

LESSON 18:

WORD PARTS AND CONTEXT CLUES

Host: This video shows how to model for students a way to think through the process of discovering the meaning of unknown words during reading. This model combines the reader's knowledge of word parts and use of context clues to figure out the meaning of unknown words. The goal is for students to learn this process and use it independently and in a variety of settings.

Teacher: When you are reading on your own and you come to a word for which you do not know the meaning, you can try to break the word into parts. You can look at prefixes, suffixes, and root and base words. You can also look at context clues. These clues are called context clues because they are found in the context, or words and phrases around the unfamiliar word. Learning to recognize and analyze word parts and context clues will help you discover the meaning of words on your own. If you just skip over words that you don't know, you probably won't understand what you're reading. I'm going to show you how to think through unknown words by using word parts and context clues to figure out the meaning of words as you read. Follow along as I read a passage from a social studies textbook.

"Sam Houston was the first president of the Texas republic. He sent an ambassador, an official who represents a country, to the United States. This ambassador's job was to ask that Texas be annexed, or added to the country. President Jackson disapproved. So, Texas remained an independent nation for 10 years."

OK, the first word with which I am unfamiliar is *republic*. I'm going to reread the sentence. "Sam Houston was the first president of the Texas republic." OK, so a republic has a president. What else do I know that has a president? A country has a president, so maybe a republic is a country. I don't see an example or a definition of *republic*; this clue is kind of general.

Because the context clue is kind of general and I'm not really sure I'm right about the definition, I'm going to see whether I can break the word into parts. Well, I see the prefix *re-*. *Re-* means "again." And the root word looks like *public*. So if this were a prefix and a root word, the whole word would mean "to be public again." I don't think that makes much sense. Maybe this isn't really a prefix and a root word.

So I'm going to insert my meaning into the original sentence and see whether it makes sense. "Sam Houston was the first president of the Texas country," or country of Texas. Well, that would make sense if Texas were a country at the time. I'm going to double-check by looking [in] the dictionary.

The dictionary says that a republic is "a state or country in which people elect representatives to exercise power for them." OK, so that makes sense. Texas was a republic, or state, or country, and they elected Sam Houston as their president.

The next word I'm going to try to figure out is *ambassador*. I'm going to look for context clues by rereading the sentence and, if I need to, the surrounding sentences.

"He sent an ambassador, an official who represents a country, to the United States." The two commas surrounding the phrase "an official who represents a country" lets me know that phrase is the definition. So an ambassador is an official who represents a country.

I can check the dictionary to make sure on this one, but usually, if the context clue is a definition clue like this, I can be pretty confident that I have the right definition.

Now, I will look at the word *annexed*. I will reread the sentence, looking for context clues. "This ambassador's job was to ask that Texas be annexed, or added to the country." I know that authors will sometimes tell the reader the definition of a challenging word by following that word with a comma, and a word like *or*, and then the definition. In this case, "or added to the country" tells me that this is probably the definition of the word *annexed*.

The next word I am not sure of is *disapproved*. I think I can break the word into parts. I see a prefix. *Dis-* is a prefix that means "not." I also see a suffix. *-d* is a suffix that I know means "past tense," but that doesn't really tell me anything. The root word is *approve*. I know that *approve* means "to like or think favorably toward something," as in when my parents approve of my friends. If I put the meanings together, I know that *disapprove* means "to not approve" and that the *-d* on the end makes it past tense.

The last word I need to figure out the meaning of is *independent*. I can see this word can be broken into parts, also. I see the prefix *in-*, which means "not." And the root word is *dependent* or *depend*. I know that a child might depend on his mom or be dependent on his mom, so *depend* might mean "to need someone or something." So if I put those two meanings together, *independent* might mean "to not need someone or something."

I'm going to check the dictionary to see if I'm correct. The dictionary says that *independent* means "free from any authority or control of something else and able to

operate and stand on its own." So my definition was close, but the dictionary definition makes complete sense. Texas was free from authority from any other nation and able to operate on its own for 10 years.

Word parts and context clues can sometimes give you an idea of the word's meaning but may not help you understand exactly what a word means. When that happens, it is helpful to check the dictionary to make sure.

I showed you what I do when I come to words I don't understand when I am reading a text. You can do the same thing when you encounter unknown words. When we come to a word we don't understand, we can look at word parts like prefixes, suffixes, and root and base words to help determine the meaning. We can also sometimes use context clues to help us figure out unfamiliar words.

Learning to recognize and analyze word parts and context clues can help you discover the meaning of unknown words in anything that you read, whether you're reading a text for class or for pleasure.