Strategy

Play "Context Clue Challenge"

- Model, model, model how to determine word meaning using context.
- Bring a small group up to model in front of the class how to work together to determine word meaning using context clues by reading the words around it and discussing what the term may mean.
- Place students in small groups.
- Provide each group with text with a highlighted vocabulary word.
- Tell each group they have 2 minutes and 45 seconds (or any time you want), to determine the meaning of the highlighted.
- When time is up, randomly choose a group(s) to give the meaning of the word and how they determined the meaning. The group can get a volunteer to demonstrate how they came up with the meaning.
- Regularly play this game and increase the difficulty as students become more proficient.

*Visual Thesaurus: In addition to taking advantage of digital text, students and teachers may find it helpful to use an online dictionary and/or thesaurus. Visual Thesaurus is a dynamic "web" of words that can be expanded and reorganized by students." http://www.visualthesaurus.com/

References

- http://www.readingrockets.org/article/using-context-clues-understand-word-meanings
- http://powerupwhatworks.org/strategy-guide/context-clues

Considering Context Clues

Language Standard #4 for Grades K-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

Context Clues

Students need to know how to find context clues embedded in text, how to use them to understand word meanings, and why they are important. Using technology resources with a variety of differentiated strategies will help students develop these skills and allow for practice.

When attempting to decipher the meaning of a new word, it is often useful to look at what comes before and after that word. The surrounding words can give readers helpful context clues about the meaning and structure of the new word, as well as how it is used.

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. The following steps provide procedures in identifying unknown words.

STEP 1: PROVIDE CLEAR EXPLANATIONS

1. Explain the six different types of context clues.
   - **Root word and affix:** People who study birds are experts in **ornithology**.
   - **Contrast:** Unlike mammals, birds **incubate** their eggs outside their Bodies.
   - **Logic:** Birds are always on the lookout for **predators** that might harm their young.
   - **Definition: Frugivorous** birds prefer eating fruit to any other kind of food.
   - **Example or Illustration:** Some birds like to build their nests in inconspicuous spots—high up in the tops of trees, well hidden by leaves.
   - **Grammar:** Many birds **migrate** twice each year.

2. Demonstrate how to identify context clues with excerpts from an authentic text.

3. After you explain and demonstrate using a variety of materials, have students explain the use of context clues in their own words and show how they would apply the strategy in their own way.

STEP 2: GIVE STUDENTS STRATEGIES AND MODELS

1. Use tools , such as graphic organizers, an online visual thesaurus, word walls, or visual representations of words, to illustrate the multiple meanings of words in context, and have students practice with these tools.

2. Model a self-questioning strategy, using the list of types of context clues, with questions such as these: What are the surrounding words? Where do these offer me clues? What does this mean in terms of the context?

3. Demonstrate a methodical approach to seeking context clues within a passage.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS TO ASK TO UNDERSTAND A WORD IN CONTEXT

- What is the overall intent of the text? For example, is it about science or history?
- Is the text factual or a work of fiction?
- What is the genre?
- What other words in the sentence or paragraph can provide information?
- What clues does the punctuation provide?

Introduce a visual thesaurus* to students so they can practice using the relationships between words to help them define words that are unfamiliar. Some students will also need to use online dictionaries to confirm that their definitions are correct.

STEP 3: PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRACTICE

Post reminders and examples of types of context clues on a class wiki, on the board, and/or in a blog, so students can easily refer to them whenever they read.

Have students work in pairs to read unfamiliar text on the computer, highlight unknown words, find context clues to hypothesize the meaning, and then check the meaning against a dictionary.

Engage in formative assessment to provide students with feedback and determine your next steps to differentiate instruction.

EXAMPLES OF WAYS TO ENGAGE IN FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- Record your observations of students' use of the strategy
- Make a list of words students marked as unknown, and discuss meanings
- Have students reflect on how, why, and when they used the strategy