Don't Be Succinct; Bloviate About Context Clues

Subject: English/Vocabulary

Grade(s): 7 and up

Overview

No matter what a student's reading or vocabulary level is, context clues are a great way to help decipher and understand the meaning of new or unusual words. Here are four types of context clues that can help your students comprehend new vocabulary with aplomb.

Objectives

Students will:

- Recognize different types of context clues for determining the meaning of an unknown word
- Write sentences using context clues as a means to clarify the meaning of an unknown word

IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

Standard 3: Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

Materials Needed

- WordTeasers: College Prep

Getting Started: Ask students if they know what the word prevaricate means? Acknowledge those students who indicate that they know the definition. Then say, "For those of you who don't know what the word means, I'm going to use it in a sentence." Ask: "Is there ever a good reason to prevaricate?" Then say, "How many of you now think you know the meaning of prevaricate?" Acknowledge those students. Finally, tell students that you are going to use the word in a different sentence that may give students a clue to the definition of prevaricate. Ask: "Is there ever a good reason to prevaricate rather than to tell the truth?" Ask how many think they now

know the definition of prevaricate. Why? Discuss with students why this last question helped them understand the definition of prevaricate. (They were able to infer from the context of the sentence that to prevaricate is the opposite of to tell the truth.)

Development: Tell students that one way to understand new words in a sentence or a passage in their reading is to look for context clues. Explain that there are many different types of context clues. Write the following four types of context clues on the board along with the pair of sentences that illustrates each context clue. Discuss each pair of sentences with the class.

- **Linked Synonyms**—an unknown word is linked with similar words or synonyms in a series.
  Sentence Sample: Name a food you abhor.
  Linked Synonyms: Name a food you hate, detest, and abhor.
- **Appositive** — a phrase that provides additional information or a definition about a preceding noun.
  Sentence Sample: Argue for or against a meritocracy.
  Appositive: Argue for or against a meritocracy, a system in which people are rewarded based on talent or ability.
- **Compare/Contrast** — an antonym or phrase with an opposite meaning to an unknown word that is used to define that unknown word.
  Sentence Sample: Name something that makes you feel timorous.
  Appositive: Name something that makes you feel timorous, rather than confident.
- **Cause/Effect** — the cause for or result of an unknown word enables the meaning of the unknown word to be inferred.
  Sentence Sample: Who would you like to emulate?
  Cause/Effect: Because the student admired her coach, she wanted to emulate her.

Activity: Prepare the following handout, which includes five statements and questions adapted from the WordTeasers: College Prep Challenge Cards. Each statement or question includes a context clue to the meaning of the word in bold. Have students write a definition for each word in bold. Then, have them identify which of the four types of context clues is used to help clarify the word's meaning.

1. If you could give up an **onerous** or difficult task, what would it be? (Type of Context Clue: Linked Synonyms)

2. Name someone in your class who is so **frugal** they won't even spend a nickel for a soda. (Type of Context Clue: Cause/Effect)

3. What time of day are you most **lethargic** as opposed to energetic? (Type of Context Clue: Compare/Contrast)

4. Name your biggest **proponent**, such as a parent, older sibling, or teacher. (Type of Context Clue: Apposition)

5. Show how you would act in a **gregarious**, friendly, and outgoing manner to a new student. (Context Clue: Linked Synonyms)

Extension 1: Have each student select a WordTeaser Challenge Card from the box. Allow time for students to revise or rewrite the challenge question or statement on the card, using one of the four types of context clues to help clarify the meaning of the word in bold. Then allow time for students to read aloud their original and their revised WordTeaser question or statement. Discuss how the context clue helps clarify the meaning of the word.

Extension 2: Challenge students to write a sentence with a nonsense word, but with enough context clues to reveal the meaning of the nonsense word. Allow time for students to read their sentences aloud and challenge other students to guess the meaning of their nonsense words. For example: Jose was synerambulent about a 9:00 pm. curfew for teenagers, rather than firm in his opinion. (Meaning: ambivalent; indecisive; having two opposing opinions; Context Clue: Compare/contrast.)

For more Teacher Lesson Plans and Resources go to www.wordteasers.com.