

Context Clues

Teacher Talk: Introducing and Defining the Strategy

Introducing the Strategy

This strategy will be used in fiction and nonfiction reading. When a reader encounters an unfamiliar word, using this strategy will help the reader to determine the meaning of the word. The strategy provides the students with specific steps to use as they attempt to determine meanings. As students become more proficient in using context clues in the text, they will gradually develop a more extensive and powerful reading vocabulary.

Definition of Context Clues

Sometimes when reading, you come to an unknown word. Look for clues in the text to help you figure it out. The words and sentences around the unknown word can give clues. These clues are called context clues. Sometimes they are found close to the new word. Sometimes you must look in the paragraph before or after the word. Use information provided in the text and what makes sense to figure out the meaning of the word.

Context Clues	Examples
helping words or punctuation (or, and, called, like)	Mary was furious, or angry, at her brother.
opposite or same meaning	Mary's cat looks tame when sleeping, but wild when awake.
your own experience	When Mary's dog died, she was filled with grief. (You know that if your dog died you would feel sad.)
sentences before or after	The people were nomads. They went from place to place looking for food.
definition provided	Mary got a scholarship for winning the contest. A scholarship is a grant or prize to pay for school.
examples given	Mary used the utensil to eat her lunch.

How to Use Context Clues

- Locate the unfamiliar word.
- Write the word down in your student response journal or sticky note.
- Write down the paragraph or page number.
- Read before and after the word (read around the word).
- Write down words that help you find the meaning of the word (context clues).
- Write down what you think the word means (make a prediction).
- Check to make sure that your prediction makes sense (reread to confirm).

Materials

For teacher convenience the following materials have been placed on the FastMapping™ CD: strategy definition and key questions; student text; graphic organizer(s); and Titles for Instruction.

Modeling and Demonstration**Opportunities for Modeling the Strategy:**

The story *Hot Stuff* has at least 10 opportunities for using the Context Clues strategy. Opportunities are identified in the text as italicized words and are listed in the lesson plan below. The text for *Hot Stuff* has been expressly written to support the use of Context Clues. Consult the Titles for Instruction for additional text that provide opportunities to model or apply Context Clues.

Teacher Tips

- Before modeling script think aloud comments on sticky notes or write comments in the margins of the text.
- Review the definition for the strategy with students.
- Explain to students that you will read aloud from the text and then demonstrate examples of the thinking process that skilled readers use to understand how using context clues can improve comprehension.
- Emphasize that the proficient reader recognizes the importance of asking context clues related questions while reading.
- Read aloud the title of the selection and set a purpose for reading the text. Demonstrate the use of one of the following strategies before reading aloud: ask a question(s), make a prediction, make a connection(s), or try to visualize what is about to be read.
- Model three (more if necessary) opportunities from the selection before releasing responsibility to the students to give it a try. When modeling use a signal to alert students when you are thinking aloud (e.g., when reporting out the thinking process lower the book when thinking aloud and hold the book up when reading; or, begin by looking at the students and say, “Hmmm” to signal the shift from reading to thinking aloud).

Key Questions

- What word do I not understand?
- Are there words or information in the sentences before and after the word that can help me?
- What is the paragraph talking about? Does it give me any clues?
- What do I think the word means?
- Does my meaning make sense in the passage?

Modeling the Strategy with *Hot Stuff*

Create a poster using the definition of Context Clues and its Key Questions and keep it visible to the students at all times. After reading the paragraphs, the teacher should identify the italicized word and demonstrate aloud the use of Key Questions to model appropriate use of the strategy. The modeling should include the use of sticky notes or notes written in the margin. After modeling the correct use of the strategy for paragraph one, move on to paragraphs two and three.

Introduce the graphic organizer for Context Clues. Provide students with copies or have them copy the format into their reader response journals. On the chart students need to record the word, page or paragraph number, clue words in the text, and a prediction of the meaning of the word.

There are at least three words in the first three paragraphs that provide the opportunity to model the strategy of Context Clues. These words are italicized in the text: *ecstatic*, *balmy*, *berserk*

The teacher should read paragraph 1 aloud from beginning to end without stopping.

Hot Stuff

1 Ben loved fourth grade! It wasn't that he was particularly *ecstatic* when it came to solving math problems, writing compositions, or worst of all doing homework. He was, however, thrilled to be the class clown!

