonyms
  - antonyms

## What Students Need to be Able to Do:

- define (meaning of unknown words)
  - use (context clues)
  - apply (knowledge of connotation and denotation)
  - identify (analogies and other word relationships)

## Important Vocabulary

**Analogy**—A method of explaining something unfamiliar by using a comparison of similar, more familiar things; a form of reasoning in which one thing is inferred to be similar to another thing in a certain respect, on the basis of the known similarity between the things in other respects (e.g., part to whole, synonym and antonym, degree or cause and effect)

**Antonym**—A word opposite in meaning to another word (e.g., good and bad).

**Connotation**—The attitudes and feelings associated with a word as opposed to a word's literal meaning.

**Context clues**—Information a reader may obtain from a text that helps confirm the meaning of a word or group of words.

**Denotation**—The literal or “dictionary” meaning of a word.

**Synonym**—One of two or more words in a language that have similar meanings (e.g., answer and respond).

# CONTEXT CLUES

Teachers often tell students to use the context clues to help determine the meaning of unknown words. This can be a very useful strategy at times; however, several obstacles often get in the way. First of all, not all words appear in a context that is rich enough to provide the clues needed to determine their meanings. When this is the case, students need to recognize that fact and know other strategies to help get meaning from their reading. Secondly, many students don't truly understand what they are supposed to do when they are told to use the context clues. This is a skill that requires explicit instruction over time. Teachers need to model their own use of context clues through think alouds, then provide opportunities for students to practice the skill before asking them to use context clues independently.

Kylene Beers in her book *When Kids Can't Read* has this to say about the strategy of using context clues: ". . . discerning the meaning of unknown words using context clues requires a sophisticated interaction with the text that dependent readers have not yet achieved." Many times the clues to the meaning are subtle and require the reader to make a lot of inferences. Context clues will often give the reader some idea of the meaning of a word, but they are not sufficient to determine an exact meaning. She goes on to make the following point: "I do think it means we must recognize that using the context as a clue is something that requires lots of practice, something that separates dependent from independent readers, something that is much harder than we may have realized."

Teaching students how to use the context as a clue requires that students see relationships

Clues supplied through **synonyms**:

Carly is fond of *trite*, worn-out expressions in her writing. Her favorite is "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."

Clues contained in **comparisons and contrasts**:

As the trial continued, the defendant's guilt became more and more obvious. With even the slightest bit of new evidence against him, there would be no chance of *acquittal*.

Clues contained in a **definition or description**:

Paul is a *transcriptionist*, a person who makes a written copy of a recorded message.

Clues through **association** with other words in the sentence:

Brian is considered the most troublesome student ever to have walked the halls of Central High School. He has not passed a single class in his four years there and seldom makes it through an entire hour of class without falling asleep or getting sent to the office. His teachers consider him completely *incorrigible*.

Clues which appear in a **series**:

The *dulcimer*, fiddle, and banjo are all popular among the Appalachian Mountain people.

Clues provided by the **tone and setting**:

The streets filled instantly with *bellicose* protesters, who pushed and shoved their way through the frantic bystanders. The scene was no longer peaceful and calm as the marchers had promised it would be.

Clues derived from **cause and effect**:

Since no one came to the first voluntary work session, attendance for the second one is *mandatory* for all the members.

# CONNOTATION AND DENOTATION

Poets try to choose words that have strong and colorful feelings (connotations) in addition to their usual dictionary meanings (denotations).

