

MEETING X

FINDING WORD MEANING USING CONTEXT CLUES

A. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, the students will learn about using context clues. By the end of the course, the students are expected to be able to determine and guess the meanings of difficult words by using the context clues.

B. MATERIAL DESCRIPTION

What do you usually do when you come to a word you do not know while reading?

- a. Look it up in the dictionary
- b. Ask your teacher
- c. Ask your friend
- d. Try to guess what it means

Actually, guessing will help to get a rough idea about the word while you are reading. Double check with the dictionary before you memorize the meaning and the usage of the word. Here are some advantages of guessing the meaning of a word by using context clues:

- a. It is fast because you don't have to interrupt your reading.
- b. It helps your comprehension because you can focus on the general sense of what you are reading.
- c. It help you remember the words within their context.
- d. It allows you to enjoy your reading more because you don't have to stop so often.

When you try to guess the meaning of unknown word, you use the text surrounding the word or the context to provide you with clues. Sometimes you can guess the meaning of a word from other word within the sentence but sometimes you may need to read several sentence in order to find the clues.

Guessing from context refers to the ability to infer the meaning of an expression using contextual clues. These clues may be purely linguistic or situational:

- a. Linguistic context: the linguistic environment in which a word is used within a text
- b. Situational context: extra linguistic elements that contribute to the construction of meaning this may involve background knowledge of the subject.

What this amounts to is that learners should be able to infer the meaning of an unknown word using:

- a. the meaning of vocabulary items that surrounds it;
- b. the way the word is formed;
- c. background knowledge of the subject and the situation.

1.1. Techniques for guessing

Texts are often full of redundancy and consequently. Students can use the relation between different items within a text to get the meaning. Our prior knowledge of the world may also contribute to understand what an expression means.

a. **Synonyms and definitions**

Examples:

1. **Kingfishers** are a group of small to medium-sized brightly colored birds.
2. When he made **insolent** remarks towards his teacher they sent him to the principal for being disrespectful.

b. **Antonym and contrast**

Example:

1. He **loved** her so much for being so kind to him. By contrast, he abhorred her mother.

c. **Cause and effect****Example:**

1. He was disrespectful towards other members. That's why he was sent off and **penalized**.

d. **Parts of speech**

Parts of speech means whether the word is a noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb, functioning as a subject, a predicate or a complement.

Example:

1. **Trojan** is an example of a computer virus.

e. **Word forms (the morphological properties of the word)**

When you are asked to determine the meaning of a long word that you do not know in the reading section, it is sometimes possible to determine the meaning of the word by studying the word parts. It means it is important to have knowledge about the base or the root of the words, the morphemes, and their relatives, such as, affixes.

Example:

1. **dis-** (meaning not), **-less** (meaning without)

Here is the short list of word parts

Part	Meaning	Example	Part	Meaning	Example
Contra	against	contrast	Dict	say	dictation
Mal	bad	malcontent	Domin	master	dominant
Miss	error	mistake	Jud	judge	judgment
Sub	under	subway	Mort	death	mortal
Dec	ten	decade	Spect	see	spectator
Multi	many	multiple	Terr	earth	territory
Sol	one	solo	Ver	turn	devert
Tri	three	triple	Viv	live	revive

f. **General knowledge**

Example:

1. The French constitution establishes *laïcité* as a system of government where there is a strict **separation of church and state**.

C. EXERCISE

Exercise 1

Instructions: *In the paragraphs below, one word has been replaced with a nonsense word. Use the context to guess what the underlined nonsense word means.*

- a. All tourists visiting Thailand should first get a **SVIP**. They will not be allowed to enter at all without one. Travelers without a **SVIP** will be seen can be given on the spot where they came from. A **SVIP** can be given on the spot if they arrive by plane or by car. However, they may have to wait a long time for one. This can be avoided by getting a **SVIP** before they leave their countries.

What is a “SVIP”?

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- b. Various kind of **WROOMS** are available in Singapore. Some are for one trip only, some are for a day, and some for three days. The three-day **WROOM** is useful for tourist who wants to visit different parts of the city. It allows them unlimited travel for three days on the local buses and underground trains. **WROOMS** and timetable for buses are available at all tourist information centers.

