

Contents

Introduction4
Enriching and Extending Functional Vocabulary
Learning New Words
Polysemantic Words
Enriching Vocabulary
Self-Selected Vocabulary
Vocabulary in Context
Academic Vocabulary
8 Reinforcing Content-Area Vocabulary
O Collective Nouns
Examining Word Parts
(1) Affixes
① Latin Roots
(D) Greek Roots
Exploring Words and Language Use
Etymology: Word History
1 Words Borrowed From Other Languages
1 Modern Words
(b) Acronyms
1 Euphemisms
Children's Books and Professional Works Cited

Vocabulary in **C**ontext

Skill: Use words surrounding an unfamiliar word to determine its meaning

Overview

It's been reported that students learn about 2,000 to 3,000 new words per year. They learn many of these words from direct instruction, but many more from the variety of reading they do. Often, word meaning can be gleaned by focusing on surrounding words and sentences, or context. When using context clues, it's important to remember that the word's definition is limited to this one context; readers with strong vocabularies are able to substitute synonyms for unknown words and to extend the meaning of a known word to other contexts.

How to Teach

Select a few target words from an engaging text your students are reading, such as *Holes* by Louis Sachar (1998). You may decide that *perseverance*, a word used on page 8, would be an important Tier 2 word for students. Many characters in this book, as well as in other texts, show perseverance, often in the face of adversity.

Using an overhead transparency, copy the paragraph in which the target word appears. Read the paragraph aloud, pointing out the target word. Explain that sometimes authors provide clues to help readers figure out unfamiliar words. In the *perseverance* example, you might read the paragraph and note that the author uses the word when he mentions that Stanley's father would work on a job for years—sometimes going without sleep for days.

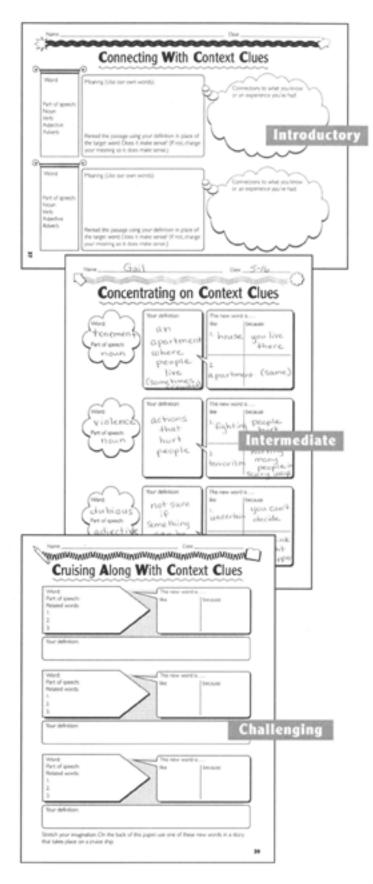
Discuss parts of speech and how knowing a word's part of speech can offer clues to its meaning. If, for example, we can determine from the sentence that the target word is a verb, we know that it's describing some type of action. If it's an adjective, it would describe a noun or pronoun. Sachar uses the word *perseverance* in the following sentence: "Stanley's father was smart and had a lot of perseverance" (p.8).



Because perseverance is a noun, we know that it refers to a person, place, thing, or quality. Explain that perseverance refers to a quality.

Next, show students how to define the target word in their own words and reread the passage, substituting a definition that you provide in the paragraph. You might say, for example, "Stanley's father was smart and showed everyone that he would work hard to accomplish what he set out to do." Model asking yourself, "Does it make sense?"

Introduce students to words related to your target word, too, like persevere. Since words that are built from a common base word have similar meanings, learning one word can often help us learn many other semantically related words. Have students explain how the target word (or a related word) connects to something in their lives, then talk about how the target word is like other, more familiar words (determination, patience, and persistence). You might point out that people who show a great deal of perseverance also tend to show determination (they don't give up), patience (they are willing to keep trying even if it takes a while), and persistence (they move steadily along).





Using the Tiered Organizers

Before matching students with tiered graphic organizers, check to see that they can use context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words, identify parts of speech, and compare words with similar meanings.

Introductory: Connecting With Context Clues

Students identify (or you may assign) two unfamiliar words from their reading. They determine each word's part of speech and write its meaning in their own words. Next, they reread the passage, substituting their own definitions and checking that the definition makes sense. Finally, they explain how these words connect to their prior knowledge or experiences.

Intermediate: Concentrating on Context Clues

Students identify (or you may assign) three unfamiliar words from their reading. They record each word's part of speech and write its meaning in their own words. Last, students list two words that have similar but slightly different meanings and explain how the words are similar in meaning and/or usage.

Challenging: Cruising Along With Context Clues

Students identify (or you may assign) three unfamiliar words from their reading, record each word's part of speech, and list up to three other words that are related to it. They define each target word, provide a word that has a similar but slightly different meaning, and explain why these words are similar. Finally, they stretch their imaginations by writing a short story using one of the target words. The story should take place on a cruise ship.

Concentrating on Context Clues

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Part of speech:	J



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Word:)
Part of spe	eech:	
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Your definition:	

The new word is			
like	because		
1.			
2.			

(Word:	
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Part of speech:	,
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Your definition:	

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