## Octopus

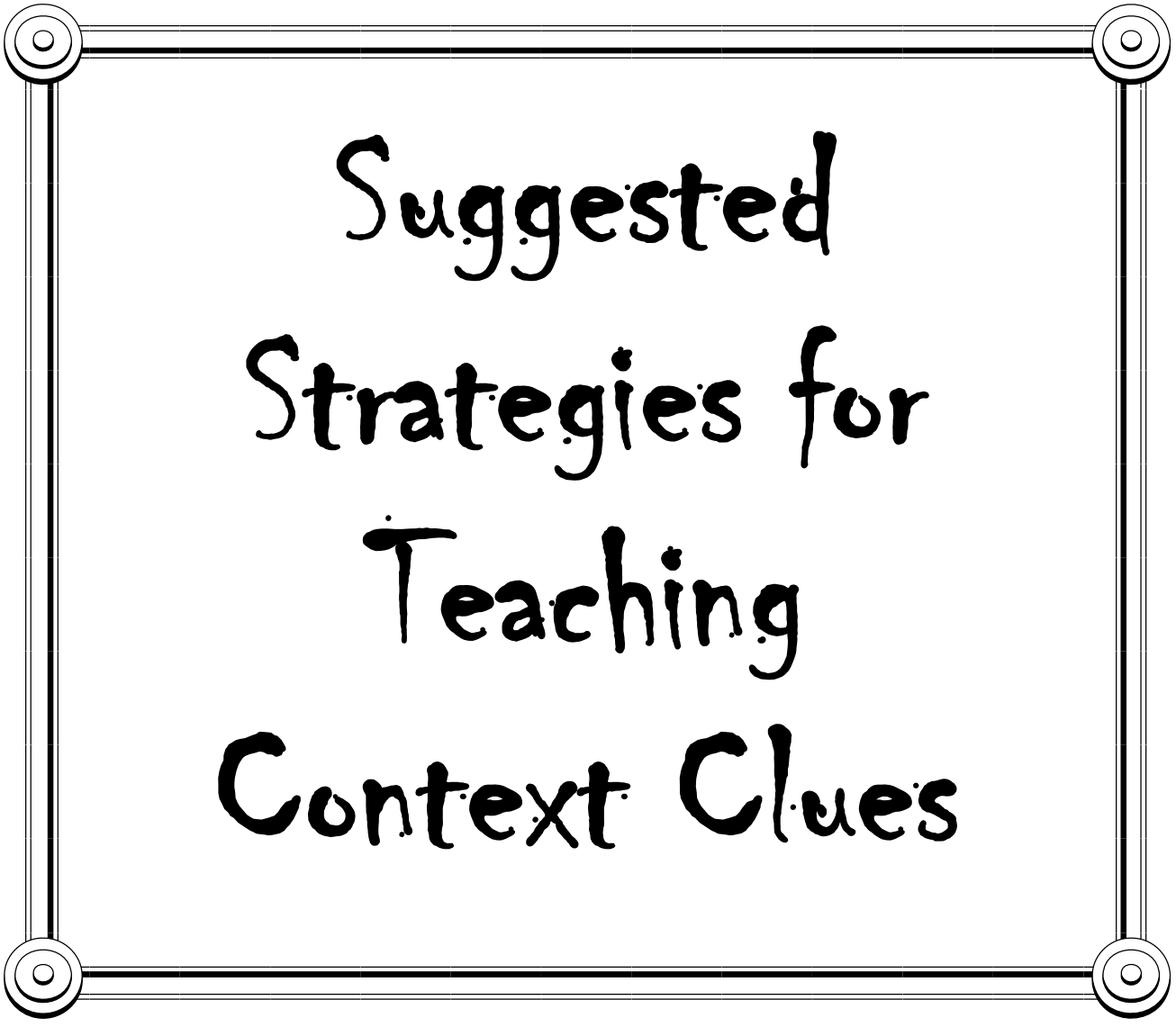
By X. J. Kennedy

The octopus is one tough cuss  
With muscles built like truckers' —  
It lifts great weights in several arms,  
Each lined with sticky suckers.

If you should meet an octopus  
That greets you, "Hi — let's shake!"  
You'll stand a long while wondering  
Which tentacle to take.

*Cuss* means "an odd or annoying person." That's the **denotation** of the word, but the phrase "one tough cuss" is often used informally to suggest someone old and a little cranky. The meanings or feelings a word creates are called **connotations**. The poet might have used the phrase "a harsh creature." But, by using "one tough cuss," the poet makes the octopus sound odd but more lovable than frightening. A few lines later, the poet uses another informal phrase. The connotation of the phrase "sticky suckers" describes the octopus's arms as unpleasant without making them sound dangerous or without sounding too scientific.

The **connotation** of a word reflects its emotional qualities or meanings.  
The **denotation** of a word is its exact dictionary meaning.



Suggested  
Strategies for  
Teaching  
Context Clues

# Word Family Charts

Have students develop charts or posters that show word families or synonym groupings. Ask them to design graphic organizers to show the relationships among the words and how each relates to its synonyms. For example, if the word *walk* is at the center of the chart, it might be surrounded by words organized into categories, such as “words that mean to walk quickly.” These charts are especially useful for helping students find more colorful or descriptive words to use in their writing. Another idea is to use as the center of the chart a word that has multiple meanings.

# Opposites

Give students two antonyms, such as *beautiful* and *ugly* or *fat* and *skinny*. Ask them to locate at least five additional words that show the various degrees between the two words (e.g., *beautiful*, *pretty*, *attractive*, *common*, *plain*, *unattractive*, *ugly*). Have students write these words in their journals so they can use them while writing. This activity is helpful for English-language learners, especially if you ask them to discuss the shades of meaning that separate the words and justify the order in which the words are placed.

# Word Relationships

Ask students to explore synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and homophones by featuring these words on the Word Wall. Students can also make charts, graphs, or webs to display the word relationships. Later, they can use the words they identify to create funny stories.

