

## Vocabulary Instructional Routine: Using Context Clues to Determine Word Meaning

Preparation/Materials: three sentences with at least one unknown vocabulary word in each sentence, markers, paper or whiteboard



- *Italicized sentences are what the teacher does*
- **Bold type is what the teacher says**
- Regular type is what the student(s) say
- **Bullet (•) and bolded type are what the teacher and student(s) say in unison**
- Teacher or student slides finger under underlined letter(s) or word(s)



**NOTE:** Using context clues is one way to determine the meaning of a word in a text. However, it is important to share with students that there are limitations to using context clues and sometimes the text does not give sufficient clues to the meaning of a word.

### TEACHER EXPLAINS TASK

We will identify the correct meaning of an unknown word using other words in the sentence.

### TEACHER MODELS TASK

*Write sentence on paper or whiteboard.*

When we do not know the meaning of a word in a sentence, sometimes we can use other words in the sentence to find its meaning. This is what we do to find the meaning of an unknown word.

First, read the sentence and underline the unknown word.

Next, think about what is happening in the sentence.

Then, find other words that may explain the meaning of the unknown word.

Finally, try out the different words in the sentence to see if they make sense.

Listen to this sentence. *Point to each word as you read aloud.*

**After the long trip, I was exhausted or very tired and needed to take a nap.**

Now read the sentence with me. *Point to each word as you choral read with students.*

- **After the long trip, I was exhausted or very tired and needed to take a nap.**

First, I am going to underline exhausted, because I do not know the meaning of the word.

Next, I ask, what is happening in this sentence?

I took a long trip that made me tired.

Then, I ask, are there other words in the sentence that help me figure out the meaning of 'exhausted'?

Yes. It says I was 'very tired' and 'needed a nap'. I know that this means I was worn-out, sleepy and had no energy.

The sentence also says I was 'exhausted'. Because the sentence says I was 'exhausted' or 'very tired' the two words mean the same.

Finally, I am going to try out my words in the sentence.

After the long trip, I was worn-out and needed to take a nap.

This sentence makes sense. So, the word 'exhausted' must also mean 'very tired' or 'worn-out'. Now I'll say the sentence with the word, exhausted. *Point to each word as you read aloud.*

**After the long trip I was exhausted and needed to take a nap.**

Now that I understand the meaning of the word, exhausted, in that sentence, I will use the word in my own sentence.

I was exhausted from raking all the leaves.

Can you make up a sentence using the word, exhausted? *Accept all relevant examples. Provide a prompt if needed, to support the students in creating a new sentence. (e.g., I felt exhausted after...).*

Listen to this new sentence. *Point to each word as you read aloud.*

**To finish her drawing in art class, Sally had to concentrate, or focus her attention, so she wouldn't run out of time.**

# EMPOWERING TEACHERS

## TEACHER MODELS TASK (continued)

Now read the sentence with me. Point to each word as you choral read with students.

- To finish her drawing in art class, Sally had to concentrate, or focus her attention, so she wouldn't run out of time.

First, I am going to underline concentrate, because I do not know the meaning of the word.

Next, I ask, what is happening in this sentence?

Sally was drawing in art class. She was running out of time.

Then, I ask, are there other words in the sentence that tell me what she had to do because she was running out of time?

Yes. It says she had to 'focus her attention'. I think I know what this means. She had 'to think only about' doing her drawing. It also says she had to 'concentrate'. Because the sentence says she can 'concentrate' or 'focus her attention' it means she can do either one to finish her drawing. The words, 'concentrate' and 'focus her attention', mean the same.

Finally, I am going to try out my words in the sentence.

To finish her drawing in art class, Sally had to think about only doing her drawing so she wouldn't run out of time.

This sentence makes sense. So, the word 'concentrate' must also mean 'to focus her attention' or 'to think only about' doing her drawing. Now I'll say the sentence with the word, *concentrate*. *Point to each word as you read aloud.*  
To finish her drawing in art class, Sally had to concentrate so she wouldn't run out of time.

Now that I understand the meaning of the word *concentrate* in that sentence, I will use the word in my own sentence.

My brother had to concentrate on playing chess to win the chess game.

Here is another example. In the next sentence, there may be two words that we don't know the meaning of.

*Point to each word as you read aloud.*

It was a prudent, or shrewd choice, to ride the train.

Now read the sentence with me. *Point to each word as you choral read with students.*

- It was a prudent, or shrewd choice, to ride the train.

First, I am going to underline the words prudent and shrewd because I do not know what they mean.

Next I ask, what is happening in this sentence?

I know it is about a choice to ride the train.

Then, I ask, are there other words in the sentence that tell me more about this choice to ride the train?

Yes, but I do not know the meaning of the words *prudent* or *shrewd* so I cannot use these words to figure out the meaning of the sentence. Sometimes I have to use a dictionary to find the meaning of the words.

## TEACHER AND STUDENTS PRACTICE TASK TOGETHER

Let's review what we can do to find the meaning of unknown word in a sentence.

First we read the sentence and underline the unknown word.

What do we do first?

- We read the sentence and underline the unknown word.