Opportunity #1

- Teacher reads the first paragraph, and uses the "Think Aloud" strategies as stated below being sure to put responses on the graphic organizer:

"I've come to a word, and I'm not sure I know what it means. I need to read around the word for clues to help me understand what it means. Are there words or information in the sentences before and after the word that can help me? What is the paragraph talking about? Does it give me any clues?"

"I predict the word *ecstatic* means happy."

- Which word(s) in paragraph 1 help(s) the reader know what *ecstatic* means? "*loved, thrilled, liked*"; the reader can tell from the word "thrilled" in the next sentence that the words have the same meaning; the reader also uses their own experience of how some kids feel about school.

2 His mom said he should be serious about school, but what fun was that? He liked to make the other kids laugh. Sometimes even the teacher had to laugh, even though he could tell she tried not to let him see. He guessed teachers were not supposed to laugh at the kids in their classes.

3 It was a beautiful spring day. The weather was *balmy*, not too hot and not too cool. The weather was perfect as Ben walked to school.

Opportunity #2

- Teacher reads the second and third paragraph, and uses the "Think Aloud" strategies below being sure to put her responses on the graphic organizer:

"I've come to a word, and I'm not sure I know what it means. I need to read around the word for clues to help me understand what it means. Are there words or information in the sentences before and after the word that can help me? What is the paragraph talking about? Does it give me any clues?"

"I predict the word *balmy* means warm."

In paragraph 3 which word(s) help the reader know what balmy means? “not too hot and not too cool”; in this sentence the definition is given for balmy

4 As he walked, Ben thought about what he could do in class today to make everyone laugh. He had considered bringing his pet lizard, Sam, and turning him loose during silent reading time. He knew the boys in his class would have loved it, but at the last minute he had decided it might not be safe for Sam. What if some girl, or his teacher, Mrs. Burson, went *berserk* and whacked the lizard with a dictionary or something?

Opportunity #3

“I’ve come to a word, and I’m not sure I know what it means. I need to read around the word for clues to help me understand what it means. Are there words or information in the sentences before and after the word that can help me? What is the paragraph talking about? Does it give me any clues?”

“I predict the word berserk means crazy.”

In paragraph four which word(s) help the reader know what berserk means? “whacked the lizard with a dictionary”; the author provides an example of what “berserk” would look like.

Teacher Tips for Guided Practice

Model and practice the routines and procedures students will need to work cooperatively in pairs and in small group discussion.

These procedures should include suggestions on how to begin, share ideas, support thinking using text, and politely disagree. During discussion students take turns applying the strategy, supporting and assisting each other to become proficient in applying the strategy. Establish rules and procedures and a chart for students to refer to during discussion.

- Scaffold learning to gradually release increasing responsibility to students for using the remaining opportunities. It is suggested that collaborative small group or student partnership activities be used to begin the scaffolding process.
- Direct students to read the paragraphs (silently or aloud) for two or more strategy opportunities, and encourage students to use the key questions to guide their thinking and discussion.
- Ask students to use sticky notes, reading journals, or write in the margins of their paper to provide evidence of their thinking process.
- Two collaborative attempts are suggested. More if necessary. Monitor student talk and strategy application. Continue collaborative work as necessary.

Guided Practice

Students work in pairs or in small group with the teacher to practice and apply the strategy. Students should use sticky notes, reading response journals or write in the margins of their papers. The teacher should closely monitor the groups to ensure understanding. Students share responses with class to confirm understanding.

“Let’s practice some strategies that can help you before you start practicing on your own.”

Teacher writes the new word, **hilarious**, on the board.

“Go to paragraph #5 and read before and after the word hilarious. There are often words that can give you clues to define the word. These words are called context clues. Do you see some words that can help you? Look for these words.” Elicit responses and write them on the board: funny, laugh

“Reread paragraph #5 and read before and after the word hilarious.” Write four possible definitions on the board, with only one being correct: depressing, very sad, very amusing, scary. **“Look at the definitions on the board. Are any of these definitions correct?”** Elicit responses. **“Is there an incorrect definition?”** Elicit responses. Discuss why a response could be incorrect.

“How did your clue words or context clues help you understand the meaning of hilarious as it is used in the paragraph?”

Put the following list of words on the board: *disruptive*, *reputation*, *humorous*. Instruct students to use the Key Questions as well as their graphic organizer to determine the meaning of these unfamiliar words from paragraphs 5 and 6.

