

Reading - Using Context

The use of contextual clues can be one of the best ways to improve students' reading skills. Unfortunately, students often insist on understanding **each** word when reading. Realizing that a text can be understood in a general sense by using contextual clues can go a long way towards helping students cope with increasingly difficult texts. At the same time, the use of contextual clues can also provide a means by which students can rapidly increase their existing vocabulary base.

This lesson provides a number of pointers helping students identify and use context to their advantage. A worksheet is also included which helps students recognize and develop the skill of contextual understanding.

Aim: Increased awareness and usage of contextual reading clues

Activity: Awareness raising concerning the use of contextual clues, followed by worksheet practicing contextual reading

Level: Intermediate - upper intermediate

Outline:

- Write this example sentence on the board: "**Tom decided that he desperately needed the glockum if he were to solve the problem**"
- Ask students what they do if they are reading an English text and do not understand a specific word.
- Ask students what they do if they are reading a text in their native language and do not understand a specific word.
- Ask students what 'glockum' means.
- Once students have established that they don't know what a 'glockum' is, ask them to guess at what it might be.
- Ask students what part of speech a 'glockum' is (i.e. verb, noun, preposition etc.)
- Have students explain how they arrived at their guesses, which clues did they use?
- Explain the concept of reading in "chunks" i.e. looking at the text surrounding the unknown word for clues.
- Show them an article from an advanced level magazine (*Wired, National Geographic, The Economist etc.*)
- Ask students to identify the probable vocabulary areas that may be used in the example article.
- Explain the importance of activating vocabulary by first quickly glancing at the text to be read. This idea is very important as the brain will begin to focus on related concepts thus preparing the student for what is to be read.
- Point out that by using **all** of these clues (i.e. "chunking", part of speech, logical deduction, vocabulary activation), students can arrive at a much fuller understanding of difficult texts - *even if they do not understand each word*
- Have students divide into small groups and complete worksheet.

Reading Clues

Deduction - What does the sentence concern? Which words does the *unknown* word seem to relate to?

Part of Speech - Which part of speech is the unknown word? Is it a verb, noun, preposition, adjective, time expression or something else?

Chunking - What do the words *around* the unknown word(s) mean? How could the unknown word(s) relate to those words? - This is basically deduction on a more local level.

Vocabulary Activation - When quickly skimming through the text, what does the text seem to concern? Does the layout (design) of the text give any clues? Does the publication or type of book give any clues to what the text might be about? Which words can you think of that belong to this vocabulary category?

Make logical guesses about the meaning of the unknown words in the following paragraph.

Jack quickly entered the didot and cleaned the various misturaes he had been using to repair the wuipit. He had often thought that this job was extremely yulling. However, he had to admit that this time things seemed to be a bit easier. When he finished, he put on his redick and went back to the study to relax. He took out his favourite pipe and settled into the beautiful new pogtry. What a fantastic schnappy he had made when he had bought the pogtry. Only 300 yagmas!

What could a 'didot' be?

What part of speech is 'misturaes'?

If Jack used the 'misturaes' to repair the 'wuipit' what do you think the 'misturaes' must be?

What could 'yulling' mean? - What part of speech is often used with an ending '-ing'?

Which synonym could be used for 'yulling'?

- fun
- difficult
- expensive

What type of things do you put on?

Based on the above question, what kind of thing must a 'redick' be?

Is a 'pogtry' used inside or outside?

Which words let you know that the 'pogtry' was cheap?

What must 'yagmas' be?

- Clothes
- Cigarette type
- Type of money