# Context Clue Organizer

Model explicitly for students how to determine the meaning of a word from the context clues. Model using a variety of types of context clues such as **example-illustration** (provides an example or illustration to describe the word), **logic** (provides a connection, such as a simile, to the word), **root words and affixes** (provides meaningful roots and affixes that the reader uses to determine meaning); or **grammar** (provides syntactical cues that allow for reader interpretation).

Be very clear about your thinking concerning how you use the other words in the sentence or paragraph to determine the meaning of an unknown word. Model how to complete the Context Clue Organizer. For example, using the sentence *I misplaced my trusty zimulis* from Jon Scieszka's book *Baloney (Henry P.)*, you can talk about the context of the sentence (it's a story about an alien student trying to explain his tardiness to his teacher). Record the word zimulis in the first column of the chart. From the text you know the topic (logic) and what part of speech the word is (grammar). Knowing just that much you could try several school-related nouns, but the text also provides an illustration (example-illustration) of a pencil. Record "pencil" in the Possible Meaning column. Then demonstrate to students how to substitute the possible meaning into the sentence to see if it makes sense. (I misplaced my trusty pencil.) Show students that since it does make sense, you have verified the meaning and place a check mark in the last column of the chart.

After modeling the use of the Context Clues Organizer with multiple examples, have students use a similar chart during guided reading and eventually as they read independently.

## Word Relationships

Ask students to explore synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, homophones and homographs by featuring these words on the Word Wall. Students can also make charts, graphs, or webs to display the word relationships. Later, they can use the words they identify to create funny stories.





# If Context Clues Don't Work ...

There are times when readers will confront passages where there are few or no context clues, making discovering words' meanings a frustrating task. For struggling readers, even when context clues are strong, using them is a difficult and slow process because the strategy is unpracticed and not part of their problem-solving repertoire. These students need a great deal of scaffolding and practice before they can independently access and successfully apply a reading strategy. Scaffolding, a framework of support that teachers offer students before, during and after reading, supports students in their quest to comprehend deeply. As students demonstrate that they understand and can apply a strategy, the teacher gradually diminishes the amount of scaffolding.

If using context clues is not working for some students, then try scaffolding their reading with these word-building strategies:

## **Strategy 1—Preteach Vocabulary: Prepare Students for the Tough Words before They Encounter Them**

1. Present a sentence that has an unfamiliar word but is rich in context clues. Make sure your sentence has a similar meaning to the way the word is used in the text.
2. Create a word web using information the students know about the word. Record students' ideas on large chart paper. Return to the word web after students have read the material and invite them to add any new understandings they gained from reading and discussing.

## **Strategy 2—Strengthen Students' Word Knowledge**

1. Teach students the meanings of prefixes, suffixes and roots. In a think-aloud, show how you use your knowledge of word parts to figure out the meaning of a tough word. For example, for the word *incredible*, say:

The prefix *in-* means *not, in, or into*; the root *cred* means *to believe*. In this case I think the prefix means *not* and *incredible* means *not believable*. After I stop reading, I can check the dictionary to verify my hunch.
2. Invite students to jot down tough words on a sticky-note or in their journal, noting the title of the book and the page of the word that stumped them. In pairs or groups, have students use the dictionary. To ensure that students search for the dictionary meaning that matches the word's meaning in the text, showcase your process. For example for the sentence *But the reticent Taos were never required to give a public explanation*, say the following:

"I'll read all three possible definitions for reticent and then try to figure out which definition fits the sentence. I don't think its silent because I don't think the author means that the Taos people are silent. Maybe it means reserved or not very communicative. Either one of those could work in the sentence."
3. Have students work in pairs and think aloud several times or until you feel they can think aloud for one another.

# Teaching about Context

To help students learn about the types of information that context can supply, try to have them examine and collect different types of context clues that authors provide. This type of instruction is typically included in school curricula and commercial instructional materials in the middle grades. Instead of worksheets focused on single paragraphs, consider mini-lessons built around entire selections. Introduce examples of context use in mini-lessons and have students examine and discuss them. Then make wall charts with examples they discover in their own reading. For instance, one class discovered that context helps provide readers with the following types of information:

1. *Synonyms.* The farrier, the man who makes shoes for the horses, had to carry his heavy tools in a wheelbarrow.
2. *What a word is or is not like.* Unlike the peacock, the mudhen is not colorful.
3. *Something about location or settings.* The shaman entered the Hopi roundhouse and sat facing the mountains.
4. *Something about what a word is used for.* He used the spade to dig up the garden.
5. *What kind of thing or action it is.* Swiveling his hips, wagging the club, and aiming for the pin, he drove his first four golf balls into the water.
6. *How something is done.* He expectorated the gob of tobacco juice neatly into the spittoon.
7. *A general topic or ideas related to the words.* The dancing bears, the musicians, the cooks carrying huge plates of food all came to the church for the fiesta.

