Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, and Word Analysis for Teachers: An Interactive Tutorial

Ninth Edition

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Context 5

Readers use many strategies to identify and pronounce words that might be unfamiliar to them in print. Phonics is just one of these strategies. Often, words are in a reader's speaking or listening vocabulary, and they can use context clues to identify and pronounce these words. Context clues include using the surrounding information to help identify a word. Context is a very important aid to word analysis and comprehension.

Context operates at many levels to help readers determine pronunciation. Usually, context refers to the text surrounding an unfamiliar word and includes language structure (*syntactic*) clues and meaning (*semantic*) clues. For example, if the first sentence in a paragraph was *John went to the* _____ , the language structure provides a clue for the type of word (the part of speech) that is appropriate for the blank—in this case, a noun. But it does not indicate the exact word that belongs in the blank. If the first letters of the last word were given (e.g., *John went to the st* _____ .), then they might predict that the target word was *store* or *street*. Readers could then use other information in the paragraph to confirm or reject their predictions.

Predicting meaning is a significant element in using context clues. In addition to surrounding print, however, other context clues, such as pictures, provide help with meaning and pronunciation.

Context applies not only to a whole word but also within word contexts. For example, a reader can use the knowledge of letter

patterns to predict letters that appear within words. You know, for example, the letter most likely to follow q in English. A reader can also use discourse knowledge as a form of context to predict the ending to a story. For example, you can probably predict the end of a story that begins *Once upon a time. . . .*

In all cases, a reader's background knowledge interacts with context clues to help the reader determine unfamiliar words. Knowing about where one pays for things in a store can help a reader to determine the pronunciation and meaning of *cashier*.

For children in the early elementary grades, words encountered in their reading materials are usually part of their listening and speaking vocabularies. Thus, using meaningful context is often a helpful word analysis strategy. Syntactic (or language patterning) clues and semantic (or meaning) clues function together with a reader's linguistic and experiential background knowledge. Readers integrate the clues from all these systems of language in the reading process.

PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHING CONTEXT SKILLS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Lesson Suggestions

- *Context Clues Lesson Plan* (http://lesson-plans-materials. suite101.com/article.cfm/context_clues_lesson_plan). This word detective game is designed to help students understand the various types of context clues that can appear during their reading.
- *Activating Strategies for Teaching Context Clues* (http:// gingersnapstreatsforteachers.blogspot.com/2010/02/activating-strategies-for-teaching.html). This lesson provides four useful activities for teaching the recognition of words in context.
- *Learn New Words Using Context* (http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/3971). Students use context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words in short passages. Then they read a newspaper or magazine article to pick out unfamiliar words and use context clues to determine the meanings of words.

THE IMPORTANCE AND USE OF CONTEXT

1. When trying to determine the pronunciation and _____ of an unfamiliar word, readers can use several types of context clues.	meaning
2. Perhaps the most commonly used context is information surrounding an unfamiliar word. In addition, readers use their linguistic and _____ knowledge to help them with unfamiliar words. Pictures and knowing the story _____ are also important sources of context clues.	background (or prior) structure (or grammar)
3. Even when readers use strategies other than context, they often use context to check their efforts at pronunciation and see if the word makes _____ .	sense

USING CONTEXT TO CHECK WORD ANALYSIS

4. Readers use context to determine whether their word analysis techniques were successful. For example, say the following word to yourself: *object* In which of the following sentences does the word you pronouned best fit? (a) I _____ to your insults. (b) The _____ of the game is to win. If your pronunciation was *ob'ject,* you would pick sentence _____ . If your pronunciation was *ob ject'*, you would pick sentence _____ . Neither pronunciation was right or wrong until it was checked within the _____ of the sentence.	(b) (a) context
5. As another example, let's imagine that you looked at the word *hoping* and pronounced it /hop/ing. Would that be correct? _____ The word should be pronounced _____ ing.	no /hope/

If you did not correctly recognize the pronunciation of the word and you checked the _____ from which the word came, you would probably be able to correct yourself. (a) Mary was *hoping* for a nice birthday present.	context

USING CONTEXT WITH OTHER WORD ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

