Vocabulary Building: Using Context Clues

3rd–4th Grade

Language

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- Use context (e.g., definitions, examples, or restatements in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard and dry-erase marker (or chalkboard and chalk)
- Word Detective Activity reproducible

Introduction

In a low voice, say to students, "If you can hear me, please raise your snooble."

Students will likely giggle or give you a quizzical look, but simply repeat the instruction until one or two students begin raising their hands. Acknowledge their correct responses with a smile or nod.

Once other students begin to catch on, confirm that the nonsense word "snooble" meant hand. Ask a volunteer to explain how she guessed the correct meaning of the nonsense word.

Procedure

1. Explain that good readers often use context clues to decode unfamiliar vocabulary words. Point out that other words in the text may give them hints about the meaning of words they do not know.
2. Display a few example sentences on the board to demonstrate the use of context clues in decoding word meanings, such as:
   - The angry dog barked *ferociously*, scaring the young kitten.
   - After studying, Tom is *optimistic* he will do well on the test.
   - The *courageous* explorer climbed the dangerous mountain.
3. Remind students that the other words in the sentence, or context clues, will give them an idea of what the words mean.
4. Invite volunteers to try to decode the meaning of the underlined words. Then have them come up to the board and circle other words in the sentence that served as context clues. (For example, in the first sentence, they might circle the word "angry" or "scaring" because these words indicate that the dog's bark was ferocious.)

Guided/Independent Practice

1. Declare all of your students word detectives! Distribute a copy of the Word Detective Activity reproducible to each student.
2. Have students work with a partner or in a small group. Instruct them to read the paragraph together and use context clues to discover the meaning of the nonsense words.
3. Encourage students to write the meaning of each word and list all of the context clues that helped them decode the correct meaning of the word.

Word Detective Activity

Directions: Read the passage below. Use context clues to decode the meaning of the underlined nonsense words.

The big yellow school <u>gleek</u> pulled to a stop at the corner. The driver opened the door, and I climbed up the steps to get on board. I walked down the narrow <u>zupher</u> looking for an empty seat. Then I saw my friend Jack waving to me from the last row. "Over here, Nate!" he yelled. I nodded and made my way toward him. I took my <u>norjot</u> filled with books and placed it under the seat. Then I plopped down beside him and enjoyed the ride to <u>blat</u>.

<u>Gleek</u> probably means _____. The clue words that helped me decode this nonsense word are: _____

_____

<u>Zupher</u> probably means _____. The clue words that helped me decode this nonsense word are: _____

_____

<u>Norjot</u> probably means _____. The clue words that helped me decode this nonsense word are: _____

_____

<u>Blat</u> probably means _____. The clue words that helped me decode this nonsense word are: _____

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