Contents

Unit 1: Context Clues

As a reader you will always encounter new and difficult words. How do you respond when you come across a word you don't know? Do you stop or do you continue to read? Do you reach for a dictionary?

Defining difficult words is a challenge, especially if you don't have a dictionary. Writers help the reader by including context clues in their writing.

What are context clues?

A context clue is information in a sentence or paragraph that helps you define a difficult word. In the sentence below, you can use context clues to make a logical guess about the meaning of **lethargic**.

> Larry was **lethargic** and didn't have the energy to get out of bed.

The writer tells you Larry has no energy. You can use this information to make a logical guess or inference about how Larry feels. Larry feels too tired to get out of bed. **Lethargic** must mean lacking energy and tired.

Be a Detective

Search for the Clues

Pause and pronounce the difficult word.

Re-read the sentence or paragraph.

Look for context clues.

Use the clues to make a logical guess as to the meaning of the word.

Types of Context Clues

Look at the different types of context clues below. Discuss with your teacher how the context clues help you figure out the meanings of the new words.

Type of Context Clue	Description	Example
Definition	The writer provides a definition of the word.	A food allergy can cause **anaphylaxis**—a serious reaction to an allergy.
Synonym	The sentence or paragraph contains a word or phrase that means the same as the target word.	It is **essential** to read all food labels carefully. It is also important to ask questions about the food you eat in restaurants.
Antonym	The sentence or paragraph contains a word or phrase that means the opposite of the target word.	Some symptoms like runny nose are not too serious, but some symptoms like a fast heartbeat and trouble breathing can be **severe**.
Examples	The meaning has to be figured out or inferred from the information or examples in the text.	A food allergy can cause **symptoms** such as a runny nose, skin rash, and sneezing.

Using context clues will help to expand your vocabulary.

Sometimes using context clues will not give you the *exact* meanings of new words, but you will be able to figure out the *general* meanings of new words.

You are going to read about earthquakes.
Use context clues to figure out the meanings of the bolded words.
Underline the context clue(s) that helped you figure out the meaning.

Example:

The earth's crust is made of tectonic plates that are always moving. Every once in a while two grinding plates will suddenly **jolt** into a new position. This <u>sudden movement</u> sends shock waves that radiate through rock, soil, buildings, and water. The energy released by this <u>abrupt movement</u> creates an earthquake.

Context clues help you figure out that the meaning of *jolt* is a sudden or abrupt movement.

❶ The Richter **magnitude** scale is used to describe the strength of an earthquake. An earthquake that measures 7.0 on the Richter scale can destroy buildings.

Choose the word that means the same as **magnitude**.

A. sound   **B.** location   **C.** depth   **D.** size

Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

❷ Some earthquakes consist of small tremors that cause little damage. Other earthquakes are so **massive** that they destroy whole cities.

Choose the word that means the same as **massive**.

A. little   **B.** hidden   **C.** large   **D.** quick

Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

❸ Earthquakes **impact** people in many ways. They cause injury and loss of life as well as damage to roads, bridges, and buildings.

Choose the word that means the same as **impact**.

A. affect   **B.** help   **C.** move   **D.** change

Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

❹ Floods, fires, gas leaks, and landslides are possible **consequences** of an earthquake.

Choose the word that means the same as **consequences**.

A. causes   **B.** movements   **C.** uses   **D.** results

Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

❺ Earthquakes cause the most damage in places like big cities. If these **populated** places are near the sea, damage is not only worse. It causes death.

Choose the phrase that means the same as **populated**.

A. having lots of earthquakes   **B.** having lots of floods
C. having lots of people   **D.** having lots of crime

Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

❻ Earthquakes can cause **enormous** ocean waves as tall as buildings.
These huge waves crash into cities along the coast.

Choose the phrase that means the same as **enormous**.

A. very salty   **B.** very loud   **C.** very slow   **D.** very big

Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

❼ Scientists can **predict** that an earthquake will happen in the future, but they cannot tell when exactly the earthquake will happen.

Choose the phrase that means the same as **predict**.

A. say in advance   **B.** plan in advance   **C.** be afraid   **D.** make sure

Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

Which *types* of context clues did you find in questions 1 to 7?

You are going to read about wildfires.
Use context clues to figure out the meanings of the bolded words.

Paragraph 1: What Causes a Wildfire?

Wildfires are fires that are out of control. An unattended campfire or a discarded cigarette butt can ignite a wildfire. Hot weather, lightning, or the sun's heat can start a wildfire. Dry **vegetation** such as grass and bushes act as fuel for a fire. And wind can aid a wildfire's progress. Wildfires can burn large areas of land and destroy everything in their paths in minutes.

❶ Choose the word that means the same as **vegetation**.

A. shrubs   **B.** farmland   **C.** forests   **D.** plants

❷ Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

Paragraph 2: The Fort McMurray Wildfire

On May 1, 2016, a wildfire began in Fort McMurray, Alberta. Nature was not on the firefighters' side. High temperatures were at record levels that week. The rains would not come. The strong winds would not die down. The fire **escalated** and rapidly increased in size, spreading over one million acres in three weeks. In mid-June, rain and cool temperatures helped firefighters control the fire.

❶ What do you think **escalated** means? Write the meaning in the space below.

....

❷ Underline the context clues that helped you figure out the meaning.

❸ Check the new word's exact meaning in the Answer Key. Is your meaning close to the exact meaning? In what ways are the two meanings similar?

Which *types* of context clues did you find in the paragraphs on this page?