

Context Clue Strategies

Summary: Using context clues to decipher unfamiliar words is an important vocabulary skill for any student. In an article from *The Reading Teacher* adapted from Valerie Ellery's *Creating Strategic Readers*, activities and best practices are given for teaching context clues.

Practical Applications

The following activity is suggested to help students with their context clue strategies, and requires no specialized materials:

- “*Collaborate and Elaborate*”
 1. Have students jot down words or phrases they don't know in a notebook as they are reading
 2. In groups, have students discuss and attempt to come up with a definition for each of the unfamiliar words, based on context
 3. A recorder from the group writes down examples and non-examples of the unfamiliar words based on the students' “personal experiences and background knowledge, which helps illustrate what the word is or is not, depending on the related words in context.”
 4. The group agrees on the best definition for the words, then checks them with either the teacher or a dictionary
 5. Students continue adding new unfamiliar words until the next time the group meets
- To assess how well your students are utilizing context clue strategies, consider if they *never, rarely, sometimes, often, etc.* do the following:
 - “Predicting and verifying omitted words using surrounding context
 - Cross checking using cueing system [looking for clues that would confirm/deny a prediction]
 - Using background knowledge to examine and verify word meanings”
- Consider strategically planning your teacher talk around context clues – what questions will you ask to prompt students? For instance, “Try the new meaning in place of the word in this sentence. Does it make sense?” or “What do you know about the word _____ from this sentence?”

Conclusion and Citation

Using context clues is a key reading strategy for students, especially as they develop their vocabulary. Making context clue instruction a regular and well-planned part of your classroom will lead to enhanced student mastery in reading.

From Ellery, V. “Creating strategic readers: Techniques for developing competency in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (2nd ed.)” Adapted and reprinted in *The Reading Teacher*, 65.4 (2011/2012), pp. 262-264. <http://bit.ly/wCvLyF> (subscription only).