6. Context is used in combination with other word analysis strategies. Sometimes, vowel pronunciation generalizations can be used to predict pronunciation, but the _____ must be used to confirm such pronunciations. At other times, context might predispose a reader toward a certain pronunciation, but pronunciation generalizations force a _____ in the prediction.	context change
7. Read the following sentence: (a) I'm looking for some heavy metal. Please *lead* me to the *lead*. In this example, a vowel pronunciation generalization predicts that each word written as *lead* is pronounced _____ (see item 30 on page 47). However, context as a word analysis strategy indicates that the first instance of *lead* must be a verb, and the second instance must be a noun. A reader's linguistic knowledge _____ with context and the vowel pronunciation generalization to confirm the pronunciation /leed/ in the first instance and _____ in the second.	/leed/ interacts /led/
8. In the following sentence, context predicts a _____, and if unaware of the initial p, most readers predict the word *brother*. (a) Sarah, who was now six, had always wanted either a sister or a *p*_____. In this case, letter name knowledge overrides context clues and the reader may predict *pet*, which is a noun and thus confirmed by _____.	noun context
9. At times, however, linguistic context in surrounding print does not help to either confirm or suggest the meaning of a word, even though it indicates the part of speech. For example, read the following: (a) I always wanted a _____, and now I finally have one! My long wait for a _____ was over, and I was so happy! No longer would I be left out of the group.	

Even though linguistic context in the surrounding print predicts a _____, there are so many possibilities that context provided by the surrounding print is not helpful. However, if a picture were available, perhaps showing a just-opened present with someone happily holding the unwrapped item, then picture-based context would help narrow the possible _____.	noun nouns

10. Look also at the following example.

(a) I was told the *ethmoid* was broken. However, although it was painful, it was not life threatening.

Similarly, this example shows that unless an unfamiliar word is already in a reader's _____ vocabulary, attempts at pronunciation might be correct but will not result in _____. (Did you know that *ethmoid* is a bone in your nose?)	oral (speaking) meaning

USING CONTEXT AS A BASIC WORD ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE TO DETERMINE MEANING

11. Many authors intentionally provide context _____ for their readers. Special efforts are often made when new or difficult _____ are introduced. The following examples illustrate several of the more commonly used techniques.	clues words (terms; concepts)
12. *Example 1:* Jim and Joan played a *set* of tennis. A set of tennis is completed when one player has won six or more games by a margin of two games. In this example, the author has provided a _____ for the term _____ of tennis. The technique of _____ words is usually limited to situations where the word is used for the first time in a passage.	definition set defining
13. *Example 2:* Many young children are *hyperopic*, or farsighted. In this case, the author has provided a _____, *farsighted*, for the unfamiliar term. _____ are used in the same manner as definitions when an author wants to explain a difficult word or concept.	synonym Synonyms

14. *Example 3:* Suburban dwellers watch with amazement as their residential areas grow more and more crowded. They are witnessing, in many cases, the development of a *megalopolis.* High-rise apartments, shopping centers, new housing developments, schools, and recreation areas spring into being almost overnight. For example, the area between Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., is growing at such a rate that it will soon be one continuous area of dwellings and businesses. In the above paragraph, readers can tell that a *megalopolis* is the continuous development of _____ areas.

metropolitan

Readers can use two clues. Their first clue is that the topic being discussed is related to suburban development. Their second clue is an _____ .

example

15. *Example 4:* Reading aloud can cause *anguish* for some children. John, a boy of ten, suffered much embarrassment because he was shy and felt that he read poorly when reading aloud. He felt terrible, almost tortured, when asked to read aloud.

In example 4, clues are provided for the term *anguish* by an _____ . In such cases, the author attempts to relate to an experience that the _____ can understand. Many authors find that using examples makes their writing more meaningful.

example
reader

16. Example patterns are very helpful but often depend on a reader's _____ knowledge. The following sentence illustrates an _____ pattern:

background (prior)
example

  (a) Europe, Asia, North America, South America, Africa, Australia, and Antarctica are the seven *continents.*

Note that while they can be useful, without appropriate background knowledge, an _____ pattern will not provide the context clues that are necessary to determine the target word.

example

17. *Example 5:* Many children came to Mary's birthday party. They played games, ate cake and ice cream, and sang "Happy Birthday" to Mary. It was one of the best days of her life. She was *ecstatic.*

In example 5, the mood of the story was the _____ to the meaning of *ecstatic. Ecstatic,* as used in the above context, means very happy. Readers might not know how to pronounce the word *ecstatic,* but they can come closer to an accurate meaning due to the _____ created by the story.

