

Module: Language

Lesson Title: Determining the Meaning of Unknown Words

Objectives and Standards

Students will:

- Identify and use multiple methods for determining the meaning of unknown words
- Understand how prefixes and suffixes can assist in determining word meaning
- Understand the use of context clues to determine word meaning

Florida Adult Basic Education Reading Standards	Level Expectation
Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials as appropriate. (CCR.LA.ABE.4)	NRS Level 4 – Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

Materials

- Handout A: Four Strategies for Determining Meaning of Unknown Words
- Handout B: Most Common Prefixes
- Handout C: Most Common Suffixes
- EdHelper – Context Clues – create your own worksheets that require students to use context clues http://edhelper.com/language/Context_Clues602.html
- YouTube video – Prefixes, Suffixes and Roots – Words are Power (rap video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOJrjNR7ZZM>
- YouTube video – Learn English – What are Prefixes? James ESL English Lessons (engVid) (Approximately 12 minutes in length this video focuses on six frequently used prefixes.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwWFyK5ZTBU>
- Flocabulary – video that explains four methods for finding meaning of unknown word: synonyms, antonyms, explanations, and examples (view online only) <http://www.flocabulary.com/context-clues/>

Instructional Plan

Overview

Students often struggle when reading text because they lack the strategies necessary to determine the meaning of unknown words. Often, they will stop at the unknown word and re-read from the beginning of the paragraph or passage rather than continue on through the passage. They don't understand that often the meaning of an unknown word may just be a few lines forward in the text.

This lesson is designed to provide students with strategies to use when determining the meaning of unknown words, including the use of context clues and prefixes and suffixes.

Process

Prior to the lesson, write the following sentences on the board.

- Walter was so **irate** over the speeding ticket that he wanted to hit something, but he took a deep breath so he could get his emotions under control.
- My pet gerbil is an **herbivore**, so I only feed him greens and other plants, never any meat.

Ask students what they do when they are reading and encounter a word they don't know. Write the students responses on the board. Students may give some of the following examples:

- Go back and re-read the text again
- Look in a dictionary for the definition
- Look around the word and see if the definition is there

Explain that while some of these are good ideas, there are more strategies that they can use in order to determine the meaning of unknown words. Explain that in this lesson, they will learn several strategies to help them use context clues as they read more complex text.

Using Context Clues

Explain that context clues are hints found within a sentence, paragraph, or passage that a reader can use to understand the meanings of new or unfamiliar words. Discuss how learning the meaning of words through context clues is one of the most practical ways to build vocabulary, especially since a dictionary may not always be available when it is needed.

Explain that a reader must be aware that many words have several possible meanings. Only by looking closely at the context in which a word is used can the reader decide which is the appropriate definition of that word in that particular sentence. Give students a few minutes to think about the word **present**. Ask them to think of all the possible definitions for the word **present**. Have students share their definitions and write them on the board. A few examples may include: currently happening, a gift, to give or show, in attendance, etc.

Caution students that they should

- Rely on context clues when an obvious clue to the meaning is provided, or they only need a general sense of the meaning
- Not rely on context clues when the clues suggest several possible definitions, when other nearby words are unfamiliar, and when they need a precise definition of the word

Ask students to look at the two sentences that you have written on the board. Ask them if they recognize the two words in bold – **irate** and **herbivore**.

Ask students if there is anything within the first sentence that would help them determine the meaning of the word **irate**. Students should indicate that there is a clue within the first sentence to help (see the underlined portion of the sentence). Ask students to explain why this clue would help them understand the word **irate**. Students may indicate that **irate** means angry or extremely upset, because the clue "he wanted to hit something" would indicate that the person was mad or upset.

- Walter was so **irate** over the speeding ticket that he wanted to hit something, but he took a deep breath so he could get his emotions under control.

Ask students to find a clue within the sentence that helps define the word **herbivore**. (See underlined portion for clue that students should locate.) Ask students to explain why that part of the sentence helped them define the term **herbivore**.

