Word Learning: Context Clues

College- and Career-Ready Standards Addressed: RL.6.4, RI.6.4, R.10

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Objective: Students will learn to use context clues to read and understand new words.

Materials
• One short text at the appropriate instructional level. Preview the text in advance to ensure that it represents the context clue type(s) included in the Context Clue Sheet. • Whiteboard, overhead projector, or some type of visual for the class to view during instruction. • Pencil. • Paper or notebook. • Context Clue Sheet. Consider presenting sample signal sentences from the text that the student(s) will read in this lesson.

Suggested Schedule and Group Size
Schedule: Daily, no more than five minutes to 10 minutes per session. **Recommended group size:** Small group, although exact group size will vary depending upon grade level. **Note:** The following script is intended as a model.

Activity	
Intervention Principle	**Sample Script and Procedures**
Use precise, simple language to preview the lesson.	**When we read, we often encounter words we do not know. We can use strategies to help us figure out how to say the word and determine its meaning in order to understand what the word means in the sentence.** **Good readers use context clues to help them understand the meaning of an unfamiliar and challenging word. For example, a reader might use the meaning of other words in a sentence or a picture on the page to help them learn the meaning of the unknown word. Today, we are going to learn how to use context clues to understand the meaning of unknown words.**

Activate prior knowledge by reviewing relevant skills.	**When we read, we may see words we do not know. One strategy that can help us to identify the meaning of unknown words is called word part analysis. This is when we break whole words into smaller parts to figure out the meaning of the words.** *Write strategy on board.*
	What is word part analysis? *(When we break words into parts to figure out their meaning.*
Preview the lesson.	**In word part analysis, we can identify prefixes, suffixes, and roots to recognize word parts that we might already know.** *Review some examples if needed.*
	Another strategy to help us figure out the meaning of an unknown word is to use context clues. During our lesson today, we will learn a context clue strategy that can help us to discover the meaning of unknown words.
	We will learn to recognize and interpret five types of context clues to help us understand unfamiliar words. Before we begin, let's talk about what a context clue is.
	A context clue can be:
	• **A word or phrase in the text that helps us understand an unknown word.**
	• **A visual such as a figure or a table that helps us understand the unknown word.**
Use study aides to help students learn and practice a new skill or strategy.	**What is a context clue?** *(Text or visuals that give hints to the meaning of an unfamiliar word.)*
	Introduce the Context Clue Sheet and review the context clue strategy and the clue types.
	Good readers use both word part analysis and context clues to help them learn the meaning of unfamiliar words. The Context Clue Sheet includes the context clue strategy in the top box and the five types of context clues in the box below. When you encounter an unfamiliar word during reading, you should use context clues to help you figure out the meaning of the word.
Use explicit instruction to teach a new skill or strategy. Break tasks into smaller steps compared with more intensive forms of instruction.	**Let's read the four steps of the context clue strategy as a group.**
	• **Step 1: Reread the sentence that contains the unknown word. Be on the lookout for signal words or punctuation.**
	• **Step 2: Reread the sentences before and after the sentence that contains the unknown word.**
	• **Step 3: Based on the clues, try to figure out the meaning of the word.**
	• **Step 4: Insert your meaning in the original sentence to see whether it makes sense.**
	Now let's review the five types of context clues that might help us understand the meaning of a word.
	Group the students in pairs to review the five types of context clues. Teachers may edit the Context Clue Sheet to include sample signal sentences that resemble text the students are currently reading.