Next, we think about what is happening in the sentence.

What do we do next?

- We think about what is happening in the sentence.

Listen to this sentence. *Point to each word as you read aloud.*

Peter had a substantial or large room so there was lots of space to play.

Now read the sentence with me.

- Peter had a substantial or large room so there was lots of space to play.

What word is new to you?

- substantial

I'll underline the word, substantial.

# EMPOWERING TEACHERS

## TEACHER AND STUDENTS PRACTICE TASK TOGETHER (continued)

Next, what is happening in this sentence?

- Peter had lots of space to play in his room. *Accept all relevant answers (e.g., He had a large room to spread out his toys. The room was big so he could play).*

Then, we look for other words to help us figure out the meaning of 'substantial'. Those words are 'large' and 'lots of space'.

What are the other words that help us figure out the meaning of substantial?

- The words, 'large' and 'lots of space'.

The sentence says Peter has a large room. A large room probably means he has 'lots of space'. There is also the word, substantial. Because the sentence uses the words substantial or large, it means the two words, substantial and large, are the same and we can use either word.

Finally, let's try out the sentence using large.

- Peter has a large room so there was lots of space to play.

Does this sentence make sense?

- Yes, this sentence makes sense.

So, the word substantial must also mean large. What does substantial mean?

- Substantial means large.

Now say the sentence using the new word, substantial. *Point to each word as you read aloud together.*

- Peter has a substantial room so there was lots of space to play.

Now that you understand the meaning of the word, substantial, in that sentence, use that word in a new sentence.

- *Accept all relevant examples. Students who fully understand the word will use the word out of the context in which it was originally presented (e.g., The truck carried a substantial amount of rocks.). Provide a prompt if needed to support the students in creating an effective sentence (e.g., The truck...).*

Great work using other words in the sentence to help figure out the meaning of an unknown word.

## STUDENTS PRACTICE TASK

Let's review what we can do to find the meaning of a new word in a sentence.

First we read the sentence and underline the unknown word.

What do we do first?

- We read the sentence and underline the unknown word.

Next, we think about what is happening in the sentence.

What do we do next?

- We think about what is happening in the sentence.

Then, we find other words in the sentence that may explain the meaning of the unknown word.

Then what do we do?

- We find other words to explain the unknown word.

Listen to this sentence. *Point to each word as you read aloud.*

**My dad gave me a push on the swing and that momentum, or force, made me go really high!**

Read the sentence with me. *Point to each word as you read aloud with the students.*

- My dad gave me a huge push on the swing and that momentum, or force made me go really high!

What word is new to you?

momentum

I'll underline the word, momentum.

Next, what is happening in this sentence?

Her dad gave her a really big push on the swing that made her go up very high. *Accept all relevant answers (e.g., The dad pushed super hard and the kid went up really high).*

Then, look for other words to help you figure out the meaning of 'momentum'. What are the other words that help you figure out the meaning of momentum?

The words 'huge push' and 'force'.

# EMPOWERING TEACHERS

## STUDENTS PRACTICE TASK (continued)

The sentence says my dad gave me a huge push on the swing and that force made me go really high. Force probably means a 'huge push'. There is also the word, momentum. Because the sentence says that momentum or force made me go really high, it means the two words, momentum and force, are the same and we can use either word.

**Finally, try out the sentence using force.**

My dad gave me a huge push on the swing and that force made me go really high!

**Does the sentence make sense?**

Yes, this sentence makes sense.

**So, what word does momentum mean?**

Momentum means force.

**Now say the sentence using the new word, momentum.** *Point to the words as the students read aloud.*

My dad gave me a huge push on the swing and that momentum made me go really high.

**Now that you understand the meaning of the word momentum in that sentence, use that word in a new sentence.**

*Accept all relevant examples. Students who fully understand the word will use the word out of the context in which it was originally presented.*

**Great job. Remember this is just one way to try to figure out the meaning of an unknown word in a sentence.**

**Does this always work to figure out an unknown word?**

No

**That's right. Nice work.**

## INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

*When students are consistently able to figure out the meaning of an unknown word in a sentence using context clues, provide individual turns using other sentences. Call on students in an unpredictable order, calling more frequently on students who made errors.*

## SCAFFOLDING SUGGESTION FOR ERRORS

*Verify that students are identifying only one unknown word in the sentence and simplify sentences that are unfamiliar to the student.*

### Adaptations using this Instructional Routine:

- Use an antonym in the sentence to help define the unknown word (e.g., The larger puppy was aggressive, not friendly, like the other puppies.).
- Use more than one sentence to help define the unknown word (e.g., The lion was ferocious. He was mean to the other animals.).
- Add another example of a sentence where each word is unknown or the meaning for one of the words is uncertain.
- Use the dictionary to find the meaning of an unknown word if the word cannot be defined using context clues.

**For further independent practice refer to the following Kindergarten and First Grade FCRR Student Center Activities at [http://www.fcrr.org/Curriculum/pdf/GK-1/V\\_Final.pdf](http://www.fcrr.org/Curriculum/pdf/GK-1/V_Final.pdf)**

- V.015
- V.016
- V.024
- V.025