- My pet gerbil is an **herbivore**, so I only feed him greens and other plants, never any meat.

Explain that there are four basic types of context clues students can use to determine the meaning of unknown words they encounter in text.

Take students through an overview of context clues using **Handout A: Four Strategies for Determining the Meaning of Unknown Words**. As you work through each of the four strategies, have students create their own sentences that use each of the strategies. After students complete their sentences, you may wish to use the video from Flocabulary as a quick and fun review of the four basic strategies for determining word meaning.

Using Prefixes

Explain that recognizing the meaning of common prefixes can help students determine the meaning of unknown words. Explain that a prefix is a group of letters added to the beginning of a word, changing its meaning. Write the following words on the board.

unhappy impatient disrespect misplaced deconstruct

Have students identify the prefix for each of the words. Ask students to look at each of the words listed above and think about what the prefix of that word has done to change its meaning. In the case of the words listed, the prefixes have created words that are antonyms, or the opposites, of the root words. Discuss the importance of being able to quickly identify key prefixes to assist in determining the meaning of a word. Help students understand that 20 common prefixes are used in 97% of prefixed words. That alone should encourage students to master the most common prefixes in order to expand their vocabulary.

Review **Handout B: Most Common Prefixes** with students. Place each of the prefixes on an index card. Divide students into pairs. Have each pair select 2-3 index cards and then create as many words as possible based on the prefixes selected. Have students share their lists. If students have words that are questionable have them explain the word and its definition to the group.

Using Suffixes

Explain that recognizing the meaning of common suffixes can also help students determine the meaning of unknown words. Explain that a suffix is a letter or group of letters added to the end of a root word. A suffix changes the meaning of the root or base word. Write the following words on the board.

transformed coats likelyy cluelessly smartestest

Have students identify the suffix for each of the words. Ask students to look at each of the words listed above and think about what the prefix of that word has done to change its meaning. Discuss the importance of being able to quickly identify key suffixes to assist in determining the meaning of a word. Inform students

that 20 common suffixes are found in approximately 93% of all suffixed words; *s*, *es*, *ed*, and *ing* make up almost two-thirds of those words. Suffixes can have different uses, including:

- Forming the plural form of nouns
- Changing the tense of verbs
- Create antonyms (clue or clueless)
- Create comparatives (smart or smartest.)

Review **Handout C: Most Common Suffixes** with students. Place each of the suffixes on an index card. Divide students into pairs. Have each pair select 2-3 index cards and then create as many words as possible based on the suffixes selected. Have students share their lists. If students have words that are questionable have them explain the word and its definition for the group.

If students need additional assistance with prefixes and suffixes consider accessing one of the videos included in the materials list. The videos can be used either as additional instruction or as a review.

Debrief the lesson's activities by having students share what they think will be the most helpful to them in determining the meaning of unknown words. The following are a few questions that you may wish to ask.

Sample Debriefing Questions

- What are the four basic strategies for using context clues?
- In what area do you think you would be most likely to use context clues that include either examples or explanation?
- Do you think that using context clues would be more helpful than using a dictionary whenever you don't know a word? Why? Why not?
- How will you use what you learned about prefixes and suffixes in this lesson?
- How could knowing the meaning of common prefixes and suffixes help you improve your writing skills?

Modifications for Different Levels

Students at the lowest literacy levels should begin working with context clues, especially definitions and examples. These two areas enable students at an early level to learn the strategies that they will continue to use throughout their school work and into real life. Likewise, students at the lower levels should also begin using prefixes and suffixes. However, rather than presenting lower level students with the complete lists found on **Handout B and C**, introduce suffixes first when students are forming plural nouns and changing verbs from present to past to future tense. Save the more complex suffixes for instruction at a higher level. The same holds true for prefixes. Introduce the most basic prefixes of *in*, *un*, and *re*. The remaining prefixes can be introduced as the student's vocabulary grows.