5 Ben reached school just as the bell was ringing. He still had no idea what funny thing he could do today but he was positive he would come up with something *hilarious*. When he reached his classroom, he saw that all the desks had been separated. Oh great, he thought. I forgot we have a big math test today. Even Ben knew better than to do something *disruptive* during a test. His teacher was pretty nice, but she would never put up with unruly behavior during a test.

6 By lunch time Ben was beginning to get worried. He had not had a single funny idea all day! He couldn’t even remember any of the dumb jokes his sister was always telling him. Only three hours of school left, his *reputation* would be ruined if he let a day pass without doing something funny. The rest of the fourth grade might not think he was so great any more! What if he could never think of anything *humorous* again? Oh no, it couldn’t be true! There on the other side of the cafeteria was that new kid Cameron. He was surrounded by laughing fourth graders!

**Guidelines
for
Independent
Practice**

**Independent
Practice**

Word	Paragraph	Clues
disruptive	#5	causing problems for others
reputation	#6	what others think about him
humorous	#6	funny

Opportunity #4

- Guide student discussion. Be sure to put your responses on the graphic organizer.

Monitor student work to confirm that students apply the strategy when reading independently. To monitor progress for student mastery of the strategy periodically ask student to provide evidence from the text documenting how, when, and why they applied the strategy.

- When students are ready, they should read the remaining paragraphs of the selection independently and apply the strategy.
 - Students should continue to use the key questions to guide their thinking, and provide evidence of their thinking using sticky notes, reading journals, or some other written evidence.
 - Use texts suggested in the titles for instruction for additional and continued use of the strategy. Periodically review the strategy with students and look for evidence that the students are using the strategy as part of a repertoire of strategies for comprehension.
- When students are ready, they should read individually to apply the strategy using the key phrases. Students should continue to use sticky notes or write in the margins of their paper to demonstrate the strategy. Teacher should monitor closely to determine if students truly understand the strategy.
 - Put the following list of words on the board. Instruct students to use their Key Questions as well as their graphic organizer to determine the meaning of these unfamiliar words from paragraphs 6, 7, and 8.
 1. dilemma
 2. casually
 3. massive

7 Ben had a real *dilemma* here. He had to come up with something really funny and it had to be fast! If he couldn't there might be a new class clown at Cooper Elementary! Ben grabbed his lunch tray and moved to the salad bar thinking furiously. Then something green caught his eye. That was it! He carefully scooped a large spoonful of the small green slices on top of his pizza. He then *casually* strolled over to where the group of laughing students was seated. He acted like he didn't even notice they were there. He sat down and began to arrange the jalapeno peppers evenly over the

slice of pizza. Soon several of the fourth graders noticed what he was doing. No way, they said. Nobody eats that many hot peppers! Ben continued to arrange the peppers. By now all of the kids at the table were watching, even Cameron. Ben opened his mouth as wide as he could and took a *massive* bite! He had so much in his mouth he could barely chew. At first it wasn't too bad. Then his eyes began to water, his face felt hot, and his tongue felt like it was on fire!

8 He swallowed. Now the fire went all the way down his throat into his stomach! Everyone at the table gasped, then they began to smile, then someone laughed out loud. When Ben heard that laugh he took another bite, then another and another. His friends all thought he looked hilarious with his face bright red and tears *streaming* down his cheeks! He had done it; no one was looking at Cameron now! Ben finished his pizza and two cartons of milk, and then it was out to the playground for recess. Unfortunately, playing a game of kickball after eating all those jalapenos was not such a good idea. Ben spent the rest of the afternoon in the nurse's office. In between trips to the commode to throw up, he lay on the cot and remembered the laughs of his friends. And once when she didn't know he was looking, he could have sworn the nurse was grinning, too!

Opportunity #5

Here is an example of a completed graphic organizer:

Word	Paragraph	Clues	Predictions
dilemma	#7	solve problem	problem
casually	#7	didn't notice others	calmly
massive	#7	opened mouth wide, could barely chew	huge
streaming	#8	face bright red and tears	running down

- When all students are finished, have students share answers and discuss the clue words. Have students reread the paragraphs and discuss together what kind of clue it was. Refer back to the Context Clues Definition.
- Remind students to use these strategies in all types of reading: during math, science, social studies, and reading for pleasure.