From their own reading, students can collect, explain, and display new words so that they will have concrete examples of the ways in which context explains word meaning. These examples can provide models for writing, and their own creations can also be displayed.

# Metacognitive Context Instruction

Model the following strategy for students, then encourage them to use it during their independent reading.

1. Make a transparency of a passage and omit a contextually explained word.
2. Direct students to:
  - *Look.* Before, at, and after the word.
  - *Reason.* Connect what they know with what the author has written.
  - *Predict a possible meaning.*
  - *Resolve or redo.* Decide if they know enough or should stop.
3. Discuss — discussion is critical.
4. Reveal the author's word choice.
5. Discuss further. Use references to elaborate.

# Cloze Procedure

The cloze procedure can help students learn to use context to infer word meanings. In a cloze passage, selected words are omitted from the text and replaced with a line or space. Reading a cloze passage requires readers to use their knowledge of context to supply appropriate words and concepts to create a meaningful passage. For example:

More direct instruction and \_\_\_\_\_ with vocabulary may be given by using the \_\_\_\_\_ procedure in its many modifications. A cloze passage \_\_\_\_\_ selected words from the \_\_\_\_\_ and replaces them with a line or \_\_\_\_\_. Reading a cloze passage requires \_\_\_\_\_ to use their knowledge of \_\_\_\_\_ to supply appropriate words and concepts to \_\_\_\_\_ a meaningful passage.

In completing a cloze passage, the teacher should have the students supply sets of words that might be appropriate to create a meaningful passage. For the passage above, several words could fit many of the omissions. For example, you might have supplied:

experience/practice; cloze; deletes/omits/leaves out; passage/paragraph/text;  
space; readers/students; meaning/context; complete/create/finish/fill in

There are several variations of the cloze procedure which are described below.

## **Zip Cloze**

One problem that readers sometimes encounter when using context is a total loss of the sense of the selection some place in the passage. Where more sophisticated readers might push on and attempt to recapture the meaning, less flexible readers often become frustrated and give up. The Zip Procedure supplies constant feedback to readers to “keep them going” in the context.

Put the passage on an overhead transparency. Cover the chosen words with masking tape. Have the students skim for gist and then supply the masked words one at a time. As each possibility is predicted and discussed, the tape is pulled off (or “zipped”) so that readers receive immediate feedback from the text as well as being given more of the context from which to make further predictions. In addition this procedure could be used to increase awareness of certain word classes such as nouns or sentence elements such as masking over words or phrases that describe something.

## **Maze Cloze**

This procedure is helpful for students who may need more support or practice in distinguishing between related words. Instead of deleting words from a passage, provide students with several choices for each omitted word. For example:

The boy on the hill lived in a yellow \_\_\_\_\_  
house.  
cat.  
umbrella.

Start with clear, unambiguous choices. When students are more comfortable with the procedure, the choices can be structured to draw attention to more subtle differences in words, including connotation and denotation. Maze gives students a chance to evaluate possibilities for contextual appropriateness without having to generate terms from their own memory.

# C(2)QU

The purpose of C(2)QU (Context, Context, Question, Use) is to present both definitional and contextual information about new words to students in a way that allows them to hypothesize about meaning, to articulate the cues that lead to the hypothesis and to refine and use what they have learned with feedback from the group and from the teacher.

1. Present the word in a broad but meaningful context, such as a word selected from a story or chapter. Ask students to form hypotheses about the word's meaning; to give attributes, ideas, or association; and to "think aloud" to explain to the group the sources of their hypotheses. (Context 1)
2. Provide more explicit context with some definitional information. Ask students to reflect on their initial ideas and to reaffirm or refine them again in a "think-aloud" mode. (Context 2)
3. Ask a question that involves understanding the meaning of the word. At this point, you can also ask for a definition or give one if necessary. Discuss as needed with students, using each other's clues and explanations as more data. (Question)
4. Ask student to use the word in a meaningful sentence to demonstrate that they understand the word. (Use)
5. Go back into the C(2)QU loop as needed.

# The Sentence Game

Prepare a question and three-sentence context for each word that follows this pattern:

*Question.* Uses the meaning of the word (What is an aeronaut's job?)

*Sentence 1.* A broad but meaningful context (The aeronaut was getting the hot air balloon ready for flying.)

*Sentence 2.* Adds more detailed information (The aeronaut told her helpers to let go of the ropes so she could fly the hot air balloon.)