At a more complex level, have students use **Handouts A, B, and C** to help improve their overall writing. Have students incorporate synonym, antonyms, explanations, and examples in their writing. In addition, have students work with prefixes and suffixes to broaden their vocabulary when writing. Rather than have students use the same basic words over and over, have them substitute new words which include prefixes and suffixes.

Assessments/Extensions

Select a variety of social studies and/or science articles from newspapers, magazines, or the Internet. Look for articles that are of interest to students, but provide them with opportunities to read content-rich nonfiction. Have students work in groups to read through the article and use the context clue strategies to determine the meaning of unknown words. This will provide students with an opportunity to practice their context clue strategies and gain knowledge in one or more of the content areas.

Consider creating your own worksheets using the program at EdHelper – Context Clues.

http://edhelper.com/language/Context_Clues602.html

These worksheets can be used to assess students' understanding of context clues and are available in a wide range of levels.

Handout A: Four Strategies for Determining the Meaning of Unknown Words

<p style="text-align: center;">1 - Find a Definition or Synonym</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author provides a definition next to or near the unknown word • Definition is a statement giving the meaning of the word • A synonym is a word that means almost the same as the other • May or may not appear in the same sentence <p>Example</p> <p><i>“Don’t think of words as separate, discrete items, or entities.”</i></p> <p>Unknown Word – <i>Entities</i> Definition provided – <i>separate, discrete items</i> Unknown Word – <i>Discrete</i> Synonym provided - <i>separate</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2 - Find an Antonym</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author provides the antonym of a word • An antonym is a word or group of words that have the opposite meaning • May or may not appear in the same sentence <p>Example</p> <p><i>“Chad is calm and quiet, but his brother is boisterous.”</i></p> <p>Unknown Word – <i>boisterous</i> Antonym provided – <i>opposite of calm and quiet</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3 – Find an Example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author provides an example that can be found near the unknown word to explain its meaning • Words like including, such as, and for example, point out example clues <p><i>“Celestial bodies, including the sun, moon, and stars, have fascinated man through the centuries.”</i></p> <p>Unknown word – <i>Celestial</i> Explanation provided – <i>objects are those found in the sky – the sun, moon, and stars</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4 – Find an Explanation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author provides an explanation of the unknown word through use of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Commas, dashes, parentheses ○ Phrase the explains the word’s meaning ○ Direct explanation of the meaning of the word • Explanation includes words or phrases that help to identify the unknown word <p><i>“Jerry carried the cask, a large barrel that holds liquids, and he placed it on the table in front of him.”</i></p> <p>Unknown word – <i>Cask</i> Explanation provided – <i>a large barrel that holds liquids</i></p>

Handout B: Most Common Prefixes

The following list of the 20 most common prefixes are listed in order by frequency of use.

Rank	Prefix	Definition
1	un	not, opposite of
2	re	again
3	in, im, ir, il	not
4	dis	not, opposite of
5	en, em	cause to
6	non	not
7	in, im	in, into
8	over	too much
9	mis	wrongly
10	sub	under
11	pre	before
12	inter	between, among
13	fore	before
14	de	opposite of
15	trans	across
16	super	above
17	semi	half
18	anti	against
19	mid	middle
20	under	too little

Handout B: Most Common Suffixes

The following list of the 20 most common suffixes are listed in order by frequency of use.

Rank	Suffix	Definition
1	s, es	plurals
2	ed	past-tense verbs
3	ing	verb form/present participle
4	ly	characteristic of
5	er, or	person connected with
6	ion, tion, ation, ition	act, process
7	ible, able	can be done
8	al, ial	having characteristics of
9	y	characterized by
10	ness	state of, condition of
11	ity, ty	state of
12	ment	action or process
13	ic	having characteristics of
14	ous, eous, ious	possessing the qualities of
15	en	made of
16	er	comparative
17	ive, ative, itive	adjective form of a noun
18	ful	full of
19	less	without
20	est	comparative