What is a “WROOM”?

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- c. In Hanoi, it is wise to get yourself a **WUP** as soon as possible. It is very easy to get lost if you leave the main streets. You can get free **WUPS** at a tourist information center, but they are not complete. Better **WUP** can be found in

the bookstores. These have more details, and they provide names of all the streets.

What is a “WUP”?

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- d. As the harmful effects of **MROPPING** on health have become widely known, many cities and some countries have passed laws that limit where it is allowed. In many places, **WROPING** is no longer permitted in the restaurants and bars. Owners of restaurants and bars were against prohibition laws because they believed that their businesses would suffer, but that lasted only for the first few months. After that, business returned to normal. The laws have also had another positive effect, apart from making the air cleaner for everyone. More people have given up **MROPNG** altogether.

What does WROPING mean?

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- e. There is a misconception that a person who obtains a Ph. D. Must be **SWELCH**. This can't be all true. **SWELCH** qualities like brilliance and quick-thinking are irrelevant in Ph.D. level studies. Let there be no doubt: brilliance and quick-thinking are valuable in other pursuits. But. They are neither sufficient nor necessary in doing Ph.D. research. Certainly, being **SWELCH** help. But it will not get the job done.

What does SWELCH mean?

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- f. In many countries, there are electronic signs along roads that **ZOOP** drivers about dangers or problems ahead. These may be short-term danger, such as an accident or bad weather, or longer-term problems, such as roadwork. Studies have shown, however, that drivers do not always notice these signs. To be sure that drivers are **ZOOPED** about the condition of the road, the highway management service in Scotland has developed a new electronic system that send messages directly to special electronic system built into cars. Do these

systems work better to **ZOOP** drivers than roadside sign? It is too soon to tell. The results on the first studies will be published next year.

What does ZOOP mean?

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- g. At the beginning of World War II, when the Germans moved into northern France, they searched the towns and countryside for escaping French soldiers, who were sent to prisoner of-war camps in Germany. Next, they tried to **ZEP** all the guns or other arms they could find, though many people hid theirs on farms or underground. The Germans also took all the horses from farms and towns, because they were needed in the army. This loss really hurt the French, since the lack of gasoline made horses necessary to work the farms and for transport. Not long after this, the Germans **ZEPPED** radios as well, so that people could not listen to foreign news reports.

What does ZEP mean?

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- h. During my stay in the city, I often used to sit on a stone wall by the riverbank in the early evening, hoping for a cool breeze—though there never was one. On one side was the "white" city, on the other side were the African villages, and all day long there were large **DREELS** that went back and forth, bringing people, bicycles, cars, and trucks to and from the city. At this time of day, city workers were eager to get back to their own world on the far side of the river. Brightly dressed and joking, the Africans pushed forward when the **DREEL** arrived. Many were carrying loads on their heads or bicycles on their shoulders. Some were so anxious not to miss the chance to get home that they leaped down the steps and jumped into the **DREEL** as it pulled out.

What does DREEL mean?

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- i. The foreign news reporters had been warned not to dress in a way that marked them obviously as foreigners. They were also told not to walk down

the middle of the street, where they could be a **ZEEM** for enemies on the roofs. They should always stay close to the buildings, ready to run into a doorway if they heard or saw anything suspicious. They should always wear a bulletproof vest. They all did as they had been told, but still did not feel safe. It was impossible not to think of the colleagues who had been wounded and killed in these streets. They walked quickly, looking up at the rooftops. There was no telling when and where a sharpshooter might decide it was time for **ZEEM** practice—and they rarely missed their **ZEEM**.

What does ZEEM mean?