	There are five types of context clues that can help us figure out the meaning of new words. Follow along on the Context Clue Sheet to learn about these clues.
	1. **Some authors include the definition of the word in the sentence to help us understand the meaning of a word.**
	2. **Some authors explain the meaning of a word by including a synonym, which is a word with a meaning that is similar to the unfamiliar word.**
	3. **Some authors might use an antonym, which is a word that means the opposite of the unfamiliar word.**
	4. **Some authors include examples of an unknown word's meaning in the sentence.**
	5. **Some authors provide general or inexact clues that do not provide the reader with a clear meaning of an unknown word.**
Provide students with opportunities to practice using the strategy. Monitor their progress and provide immediate feedback.	**Let's use partner reading to read the signal words of each type of context clue. With your partner, read the signal words for the "definition" context clue. Next, read the signal words for the "synonym" context clue. Then, read all of the signal words for the remaining context clue types with your partner.**
	Put your finger on the signal words for the definition context clue. Partners, check to make sure that your partner is at the correct spot to follow along.
	Allow the students adequate time to read the signal words. While students read, monitor their reading of signal words for accuracy and automaticity. After partners are finished reading the signal words, allow pairs to share which signal words they already knew and which signal words were new.
	The definition context clue might include signal words such as "is" or "are." Sometimes punctuation can also be a signal. For example, authors might use commas to separate the definition of a word from the rest of the sentence. Let's look at the signal sentences to see an example of each type of signal for the definition context clue.
	Write "is" and "or" on the board.
	With your partner, identify the signal word used in this example. The first signal sentence is "Brick made of sun-dried clay is called adobe." Turn to your partner and identify the signal word. *Provide students time to identify the signal word. Point to the word "is" on the board to confirm the correct response.*
	That's right, the signal word is "is."
	Again, with your partner, identify the signal word used in the next example. The second signal sentence is, "The Native Americans used adobe, or bricks made of sun-dried clay, to build their homes." Turn to your partner and identify the signal word.
	Provide students a short time to identify the signal word. Point to the word "or" on the board to confirm the correct response.

	Very good. Now let's try to use the context clues to help us learn the meaning of a word. For example, look at the word "adobe" in the definition signal sentences. When we read the sentence, we are looking for hints to help us understand the meaning of the word "adobe." The first signal sentence includes the definition of the word "adobe." The signal word "is" helps us to identify the type of context clue—a definition context clue.
	The second signal sentence also includes the definition of the word "adobe," but there is more information in the sentence. The signal word "or" helps us to identify the type of context clue—a definition context clue. Both signal sentences state that the definition of the word "adobe" is "bricks made of sun-dried clay."
	Now let's figure out the meaning of the words in bold in the remaining signal sentences on the cue sheet. Work with your partner to figure out what the meaning of the words "longhouses," "crops," and "textile" in the signal sentences. *Provide time for partners to work together and debrief.*
	Pass out a short text at the appropriate instructional level. The teacher may vary how many sentences the students will read together.
	Read the first two sentences with your partner. If you encounter an unfamiliar word, use the four steps in the context clue strategy we just practiced. Remember that during Step 1, you will look for signal words and types of context clues.
	Allow the students adequate time to read the sentences and apply the context clue strategy. While students read, monitor their reading of words for accuracy and automaticity.
	After partners are finished reading the assigned sentences, have pairs share which words were unfamiliar and how they applied the context clue strategy to understand the meanings of the words. Provide feedback.
	Now you will work independently to apply the context clue strategy to the next paragraph in the text. *Provide students with additional guidance and support to assist them in finding the meanings of the unfamiliar words.*
Error Correction	
Provide immediate and explicit error correction. Have the students practice the correct response.	If students make errors while reading the words aloud, or if they express incorrect meanings of words, provide immediate and corrective feedback. Say the correct pronunciation of the word and the meaning of the word. Have the students repeat the correct response.

Context Clue Sheet

This handout should serve as a guide for students while learning how to use context clues. The handout will help them to remember the five types of context clues they can use to learn the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Context Clue Strategy
1. Reread the sentence that contains the unknown word. Be on the lookout for signal words or punctuation.
2. Reread the sentences before and after the sentence that contains the unknown word.
3. Based on the clues, try to figure out the meaning of the word.
4. Insert your meaning in the original sentence to see whether it makes sense.

Type of Context Clues			
Types of Context Clues	What To Look For	Signal Words	Examples of Signal Sentences
Definition	A definition in the sentence	• Is, are, is called, means, or • Signal punctuation: Set off by commas	Brick made of sun-dried clay *is called* **adobe**. The Native Americans used **adobe**, *or* bricks made of sun-dried clay, to build their homes.
Synonym	A word with a meaning that is similar to the meaning of the unknown word	• Also, as, like, same, similarly, too	The Zuni built their homes with brick made of sun-dried clay. The Hopi *also* used **adobe** to build their homes.
Antonym	A word or phrase that means the opposite of the unknown word	• But, however, in contrast, on the other hand, although, unlike	The Hopi lived in single-family houses, *but* the Iroquois lived in **longhouses**.
Example	Several examples in a list	• Such as, for example, for instance, like, including	The Pueblo people grew many **crops** *such as* corn, beans, and squash.
General	General or inexact clues		After 1700, the Pueblos got sheep from the Spanish, and wool replaced cotton as the most important **textile**.