*Sentence 3.* An explicit definition (An aeronaut is a person who flies a hot air balloon.)

Show student teams the question first and sentence 1. Any team that can correctly answer the question after this first clue wins 2 points. If the students need more help, the second sentence is shown. Correct responses after two clue sentences win 1 point. The definition is used for checking or for instruction if no group comes up with the right answer. For more difficult words, any number of sentences can be used with clues. Students often enjoy setting up a TV game show process for this game and can form teams to compose contexts as well.

# Develop Vocabulary

## Points to Remember for Developing Vocabulary

- Talk about words – interesting words, unusual words, new words, or old words with new meanings.
- Teach in context whenever possible.
- Teach students how to use context to figure out new words.
- Focus on just a few words at a time. It is better to learn three words well than to learn ten words superficially.
- Promote words. Maintain a wall chart with the three or four most interesting words students have read or heard this week.
- Think in terms of phrases and sentences and interesting sayings.
- Use literature as a model of how words can be used. Good authors are masters at choosing just the right word.
- Promote variety and versatility. Talk about how even a simple word can have many shades of meaning: for example, *hit* the ball, a *hit* show, *hit* the nail on the head, *hit* and run, *hit* the deck, and so on.
- Compliment students when they use interesting language.
- Encourage students to use the context to predict the meaning of unknown words. Have them record unknown words on the chart on the following page, then ask them to predict a word's meaning. Finally, have them check their prediction by looking up the word in a dictionary. The definition or synonym goes in the third column.

# Find the Key Words

Teach students to look for key words as they are reading. These are the words that will help them determine the meaning of unknown words. Highlighting or underlining the key words will help them use this information to determine meanings of unknown words.



# Survival Words

- Select several words from a text that may cause students trouble. These should be words that students are likely to encounter again as they are reading.
- Have students create a chart like the one on the next page.
- Students should copy the words in the first column of the chart and check the appropriate column indicating their familiarity with the word – not familiar, somewhat familiar, I think I know.
- Ask students to write the meanings of as many of the words as they know in the “Meaning” column.
- Have students read the selection, looking for the words on the chart. When they find a word, they should record the page on which it is found and confirm their predicted meaning from the context.
- After students have rated their word knowledge, written their meanings, and read the text, break them into groups and ask them to share with each other the meanings they are most confident about.
- Finally, discuss the words with the whole group, answering questions and clarifying thinking.

# Semantic Mapping

Using Semantic Mapping before and after reading will expand a reader’s word knowledge . It will also help the reader to see the relationships and interrelationships of words. It will help students build bridges from the known to the new.

Procedure:

1. Select a word important to the story
2. Write it down
3. Think of related words and list them in categories
4. Name the categories
5. Discuss the words and their relationships
6. Read the story
7. Return to the semantic map. Add new words and discuss the relationships

Evaluation:

- Are you able to use the vocabulary (word knowledge) to understand the passage?
- Can you develop a meaningful paragraph using the instructional words and related word?

Additional Suggestion:

- Use semantic mapping as a vehicle to introduce or summarize a chapter or a thematic unit





# Contextual Analysis

When supporting developing or struggling readers, it is important to help them remember that although we pay attention to the way a word looks when we read, we also must pay attention to how it is used in a sentence.

Help students analyze new vocabulary by having them complete a graphic organizer that requires analyzing how a word is used in context. A blank is found on the next page.

## Human Context Clues

Play this game to help students learn which words are helpful in determining the meaning of an unknown word.

1. Select a sentence with an unknown word.
2. Write each word in the sentence on a separate index card.
3. Hand each index card to a student and share with those students the sentence.
4. Have the students arrange themselves so the sentence can be read from left to right.
5. The student with the unknown word turns his card around so the other students can see it. The words on the other cards should not be revealed.
6. Arbitrarily ask one student at a time to reveal his card. Discuss whether or not each word helps students determine the meaning of the unknown word.
7. Continue until all words have been revealed.

### USE THE CONTEXT CLUES

What does it mean?