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Exercise 2

Instructions: *Read each text excerpt. Use context clues to help you complete the statements.*

- a. A botanical garden is an area of flora in which plants are grown chiefly for scientific, educational, or aesthetic purposes. They usually surround an institution, such as a university or museum.
 1. Botany is the study of
 2. A synonym for plants is
 3. A word that means pleasing to the senses is
 4. A university may have botanical gardens for the purpose of
 5. True or false: All botanical gardens are open to the public

- b. Beech is the name of a family of trees that grows in the temperate regions of North America and Europe. It has papery leaves and slender twigs. Its fruit, beechnuts, are edible. Its wood is used for making furniture and for fuel.
 1. Beechnuts are the of the beech tree.
 2. A synonym for areas is
 3. The word describes a seasonal climate.
 4. A word that means able to be eaten is
 5. True or false: Beech trees have paper leaves.

- c. The era covering the presidency of James Polk was known as the “Fabulous Forties.” During this time the American flag was raised over much of the western territory, Texas became a member of the Union, gold was discovered in California, covered wagons rolled over the Oregon trail, and Americans sang Stephen Foster’s “Oh, Susanna.”
1. The Union refers to the
 2. A word meaning period of time is
 3. Is “Oh, Susanna” a story, a song, or a campaign slogan?
 4. What state entered the Union during Polk’s presidency?
 5. True or false: Polk was president during the 1940s.

Exercise 3

Instructions: *Find the meaning of the underlined word in each set of three sentences below.*

- a. Never tamper with electrical fittings without first switching off the main power supply.

It is illegal to add, take away, or otherwise tamper with the content of these videos.

Several research assistants were accused of tampering with the results of the experiments.

What does tamper mean?

- b. When the train pulled out and the crowd had thinned, he could see a small, forlorn figure sitting on a suitcase.

Drennan held on to a forlorn hope that somehow at the end of the war they would all be together again.

Two forlorn trees stood out, black and naked against the snow-covered fields.

What does forlorn mean?

- c. The financial woes of Fiat and other big Italian companies could lead to some important changes in the Italian economy.

Take a vacation in the South Pacific and leave behind all your winter worries and woes.

It did not take long for him to discover the source of all his friend's woes, but there was little he could do to help.

What **does woes mean?**

- d. Recent surveys show that many parents are very worried about the possibility of their child being abducted.

In **1976**, a school bus driver and twenty-six children were abducted at gunpoint in California.

The young woman admitted in tears that she had made up the story of how she was abducted and held by the men for thirty-six hours.

What **does abducted mean?**

- e. Dark clouds appeared and ten minutes later everyone at the football match was completely drenched.

When he pulled her out of the swimming pool, her dress was drenched and hung close to her body.

Seymour screamed and sat up suddenly in bed, drenched in a cold sweat.

What **does drenched mean?**

- f. The stranger never said a word, but thrust a folded piece of paper into Pilar's hand.

He thrust his hands into his pockets and walked slowly away.

As she straightened up, she felt a sudden pain like a knife being thrust into her lower back.

What **does thrust mean?**

- g. The president's spokesman said that it was too early to comment on the outcome of the meeting.

One unfortunate outcome of the elections was that both parties were weaker than before.

The outcome of hospital-based treatment was clearly better than home-based treatment.

What does outcome mean?

Exercise 4: TOEFL EXERCISE

In reading comprehension, you may be asked to determine the meaning of a difficult word, a word that you are not expected to know. In this case, the passage will probably give you a clear indication of what the word means.

The following chart outlines the key information that you should remember about vocabulary questions containing difficult words.

HOW TO IDENTIFY THE QUESTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the meaning of “X” in line Y? • The word “X” in line Y is closest in meaning to
WHERE TO FIND THE ANSWER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Information to help you understand the meaning of unknown word can often be found in the context surrounding the unknown word.
HOW TO ANSWER THE QUESTION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find the word in the passage 2. Read the sentence that contains the word carefully. 3. Look at the context clues to help you understand the meaning. 4. Choose the best answer that the context indicates.

EXERCISE

PASSAGE 1

The oxidation of exhaust gases is one of the primary sources of the world's pollution. The brown haze that is *poised* over some of the world's largest cities is properly called *photochemical smog*; it results from chemical reactions that *take place* in the air, using the energy of sunlight. The production of smog begins with gases are created in the cylinders of vehicle engines. It is there that oxygen and nitrogen gas combine as the fuel burns to form nitric oxide (NO), a colorless gas. The nitric oxide is *forced* out into the air through the vehicle tailpipe along with other gases.

