Context Clues

Reading Strategies Across the Content Areas
Why Use Context Clues?

Using context clues helps one figure out unknown words without using a dictionary.

Dictionaries are not provided in life (or on standardized tests).

The more a student “think about a word, the higher the chance of retention.”
And...

- These devices (types of context clues) are used by writers of textbooks and other educational materials, so by teaching students to look for these clues they can access their texts more effectively.

- Students learn word parts in English and Science classes so they should be held accountable for trying to use that knowledge when reading unfamiliar words.
Six Types of Context Clues

• Definition
• Example-Illustration
• Contrast
• Logic
• Root Words and Affixes (Word Parts)
• Grammar

Important words are also often written in bold or in italics in academic texts.
DEFINITION

Readers use the definition in the sentence to understand the unknown word.

Examples:

- Mary retained, or kept, the deed to her mother’s house.
- Spanish noblemen lived in encomiendas, estates given to Spaniards in the new world beginning in 1503.
Readers use an example or illustration to understand the unknown word.

Example:
Comparing Barry Bonds to *infamous* figures such as Al Capone, Benito Mussolini, Sadaam Hussein, and Art Modell is a bit extreme, don't you think?
CONTRAST

Readers understand the unknown word because it is compared or contrasted with another word in the sentence.

Examples:

Her sisters were thin, but Imelda herself was *obese*.
The United States is an open country, especially when compared with a *hermetic* nation like Bhutan.
LOGIC

Readers think about the rest of the sentence to understand the unknown word.

Owls are mainly nocturnal, but other birds of prey hunt during daylight hours.

Because he ate candy morning, noon and night, it was inevitable that he would have a lot of cavities in his teeth.
WORD PARTS

Readers use their knowledge of root words and affixes to figure out the unknown word.

Example:
The blue moon was luminous on New Years Eve.

Related Word: illuminate  Suffix: “full of”
GRAMMAR

Readers use the word’s function in the sentence or its part of speech to figure out the unknown word.

Example:
A spider’s exoskeleton is extremely strong and does not stretch. In order to increase in size, spiders must form a new exoskeleton. Most spiders molt five to ten times.

By determining that the word is a verb, students know that it’s something spiders DO – helping them to conceptualize the word. What would they need to DO in context?
EXAMPLES IN CONTEXT
If we are to understand the politics of a nation, we must understand the issues people care about and the underlying images of the good society and how to achieve it that shape their opinions. Citizens in different nations differ as to the importance they attach to various policy outcomes. In some societies, private property is highly valued. In others, communal possessions are the rule. Some goods are valued by nearly everyone, such as material welfare, but societies differ nevertheless: some emphasize equality and minimum standards for all, while others emphasize the opportunity to move up the economic ladder.
“communal”

• **Root Words and Affixes**
  • Communal- prefix “com” meaning with or together as in the word community

• **Contrast**
  • “Communal possessions” is contrasted to “private property,” so because possessions and property are the same thing, private must be the opposite of communal.
The eight-man expedition was pinned down in a ferocious blizzard high on K2, waiting to make an **assault** on the summit, when a team member named Art Gilkey developed **thrombophlebitis**, a life-threatening altitude-induced blood clot (91).


**Logic**

- The meaning of “assault” can be understood in the context of the sentence dealing with the summit of a mountain.

**Definition**

- The definition of “thrombophlebitis” is listed immediately following the word.
STRATEGIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

(What can we do?)
Preview selections. Identify vocabulary that may be a problem for students.
This study revealed that mutations were occurring at about the same rate across the full genome—not just in specific parts. This might help explain why efforts to keep some plants at bay with single-gene-targeting herbicides are often only briefly successful. It should also hearten researchers who are searching for ways to improve crops. But to truly expedite strategic breeding for many crops, full genome sequencing will be crucial to giving horticulturalists a genetic map to different traits.
Return the Question. When students ask what a word means, ask them what they “think” the word means.

Provide examples and clues by using the word in other sentences rather than providing a definition.
Write sentences on the board for bellwork or exit slips. Have students determine word meaning from the context.

Use organizers for active reading or to conceptualize unfamiliar terms.
Frayer Model

Definition in your own words
A quadrilateral is a shape with 4 sides.

Facts/characteristics
• 4 sides
• may or may not be of equal length
• sides may or may not be parallel

Examples
• square
• rectangle
• trapezoid
• rhombus

Nonexamples
• circle
• triangle
• pentagon
• dodecahedron
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>pg. #</th>
<th>What I Think the word means</th>
<th>Def.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Active Reading Charts**
Worksheets or Bellwork

1) With his worn-out clothes and shoes and his bad haircut, he looked *pathetic*.
   Using the context for clues, *pathetic* means ____________________________________________.

2) Under different *circumstances*, I would consider taking you out for dinner.
   Using the context for clues, *circumstances* means ________________________________________.

3) The cars in NASCAR races move at a great *velocity*.
   Using the context for clues, *velocity* means ____________________________________________.
KNOWLEDGE RATING SCALES

• List words. Ask students to assign #s to the word for the following:
• 1. Know It Well
• 2. Have Seen or Heard It
• 3. Have No Clue What It Means

Use rating scales to access prior knowledge or to introduce words at the beginning of an unit.
## Knowledge Rating Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Know it well</th>
<th>Have seen or heard it</th>
<th>No Clue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rhombus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>triangle</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pentagon</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quadrilateral</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trapezoid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>square</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCEPT MAPS

Examples of what to put in sections:
- Synonyms
- Antonyms
- Definition in Own Words
- What it’s Like
- What it’s Not Like
- A picture
- A sentence using the word
**VERBAL AND VISUAL WORD ASSOCIATION (VVWA)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD</th>
<th>VISUAL REPRESENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swastika</td>
<td>![Swastika Image]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:**
It is a very tiny structure that makes up all plants and animals.

**Personal Association:**
It reminds me of rooms in a house. They have lots of different uses, but together they make a home.
OTHER RESOURCES AND LINKS:

- https://www.msu.edu/~defores1/gre/roots/gre_rts_afx_tab2.htm Comprehensive list
- http://www.betterendings.org/homeschool/Words/Root%20Words.htm List
- http://www.prestwickhouse.com/articles.aspx?id=52 Quizlet resources from Prestwick House
- http://www.virtualsalt.com/roots.htm List with helpful links and resources
- http://quizlet.com/_5ack Word parts for Science (Medical)
Links to Organizers and Examples

- Frayer Model Template
- Directions for a Folded Frayer Model
- Blank Knowledge Rating Scale
- Math Knowledge Rating Scales
- Blank Word Detective Sheet
- Sample Science Word Detective Sheet
- Verbal and Visual Word Association
- Vocabulary Journal
- Vocabulary Word Map
- Sample Vocabulary Organizer (Social Studies)