Dive Into Context Clues

Fifth Grade
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Help your students flex their vocabulary muscles with this lesson on using context clues. By deciphering the meanings of different nonsense words, young readers will greatly improve their comprehension skills.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to use context clues to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Materials and Preparation

- Paper
- Pencils

Key Terms

- context clues

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Tell the students that they are going to be learning a strategy for figuring out the meaning of new words.
- Have them imagine that they are in a restaurant and reading a menu. Under the dessert section of the menu, they see the item: creamy, cold vanilla gelato.
- Explain to the students that they may be able to easily figure out that the word "gelato" means ice cream because of a few clues: 1) it is a dessert and 2) it is described as creamy and cold.
- Tell students this strategy is called using context clues.

EL

- **Beginning**: Provide a student friendly definition for the word 'strategy' and invite students to think about strategies they use to learn and understand English.
- Use a visual of gelato to go with the introductory activity.
- **Intermediate**: Ask students to think about a time they went to a restaurant and didn't know a word on the menu.
  - Invite students to share about their experiences so they can make a personal connection to the introductory activity. Use sentence frames to support the discussion:
    - When I went to a restaurant, I saw the word... on the menu.
    - I didn't know what the word ... meant.
    - I used ... as a clue to figure it out.

Explicit Instruction/Teacher Modeling (15 minutes)

- Write this sentence on the board: "Sally and her friends went to the pool and they all wore their new elepods."
- Ask the students what "elepods" could be.
- Talk to the students about how a reader can use the context clues (or other known words) in the sentence to determine meaning.
- Make students aware that sometimes there is not enough information in one sentence to determine the meaning of the unknown word. They may have to read surrounding sentences to help.
- Tell the students that the nonsense word "elepods" could be any article of clothing that may be worn at the pool.
- Write this sentence on the board below the first sentence: "The girls wanted to show off their pretty painted toenails."

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Explain to the students that if they read this next, they can more clearly tell what the meaning of "elepods" is since it gives the clue about showing off their toenails. Tell students that from this example, we can determine that "elepods" are sandals or flip-flops.

**Guided Practice/Interactive Modeling (10 minutes)**

- Have students work with a partner to determine the meaning of the nonsense words in the following sentences:
  - "Children were taking swimming lessons and learning how to binzo on their backs."
  - "When Luke and Denzel jumped into the pool they made a big kankie."
  - "All the parents at the pool were sitting in the coolenz to try to stay cool."
- Partners should write down the sentences and replace the nonsense words with words that make sense.

**Independent Working Time (15 minutes)**

- Ask students to write the following sentences and replace each nonsense word with a word that makes sense:
  - "Doug took a gytoper after he got out of the pool so he wouldn't smell like chlorine."
  - "Betsy wore her zonbeeks in the pool so she could open her eyes underwater."
  - "The baby was floating around the pool in a flingtrop because she was unable to swim."

**Differentiation**

- **Enrichment**: Have advanced students write a short paragraph about something they know a lot about. However, as they write, they must replace the word for the topic with an nonsense word. For example, if they write about soccer, they should replace the word "soccer" with a nonsense word. Have advanced students exchange papers to see if they can determine what the other student wrote about.
- **Support**: For struggling learners, it may help to give them multiple choice answers for the practice sentences.

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Assessment (10 minutes)

- Ask students to write the following sentence and replace the nonsense word with a word that makes sense: "People enjoy swimming in the indoor wendoy in the winter since it is too cold to be outdoors."
- Have the students write a short explanation of how they arrived at their answer.

EL

- **Beginning**: Provide a word bank for the writing task.
- **Intermediate**: Provide sentence frames as support for the writing task:
  - When I read ____, I came to the conclusion that...
  - I think ____ means ____ because....

Review and Closing (10 minutes)

- Ask the students, "How can you figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word in a sentence?"
- Remind them to look for surrounding words that they know to help them determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

EL

- **Beginning**: Allow students to apply the strategy they learned to a text in their home language (L1) as a way to reflect and practice.
- **Intermediate**: Ask students to reflect on the strategy they used in this lesson.
- **Intermediate**: Have students talk with a partner to share their reflections. Allow students to use their home language (L1) if their partner speaks the same language.
- Provide sentence frames to support the discussion:
  - When I don't understand a word, I can use ... to help me figure out its meaning.
  - Using context clues helped me understand new words because...
  - It was hard to use context clues because...
  - I plan to use this strategy when I ...