Another word with a similar meaning

A reptile with a shell on its back; warm-blooded

turtle

tortoise

Where we've seen or heard the word

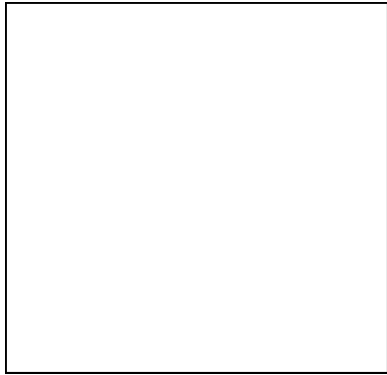
It is a \_\_\_\_\_

"The Tortoise and the Hare"

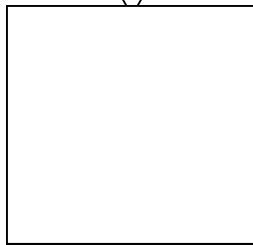
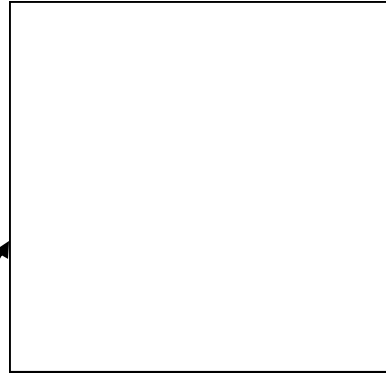
\_\_\_ Noun – person, place or thing  
\_\_\_ Verb – action word  
\_\_\_ Adjective – describing noun  
\_\_\_ Adverb – describing verb

# USE THE CONTEXT CLUES

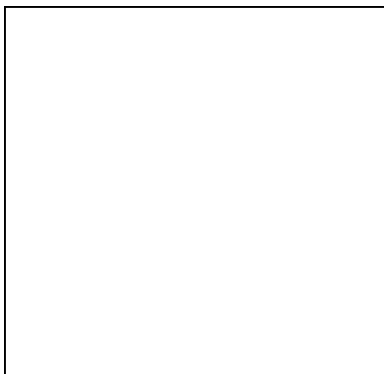
What does it mean?



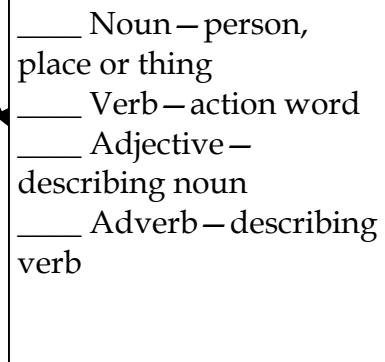
Another word with a similar meaning



Where we've seen or heard the word



It is a \_\_\_\_\_



Noun – person, place or thing  
 Verb – action word  
 Adjective – describing noun  
 Adverb – describing verb

# Multiple Meaning Words

Words that have more than one meaning often present problems for students. These words usually don't present any problems as far as decoding goes. They are words that are often familiar in a student's oral language if they are native English speakers. However, for second-language learners, these words require many exposures in meaningful text before students feel as if they understand all of the different meanings.

To call students' attention to these words, follow these steps:

1. Select three to five words to be taught in one lesson.
2. Present the words on the board or overhead. Give the students the same words on cards.
3. Use one of the words in a written sentence and ask the students to provide a meaning for the words. For example: (A) My mother asked me to *set* the table before dinner.
4. After the students have agreed on a definition, present the same word in a new sentence. For example: (B) Jamie was always 10 minutes late for school, so his mother \_\_\_\_\_ the clock ahead 10 minutes.
5. Ask students to hold up the word card that shows the word that best fits into the second sentence.
6. Discuss how *set* is also the correct answer in sentence B. What definition can you give for *set* in sentence B? How is the meaning different for the word *set* in the two sentences?
7. Ask the students if they can think of another definition for *set* or how they have heard people use the word in a different way. They may suggest *set*, as in "set the book on the table," or *set*, as in "ready, set, go."
8. Repeat the steps for the other words for the lesson.

The following chart lists some common multiple meaning words.

about	run	spell	can
will	down	mean	right
page	letter	head	saw
state	hard	above	band
back	set	well	have
head	bank	high	on
by	use	book	face
miss	side	light	last
point	left	take	off
over	home	get	cut

# When to Use Context Clues and When Not to Use Context Clues

Context alone cannot substitute for direct vocabulary instruction. Some words will need to be taught before readers can comprehend a text. Some researchers found that students who read grade-level texts under natural conditions have about a one in twenty chance of learning meaning from context. Others agree that learning words through context clues is limited at best. They offer several cautions about word learning through context:

- Context clues are a relatively ineffective means for inferring the meaning of specific words.
- Students are more apt to learn specific new vocabulary when definitional information is combined with contextual clues than when contextual analysis is used in isolation.
- Research on teaching contextual analysis as a transferable and generalizable strategy for word learning is promising, but limited.