When the gas reaches the air, it comes into contact with available oxygen from the atmosphere and combines with the oxygen to produce nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which is a gas with a brownish **hue**. This nitrogen dioxide plays a role in the formation of acid rain in wetter or more humid climates and tends to decompose back into nitric oxide as it releases an oxygen atom from each molecule; the released oxygen atoms quickly combine with oxygen (O₂) molecules to form ozone (O₃). The brownish colored nitrogen dioxide is partially responsible for the brown color in smoggy air; the ozone is the toxic substance that causes irritation to eyes.

1. The word **poised** in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to
 - (A) interacting
 - (B) sitting
 - (C) blowing
 - (D) poisoning
2. The phrase **take place** in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to
 - (A) position themselves
 - (B) put
 - (C) are seated
 - (D) occur
3. The word **forced** in paragraph 1 could best be replaced by
 - (A) obliged
 - (B) required
 - (C) pushed
 - (D) commanded
4. The word **hue** in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to
 - (A) color
 - (B) odor
 - (C) thickness
 - (D) smoke
5. The phrase **plays a role** in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to
 - (A) makes fun of
 - (B) serves a function in
 - (C) acts the part of
 - (D) moves about

PASSAGE 2

The black widow is the most dangerous spider living in the United States. It is most common in the southern parts of the country, but it can be found throughout the country. The black widow got its name because the female has been known to kill the male after mating and, as a result, becomes a **widow**.

The black widow is rather distinctive in appearance; it has a shiny *globular* body, the size and shape of a pea, and is marked on its underbelly with a red or yellow spot. The female is considerably more *ample* than the male, roughly four times larger on the average.

If a human is bitten by a black widow, the spider's poison can cause severe illness and pain. Black widow bites have occasionally resulted in death, but it is certainly not the norm for black widow bites to be *mortal*.

6. In line 4, the word "widow" means
 - (A) a type of poison
 - (B) the dead male spider
 - (C) the human victim of the spider
 - (D) a female whose mate has died
7. Which of the following is closest in meaning to the word "globular" in line 5?
 - (A) Earthen
 - (B) Luminescent
 - (C) Green in color
 - (D) Round
8. The word "ample" in line 7 indicates that the spider is
 - (A) feminine
 - (B) large in size
 - (C) dotted with colors
 - (D) normal
9. Which of the following has the same meaning as the word "mortal" in line 10?
 - (A) Deadly
 - (B) Painful
 - (C) Poisonous
 - (D) Sickening

PASSAGE 3

Ring Lardner himself was born into a wealthy, educated, and cultured family. For the bulk of his career, he worked as a reporter for newspaper in South Bend, Boston, St. Louis, and Chicago. However, it is for his short stories of lower middle-class Americans that Ring Landner is perhaps best known. In these stories, Ladner *vividly* creates the language and ambiance of this lower class, often using the *misspelled* words, grammatical errors, and incorrect diction that typified the language of the lower middle class.

10. The word "vividly" in the passage is closest in meaning to
 - (A) In a brief way
 - (B) In a lifelike way
 - (C) In a correct way
 - (D) In a cultured way

11. The word “misspelled” in the passage is closest in meaning to
(A) Quite vulgar
(B) Extremely wrong
(C) Highly improper
(D) Incorrectly written
12. The word “speech” in the passage is closest in meaning to
(A) Diction
(B) Ambiance
(C) Language
(D) Well written

PASSAGE 4

Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was a Portuguese-born explorer who is credited with the exploration of the coast of what is today the state of California. Sketchy military records from the period show that early in his career he served with the Spanish army from 1520 to 1524 in Spain's quest for *subjugation* of the people in what are today Cuba, México, and Guatemala. Little is known of his activities over the next *decades*, but apparently he succeeded in rising up through the ranks of the military; in 1541, he was ordered by Antonio de Mendoza, the Spanish ruler of Mexico, to explore the western coast of North America. Cabrillo set out in June of 1542 in command of two ships, the San Salvador and the Victoria; he reached San Diego Bay on September 28, 1542, and claimed the *terrain* for Spain. The peninsula where he landed is today named Cabrillo Point in his honor; the area has been established as a national monument and park, and local residents each year hold a celebration and reenactment of Cabrillo's landing.

