

A GUIDE TO IMPLICIT INSTRUCTION OF VOCABULARY

English Language Arts

STRATEGY 1: USING CONTEXT CLUES

Using context clues is a broad term for figuring out unknown words in context by using the hints authors include. Context clues are often found in the same sentence or paragraph of the unknown word. Many of the strategies below are similar but vary slightly. Students should be able to use these strategies fluidly depending on the demands of the text.

Note: Teachers should avoid using context clues as the *only* way of teaching vocabulary during reading. The context surrounding a given word is often misleading. In order to maximize students' practice using context clues, select words with a specific, directive context surrounded by other words students know. See examples below.

- **Synonym context clues:** Words around the unknown word that mean the same or nearly the same thing as the word.
Samantha was overwhelmed with glee, or happiness, when she saw her puppy.
There were many unusual exotic outfits at the circus.
- **Definitions:** An exact definition of the unknown word that is included directly in the text. These are often found in informational texts.
Students take a lot of examinations, or tests, in college.
Insomniacs, people who have trouble sleeping, often try meditating before going to bed.
- **Antonym/contrast clues:** Words around the unknown word that mean the opposite or nearly the opposite of the word.
My sister has two cats. One cat is a coward, while the other is very brave.
The insulated jacket kept me warm, while my thin jacket did not.
- **Examples:** Words around the unknown word that give a reader other examples of what the word means.
Flammable items, things that easily catch fire, must be kept in cool temperatures.
- **Explanations:** Words around the unknown word that explain what the word means.
Drew was mortified because his teacher yelled at him in front of the entire class.
The table seemed indestructible because nothing could break it.
- **Meaning clues:** Understandings about the overall topic of the text that help figure out the unknown word. (For example, in a text about insects, most of the details in the text will be about insects. Therefore, any unknown words are likely terms about insects.)

- **Plot clues:** Understandings about what is happening in the story and about the character that help figure out what the unknown word might mean. This strategy is often used in conjunction with another strategy.
"Bunce was a duck-and-geese farmer. He kept thousands of ducks and geese. He was a kind of potbellied dwarf. He was so short his chin would have been under water in the shallow end of any swimming pool in the world." (from Fantastic Mr. Fox by Roald Dahl)
- **Picture clues:** Pictures that help figure out the meaning of the unknown word.
- **Syntactic or word order clues:** Understanding the part of speech of the unknown word to help understand the meaning of the word. (For example, is the word an adjective, noun, verb, or adverb? How does that help determine the meaning of this word?)

STRATEGY 2: DROP IN WORDS

Some words are important to know in order to understand the text, but they don't have enough context surrounding them to help students infer meaning. We recommend using a "drop-in" definition to define these unfamiliar words while reading a text aloud or during shared reading. This means that you'll plan a short, student-friendly definition to give when you get to that word in the text. Then you'll continue reading without discussion. For example, when encountering the word "famine," you might say, "a famine is a situation in which a lot of people don't have enough food to eat." The word famine is important for understanding what is happening in this section of text but is not important for the rest of the text, so a "drop-in" definition is sufficient. The key is to do this quickly so that you can return to reading the text as soon as possible.

STRATEGY 3: USING WORD PARTS

While using context clues allows students to look outside of a word for clues, using word parts challenges students to look within a word to figure out the meaning. Understanding morphology, or the study of the internal structure of words and the rules by which they are formed, directly impacts a student's ability to tackle increasingly complex texts. Key understandings are:

- Affixes can have separate meanings that can transform a word's meaning.
- Adding or removing affixes can impact the part of speech of a word.
- Inflections do not change the core meaning of a word.

STRATEGY 4: USING RESOURCES

Authors often include resources within a text to help readers determine the meaning of unknown words. Resources are also often available outside of a text to help determine or confirm the meaning of an unknown word, including a glossary, dictionary, thesaurus, or footnotes. Students should be encouraged to use these resources as much as possible.