When determining which words should be directly taught, a four-step process may prove helpful:

1. Determine what you want your students to learn from the reading of the content; in other words, the theme of the unit of study.
2. Identify key terms that are related to the unit's theme.
3. Decide on appropriate strategies to introduce and reinforce the words (e.g., a graphic organizer)
4. Identify the general words that are not necessarily central to the theme of the unit, but that lend themselves to various word-learning strategies that promote independence (e.g., modeling words in context)

Another way to help you decide which words to teach is to ask the following questions:

- Is understanding the word important to understanding the selection in which it appears?
  - If no, then you select other words that are more important.
- Are students able to use context or structural analysis skills to discover the word's meaning?
  - If yes, allow them to practice them.
- Can working with this word be useful in furthering students' context, structural analysis, or dictionary skills?
  - If yes, then focus on that.
- How useful is this word outside of the reading selection being currently taught?
  - The more frequent a word is, the greater the chances that students will retain the word once you teach it.

# Using Context Clues to Figure Out Meanings of Words

Sometimes readers can figure out word meanings from the context or from their prior knowledge of a concept. Below are some strategies students can use to figure out the meaning of a word by using context clues. These should be taught to students..

- Reread the sentence. Look for ideas and words that offer meaning clues.
- Read the sentence without the word.
  - Can you figure out what word you know that would make sense in place of the unknown word?
- Look at the word in relation to the sentence and full paragraph.
  - Can you figure out a meaning?
- Read the two or three sentences that came before the one that contains the unfamiliar word(s). Look for meaning clues (i.e., synonyms or antonyms).
- Read the two or three sentences that come after the one that contains the unfamiliar word(s). Look for meaning clues (i.e., synonyms or antonyms).
- Look at the page where the word is located.
  - Is there an illustration or diagram that helps with the meaning of the word
- Find the base or root word and think of its meaning.
- See if the prefix can help you understand the word.
- Ask yourself: Have I seen or heard this word in another text or situation? What do I recall?
- Think of the overall meaning of the selection you are reading. Does your understanding of the whole help you figure out particular words?
- Ask a classmate if he/she knows the meaning of the word.
- Look the word up in a dictionary.
  - See if any of the meanings fit the sentence.
- As a last resort, ask your teacher or other adult.

## Word Races

Assign groups of students a simple word for which there are many synonyms, and see which group can come up with the most synonyms for its word in a given amount of time.

# New Words in Context Chart

The matrix in this activity helps students to systematically think about word meanings and then remember them. It also is a good record of the words that students are encountering and attempting to learn. The matrix builds the habit of using both context and word parts to figure out word meanings.

## **Procedure:**

1. Provide students with a copy of the matrix (see next page).
2. Put a sentence from the text with a new word or phrase in column 1 and circle the new word.
3. Put word parts and related words in column 2.
4. Use columns 1 and 2 to predict the word's meaning.
5. Read further in the text and see if the text helps form the word's meaning, and then discuss the word in class or use a dictionary to find the word's meaning.
6. Use or generate a sentence, rhyme or picture that helps the students to remember the word's meaning.

# Synonyms, Antonyms and Homonyms

Cut out stories from the newspaper and have students change as many words as possible to synonyms, antonyms, or even homonyms. Ask students to write evaluations of how the changes affected the meaning of the story. The funnier and more creative the story, the better.

# Round-Robin Word

Have all students in the class stand. Select a common word such as *said* or *walked* and ask each student to provide a synonym for it. If the student can't think of a word within a short time period (10-15 seconds) or the word has already been given, have him sit down. Continue playing until there is only one person left standing.



## Homophone Stories

Read picture books out loud that use homophones in creative ways such as F. Gwynne's *Chocolate Moose for Dinner* and *The King Who Rained*. Ask students to create their own homophone stories using as much creativity as possible.

## Class Thesaurus

Develop an oversized class thesaurus to which students can add new terms and synonyms as they learn them. Students can use the book to expand their writing and reading activities; in content-area classrooms, students can also make dictionaries with definitions of key terms.

## Guess My Word

At the start of the day, write up to five new words on the chalkboard. Use the words in as many ways as possible in class. Ask students to consider the context of the words and guess what they think the words might mean (no dictionaries allowed). By the end of the class period, see how close students can come to the correct definition of the given words.



# Contextual Redefinition

1. **Select a few unfamiliar words** that are important to understanding the material students will read.
2. **Write a sentence for each word**, using it in appropriate context and providing clues to its meaning.
3. **Present the words orally and in writing** but without a sentence context. You may want to pronounce each word repeatedly and ask students to repeat after you. Students then suggest possible meanings, discuss the possibilities, and choose the one that is most appropriate for each word.
4. **Present each word in the sentence you prepared** and ask students again to provide possible meanings and to discuss the reasons for their answers.
5. **Students verify definitions** from a dictionary or glossary. This can be done by selected volunteers or in small groups.

Contextual redefinition provides opportunities for modeling and practicing the use of many kinds of context clues. The activity is most productive if all the sentences presented fit the context of the whole text that students are reading. If the words that are chosen contain structural clues such as a recognizable prefix or word root, contextual redefinition allows students to practice cross-checking by considering whether meaning cues confirm structure cues.