clue

mood

18. Authors find many ways to help readers discover the meaning of words by providing _____ clues. The examples given previously provide some of the common types of context clues. Definition, example, _____ , and _____ are common types of context clues.	context synonym, mood
19. To use context effectively, readers need to be flexible in using surrounding text. In the following example, the context clues are located _____ the target word. (a) The teenager had been swimming since she was an infant. It is not surprising that she is a really good *swimmer*.	before
20. Read the following sentence: (a) A *swimmer* is a person who swims. In this example, the context clues are located _____ the target word.	after
21. Context clues can also be provided by a _____ or an appositive phrase that follows the target word. For example, (a) He was *delayed*, or made late, because his car broke down. (b) The *jockey* (a person who rides race horses) was very good at her job.	clause
22. Readers also use comparison patterns in using context to determine meaning and pronunciation. _____ patterns can also require that readers read past the target word or look _____ at what preceded it. (a) The *ancient* rock formations were as old as the earth itself. (b) I hate going to bed early. In fact, I *despise* it.	Comparison back
23. Read the following sentences and decide how context can help to determine the italicized target word. (a) My car is *quiet*, unlike the noisy thing that my brother drives! (b) Even though I was fond of Bill, I truly *loved* Bob. (c) It is *warm* during our winters, especially when compared to winter in Alaska. The above sentences illustrate _____ patterns that help readers to use context clues.	contrast

24. From the previous examples, you probably noticed that context clues have more to do with meaning than with _____ . It is possible that readers could use a synonym for an unfamiliar word when using _____ clues as their only form of word analysis. Other types of word _____ strategies, in combination with context clues, add to accuracy.	pronunciation context analysis
25. *Example:* Mary had a birthday _____ . If the blank indicates an unfamiliar word, one might substitute words such as *today* or *surprise.* However, because readers look closely at the initial consonant, when the example reads "Mary had a birthday *p*_____". the reader's choices are limited. Now, of the words listed, only _____ will fit.	party (or other appropriate noun) party
26. Readers might be able to supply a missing word in a sentence, but they might have a limited understanding of the word's _____ because they lack knowledge of the concept(s) that the word represents.	meaning
27. Using context _____ should not be considered as a substitute for a complete program of vocabulary development. The more extensive readers' speaking and _____ vocabularies are, the greater their resources are for using context clues.	clues listening
28. Authors do not always supply the needed clue. Therefore, if readers rely on using only _____ , their word analysis strategies will not be as _____ as they could be.	context effective
29. Readers will find that they need to know the words, ideas, and pictures _____ an unfamiliar word to use context effectively, and authors provide many different _____ of context clues.	around (surrounding) types
30. Readers will also find _____ to be an effective means for checking other attempts at _____ analysis.	context word

✓ SELF-CHECK FOR CHAPTER 5

1. The following sentences contain language structure clues: (a) John _____ to the store. (b) The _____ is getting cold. In sentence (a), you know the word will be a _____. In sentence (b), you know the word will be a _____.	verb noun
2. Context clues can be used in the following ways: (a) as a technique to determine the _____ of an unfamiliar word. (b) to check a pronounced word to see if the word makes _____. (c) as a step when using other _____ analysis strategies.	meaning sense word
3. The types of patterns that readers find useful when applying context clues are _____ patterns, _____ patterns, and _____ patterns.	comparison, contrast example

🌐 ONLINE READING RESOURCES

To learn more about context use during reading, explore these online resources:

- Fries-Gaither, J. (2008). Teacher resources for making inferences, using context clues. *Beyond penguins and polar bears: An online magazine for K-5 teachers*. (2). (An article describing a variety of forms of context use during reading.)

    Retrieved from http://beyondpenguins.nsdl.org/issue/column.php?date= April2008&departmentid=professional&columnid=professional!literacy

- Unknown. (n.d.). Facts on the use of context in reading. (A short review on the use of context during word recognition and reading.)

    Retrieved from http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/08894/ 08894f16.html

- Acker, B. C. (2009). Using context clues: A third grade lesson by Mrs. Acker. (A PowerPoint-based video explaining different ways to address difficult words using context clues.)

    Retrieved from http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/grrrlish-200334- using-context-clues-education-ppt-powerpoint/