From San Diego, Cabrillo continued northward for further exploration of the *spectacular* California coastline. By November 1542, he had reached as far north as San Francisco Bay, although he missed the entrance of the bay due to a huge storm. Soon after, with the approach of winter, he *veered* south and headed back to Mexico. He made it as far south as the Channel Islands off the coast of what is today Santa Barbara. Cabrillo, who died on San Miguel Island in the Channel Islands, never made it back to Mexico.

13. The word "subjugation" in line 4 is closest in meaning to
(A) religion
(B) flag
(C) control
(D) agreement
14. In line 5, the word "decades" is closest in meaning to
(A) months
(B) centuries
(C) long epoch
(D) ten-year periods

15. In line 9, the word "terrain" is closest in meaning to
(A) land
(B) population
(C) minerals
(D) prosperity
16. The word "spectacular" in line 14 is closest in meaning to which of the following?
(A) Ruggedly handsome
(B) Visually exciting
(C) Completely uneven
(D) Unendingly boring
17. The word "veered" in line 17 is closest in meaning to
(A) arrived
(B) ran
(C) turned
(D) cooled

PASSAGE 5

Checks and balances are an important concept in the formation of the U.S. system of government as presented in the Constitution of the United States. Under this conception of government, each branch of government has built-in checks and limitations placed on it by one or more different branches of government in order to ensure that any one branch is not able to usurp total *dominance over* the government. Under the Constitution, the United States has a *tripartite* government, with power divided equally among the branches: the presidency, the legislature, and the *judiciary*. Each branch is given some authority over the other two branches to balance the power among the three branches. An example of these checks and balances is seen in the steps needed to pass a law. Congress can pass a law with a simple majority, but the president can veto such a law. Congress can then *counteract* the veto with a two-thirds majority. However, even if Congress passes a law with a simple majority or overrides a presidential veto, the Supreme Court can still declare the law unconstitutional if it finds that the law is *contradictory* to the guidelines presented in the Constitution.

18. The expression "dominance over" in line 5 is closest in meaning to
(A) understanding of
(B) dispute over
(C) authority over
(D) rejection of
19. The word "tripartite" in line 6 suggests that something is
(A) divided into three
(B) totally democratic
(C) powerfully constructed
(D) evenly matched

20. The "judiciary" in line 7 is
 (A) the electorate
 (B) the authority
 (C) the legal system
 (D) the government
21. The word "counteract" in line 10 is closest in meaning to
 (A) vote for
 (B) debate
 (C) surpass
 (D) work against
22. "Contradictory to" in lines 13 is closest in meaning to which of the following expressions?
 (A) In agreement with
 (B) Opposite to
 (C) Supported by
 (D) Similar to

PASSAGE 6

Autism is a developmental disorder that is characterized by severe behavioral abnormalities across all *primary* areas of functioning. Its *onset* is often early; it generally makes itself known by the age of two and one-half. It is not a single disease entity but is instead a *syndrome* defined by patterns and characteristics of behavior; it, therefore, most likely has multiple *etiologies* rather than a single causative factor. Autism is not fully understood and thus is controversial with respect to diagnosis, etiology, and treatment strategies.

23. The word "primary" in the passage could best be replaced by
 (A) elementary
 (B) main
 (C) introductory
 (D) primitive
24. The word "onset" in the passage is closest in meaning to
 (A) placement
 (B) arrangement
 (C) support
 (D) beginning
25. The word "syndrome" in the passage is closest in meaning to
 (A) concurrent set of symptoms
 (B) feeling of euphoria
 (C) mental breakdown
 (D) repetitive task

26. The word “etiologies” in the passage is closest in meaning to
(A) symptoms
(B) patterns
(C) causes
(D) onsets

D. REFERENCES

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