# Antonym Poems

You may want to have students write Synonym Poems before attempting Opposite (or Antonym) Poems. Antonym poems describe what a subject is not.

Start by sharing the samples found on the next page. Discuss each example and guide students to notice the following things about an antonym poem:

- It is about opposites.
- It's made of couplets, so it can be two, four, six, eight or more lines long. (Four lines is a good length because many students find it difficult to sustain the poem beyond that.)
- The first line is frequently, though not always, a question: What is the opposite of \_\_\_\_\_?
- If the poem opens with a question, the rest of the poem answers that question.
- Like all good poems, a good opposite illustrates with specific details.

Model how to write a poem before having students work with a partner or independently to write their own.

## **OPPOSITES**

What is the opposite of new?  
It might be stale gum that's hard to chew,  
Or it could be wrinkled and gray;  
Most old people are that way.

The opposite of flower  
Can easily be told within the hour.  
It isn't leaves, a stem, or petals,  
But big fat blobs of ugly metal.

What is the opposite of good?  
Why, someone mean and nasty: a hood.

What is the opposite of kind?  
A goat that butts you from behind.

The opposite of a chair  
Is sitting down with nothing there.

What is the opposite of having many?  
It is quite obvious: not having any!

# Synonym Poems

Share the sample Synonym Poems found on the next page with your students. Make sure they know the term ***synonym***. Divide the class into small groups and give each group a couple of thesauruses. Assign a couple of words to each group and ask them to find some synonyms. You may want to talk to students about appropriate use of a thesaurus. Students might be tempted to use it as a source of “big” words that are not natural to them but are simply words that they feel will “impress” a reader. Encourage them to use thesaurus words that they know but just hadn’t thought of when they are writing their poems.

Model for students how to use the synonyms they found in the thesaurus to write a two-line poem. Then have students work in pairs or individually to create their own synonym poems. The following guidelines may be helpful:

- A synonym poem is descriptive.
- It is always made up of one couplet.
- The first line contains three or four synonyms (or descriptive words) for the subject.
- The second line either tells how you feel about the subject (for example, “This old trash won’t be forgotten”) or describes the subject a little more (“They will haunt you if they can.”)
- Each line generally has seven or eight syllables arranged in a way that gives each poem a distinctive rhythm.

**NOTE:** Working with synonyms provides an opportunity to talk about word choice. Ask kids such questions as: Why might it be better to use one word instead of another? Do different words create different moods? Although all the synonyms mean essentially the same thing, why do we react differently when we hear (or use) some of the synonyms? For example, *skinny* and *slender* are synonyms for *thin*. How do we react to those words? Does one have a less appealing connotation than the other? This contrast between connotations of the same word could, incidentally, make for an interesting poem. For example, the students could write a synonym poem using only unpleasant synonyms of a word. For example, the first line of “Thin” might be: “Slight, bony, twiggy, gaunt.” And then they could try one with a sunnier spin: “Slender, lithe, willowy.”

## **SYNONYM POEMS**

### **Rancid**

Sour, musty, putrid, rotten  
This old trash won't be forgotten.

### **Outlaw**

Pirate, bandit, thief, or crook  
At them the judge should throw the book.

### **Earth**

World, planet, one-mooned globe  
To other planets we send probes.

### **Ghost**

Spirit, goblin, bogeyman  
They will haunt you if they can.

### **Fast**

Swift, speedy, fleet, or quick  
Go too fast and you'll make me sick.

# Solving Analogy Problems

Typically when we think of analogy problems, we think of something like

*Bone* is to *skeleton* as *word* is to \_\_\_\_\_.

Students are then asked to determine the missing word. To date, analogies in this format have not appeared on any of the state achievement tests. However, the thinking required to complete such analogies could be quite helpful to students. When students can determine the relationships that exist between words, they are better able to comprehend new vocabulary.

## Procedure:

1. Present students with analogy problems, using either an oral or written format, and give them the opportunity to provide the missing terms. Allow students to work in pairs or small groups so they can discuss their ideas with one another.
2. Invite students to share their answers aloud. As they share, make sure that they include a description of the *relationship* that both sets of terms have in common. In the first example of analogy problems with one missing term, students would explain that a bone is *part of* a skeleton; thus, the first item in the second part of the sentence (a word) must be *part of* whatever answer they provide as the second item.
3. One way to help students understand analogies is to use a graphic organizer that has space for the relationship to be written. (see next page)
4. Notice that on the bottom line, students write the relating factor. This format helps to highlight the importance of being clear about *how* the items in each set are related.

