

Context Clues

Lesson Objective	(Vocabulary) Students will learn to find and interpret context clues to help determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.	
Vocabulary	context clues: clues in the words and phrases coming before and/or after an unknown word that can help you identify the unknown word's meaning	
Reviewed Vocabulary	antonym, synonym	
Instructional Materials	Teacher	Student
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Masters • <i>TM#1: Context Clues Signal Words Poster</i> • Timer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Booklet • Practice—Selection of nonfiction text that students are currently reading that contains two challenging words with easily identified context clues and signal words (see Teacher Masters). Preselect the words that you would like students to define.

Preview

Writers carefully select words to convey their ideas to their readers. Sometimes readers will encounter words that they do not understand. They must then use different strategies to figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words on their own. Today you will learn how to use context clues to identify the meanings of unfamiliar words. Context clues are clues in the words and phrases coming before and/or after an unknown word that can help you identify the unknown word's meaning.

Teacher Note

Students may require additional time in order to achieve mastery of this material. Consider adding additional practice to promote understanding.

Engage Prior/Informal Knowledge

When you read, what are some techniques that you use to determine what an unknown word means? (*Answers will vary. Possible answers include: keep reading; use a dictionary; use context clues; ask someone; look at prefixes, suffixes, and roots.*)

Demonstrate

1. Introduce signal words and punctuation. Display *TM#1: Context Clues Signal Words Poster*.

Context clues can mean either nearly the same as the unknown word or nearly the opposite. Sometimes the context clue in a sentence is connected to the unknown word using a signal word or phrase. A signal word or phrase tells whether the context clue has the same meaning or the opposite meaning.

Look at the poster. What are some examples of signal words that show the same meaning? (*and, likewise, means, or, similarly,*

that is, comma without a signal word) **Notice that a comma might be a signal that the text provides information about a word.**

Other signal words show that the context clue means the opposite, or nearly the opposite, as the word you are trying to define. What are some examples of signal words that show the opposite meaning? (*although, but, despite, however, in contrast to, not, on the other hand, whereas*)

Remember, not all context clues are connected with signal words. But when signal words do appear in text, they help you determine the meanings of unknown words.

2. Demonstrate using a context clue and signal words to check a word's meaning.

The words that we practice with today might be easy for some of you. Focus on learning and practicing the strategy so that you can later apply it with more difficult words.

Display *TM#2: Demonstrate and Practice—Context Clues*. Direct students' attention to their copies, *SB#1: Demonstrate and Practice—Context Clues*. Read the first sentence aloud.

This sentence has a context clue that helps define the phrase *combat zones*. *Combat zones* is written in the first column of my Context Clues Steps chart. The next step is to identify a possible context clue, a word or phrase that might help define the unknown word. I think “dangerous areas where armed forces may be fighting” might define *combat zones*, so I have written those words in column two.

The next step is to find any signal words that might tell whether the context clue has the same meaning or the opposite meaning. Some sentences have signal words, and some do not.

Refer to *TM#1: Context Clues Signal Words Poster*.

Refer to the poster to remember what some possible signal words are. This sentence contains the word *or*, so I have written it in the chart. *Or* tells me that the context clue

probably would have the same meaning as the phrase *combat zone*.

I think “dangerous areas where armed forces may be fighting” means a dangerous war zone, so I wrote that in the next column.

The last step is to use my definition instead of the word in the sentence. It must make sense. So I have: “The U.S. government announced plans last week that would allow female military members to work closer to the front lines of dangerous war zones, or dangerous areas where armed forces may be fighting.” That repeats itself, but it does make sense, so I wrote *yes* in the last column.

Even if you think you know the definition of a word, one way to check the meaning is to see if the context clues confirm your understanding. Maybe you already thought that a combat zone is a place where people fight. If you look at the context clue, that definition is confirmed.

Practice

1. Finish the remaining two rows of *TM#2: Demonstrate and Practice—Context Clues* with class input. Refer to *TM#3: Demonstrate and Practice—Context Clues Answer Key* as needed.

Display *TM#2: Demonstrate and Practice—Context Clues*. Direct students’ attention to their copies, *SB#1: Demonstrate and Practice—Context Clues*. Read the next two sentences aloud.

The next word we want to define is *barred*. The first step is to find a possible context clue. What is a context clue? (*clues in the words and phrases coming before and/or after an unknown word that can help you identify the unknown word’s meaning*)

When a context clue is difficult to find, you can sometimes use the signal word to help you. The context clue for the word *barred* is difficult to find. So let’s look for a signal word. Look

at the signal word poster. What word from the poster appears in this sentence? (*but*)

***But* is an opposite-meaning signal word. Write it in the column for signal words.**

Write *but* in the third column of the chart. Ensure that students are doing the same.

The phrase *but until now* tells us that women being “barred” is the opposite of what is happening now, so the context clue might be before that signal word. Reread the sentences before the phrase *but until now*: “The U.S. government announced plans last week that would allow female military members to work closer to the front lines of combat zones, or dangerous areas where armed forces may be fighting. Women currently make up 14.5 percent of all active-duty members of the U.S. military.” What word in the first sentence tells us what is happening now? (*allow*)

The phrase *allow female military members to work closer to the front lines* is a context clue for *barred*.

Write *allow female military members to work closer to the front lines* in the second column of the chart. Ensure that students are doing the same.


Is *but* a same-meaning signal word or an opposite-meaning signal word? (*opposite*) The signal word tells us that *barred* means the opposite of *allowed*. In other words, *barred* is an antonym for *allowed*. So what would be a synonym for *barred*? (*prohibited, forbidden*)

In the fourth column of the chart, write a definition the students have provided aloud. Ensure that students then copy the definition you have written.

The last step is to test our context clue by substituting our synonym for *barred* to see if it fits the meaning of the sentence.

Have a student volunteer-test the definition provided by the class by rereading the sentence with the new word in place of *barred*.

Watch For



Testing the context clue in a sentence can be difficult because context clues are often in a different part of speech than the word students are trying to define. For example, *allow* is a present tense verb, but *barred* is a past participle. If students know the parts of speech involved, point out the difference. If not, explain that they might have to change the ending on a word or add a connecting word such as “to” in order to make the sentence sound right.

Complete the row for *enlist* with class input. Ensure that students copy the work onto their charts.

2. Students complete *SB#2: Practice—Context Clues* in pairs.

Give students copies of a previously selected nonfiction passage from the text they will be reading in class that day (see instructional materials).

Identify for students the two words for which you would like them to find context clues, and have them write those words in the first column of their worksheet.

Tell students they have 5 minutes to work in pairs to complete the remaining columns for those words. Have students restate the instructions, and check for understanding. Set the timer for 5 minutes.

Circulate among the students, check for understanding, and provide corrective feedback as needed.

3. When 5 minutes have passed, ask for volunteers to share their answers. Have students make corrections or additions to their own papers.

Independent Practice

1. Have students complete *SB#3: Independent Practice*.
2. Collect the materials, score the work using *TM#4: Independent Practice Answer Key*, and check for mastery.

Teacher Note

As an extension of this lesson, keep the *Context Clues Signal Words* poster in a visible place in the classroom and refer to it when students encounter unknown words. Also frequently remind students of the Context Clues Steps strategy.