**Figure 5.2.** Clue Web

**Clue Web**

What does it What does it do?

Where is it?

look, smell,

sound, taste, and/or feel like?

Unknown word/object:

What's another word for it?

When does it happen?

What is the opposite of it?

Other Notes:

**Figure 5.3.** Sample Poster Showing Four-Step Strategy for Inferring Word Meanings from Context

# FOUR-STEP STRATEGY

**(Inferring word meanings from context)**

## Play and Question

Read carefully.

Frequently ask yourself, “Does this make sense?”

## Slow Advance

Notice when you don’t know the meaning of a word and slow down. Read that sentence at least once more, looking for clues.

## Stop and Rewind

If necessary, go back and reread the preceding sentence, looking for clues that help you figure out what the word might mean.

## Play and Question

When you figure out what the word might mean, substitute your guess in for the difficult word and see if it makes sense.

If it does, keep on reading. If it doesn’t, stop and rewind, and try again.

*Guided Practice*. After explaining how to use the four-step strategy for inferring word meanings from context, the teacher and the class work

together to infer the meaning of a difficult word. The following teacher- student dialogue is a good example of Guided Practice for the instruc- tion on using context clues.

*Teacher:* Much like we did with the video, we are going to take a small section of a book and make sure we understand it before moving on. I will read a paragraph aloud and then stop and check to make sure everyone understood the words and the ideas. The book is *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. As you will see, the story is set in a very strange place. Here is the paragraph we’re going to work with.

“A-H-H-H-R-R-E-M-M,” roared the gateman, clearing his throat and snapping smartly to attention. “This is Diction- opolis, a happy kingdom, advantageously located in the Foothills of Confusion. The breezes come right off the Sea of Knowledge and cool the foothills gently. In this kingdom we don’t have the cold temperatures like at the top of the moun- tains, nor the rain that the other side of the mountain gets.”

*Teacher:* This gateman is welcoming the main character, Milo, into his city of Dictionopolis. Notice that Foothills of Confu- sion and Sea of Knowledge are capitalized. What does that tell you?

*Students:* They’re proper nouns. . . . They’re names of places.

*Teacher:* Exactly. Knowing what sorts of words are capitalized will help you understand this section.

*Teacher:* Did everyone understand the paragraph completely? If we don’t understand everything, what could we do?

*Students:* Reread it. . . . Read it again. . . . Read it slower. . . . Ask ourselves questions as we are reading it.

*Teacher:* Good thinking. You came up with two of the steps to our strategy, Slow Advance and Stop and Rewind. Let’s use

those two steps now. As I reread the paragraph, listen for words that you don’t know.

[*The teacher again reads the paragraph aloud*.]

*Teacher:* Were there any difficult words in the paragraph? If so, what were they?

*Students: Advantageously*.

*Teacher:* Let’s highlight that one. Now, let’s reread just the sentence that *advantageously* is in and the one after it. We don’t need to reread the whole thing every time, just the section we’re focusing on.

[*The teacher rereads just the one sentence*.]

*Teacher:* Does *advantageously* sound like a positive thing?

*Students:* It does to me. . . . It says that it is a happy kingdom. I think that it has a positive meaning.

*Teacher:* What are some of the things the paragraph tells us about this kingdom?

*Students:* That it gets nice breezes off the sea. . . . It’s not as cold as the mountain peaks and it’s not as rainy as the other side of the mountain.

*Teacher:* Would that make it a pleasant place to live?

*Students:* Yes. . . . It’s nice to have a breeze. . . . It’s also good that it’s not too cold. . . . And being not so rainy is a good thing too.

*Teacher:* What is the word *advantageously* describing?

*Students:* Where this city is located.

*Teacher:* That’s right. The city is located in an advantageous place. What do you think that *advantageous* could mean?

*Students:* Nice?

*Teacher:* Let’s add an *-ly* to that because our unknown word had an *-ly*. Then, let’s write *nicely* above the word *advanta- geously*. Now, we should reread the paragraph with our replacement word to see if it makes sense. This time, while I’m reading, ask yourself if you understand what sort of place the story takes place in.

[*The teacher crosses out* advantageously *on the overhead and replaces it with* nicely.]

*Teacher:* What do you think? Did *nicely* fit in the sentence OK?

Does the sentence make sense now?

*Students:* Yes. . . . It does make sense. . . . Dictionopolis sounds like a good place to live.

*Teacher:* I agree. I think that we now have a better understand- ing of the whole paragraph because we understand the word

*advantageously* better. That’s what learning to use context to infer word meanings can do. It can help us learn words, and it can help us better understand what we read.

**Figure 5.1.** Overview of a Unit on Context Clues

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| DAY 1  Motivation and introduc- tion to using context to infer mean- ing using a videotape | DAY 2  Introduction to using con- text clues to infer word meanings and to the four-step strategy | DAY 3  Detailed in- struction in the first two steps of the strategy: Play and Question, and Slow Advance | DAY 4  Detailed in- struction in the second two steps of the strategy: Stop and Rewind, and Play and Question | DAY 5  Game in which stu- dents earn points for using the four-step strategy to infer word meanings |
| DAY 6  Review of using context clues and the four-step strategy; re- naming of the four steps without the video playing termi- nology | DAY 7  Guided prac- tice—and further in- struction if necessary— in using the four-step process with teacher- provided narrative texts. | DAY 8  Guided prac- tice—and further in- struction if necessary— in using the four-step process with teacher- provided expository texts. | DAY 9  Guided prac- tice—and further in- struction if necessary— in using the four-step process with authentic texts currently be- ing used in the class. | DAY 10  Review of using context clues and the four-step strategy; student- teacher planning on strategically using and learning more about context clues |

**Figure 5.4.** Twenty Most Frequent Prefixes *Prefix Words with the Prefix* un- 782

re- 401

in-, im-, ir-, il- (= “not”) 313

dis- 216

en-, em- 132

non- 126

in-, im- (= “in,” “into”) 105

over- (= “too much”) 98

mis- 83

sub- 80

pre- 79

inter- 77

fore- 76

de- 71

trans- 47

super- 43

semi- 39

anti- 33

mid- 33

under- 25

total 2,859

*Note.* Adapted from “Teaching Elementary Students to Use Word-Bit Clues,” by T.G. White, J. Sowell, and A. Yanagihara, 1989, *The Reading Teacher, 42.*

**Figure 5.5.** Overview of a Unit on Prefixes

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| DAY 1  Introduction, definition of a prefix, moti- vation to learn to use pre- fixes, and overview of the unit | DAY 2  Instruction on the first three prefixes using direct expla- nation | DAY 3  Review and instruction on the prefix strategy | DAY 4  Instruction on the remaining three prefixes and guided practice with the prefix strategy | DAY 5  Review, guided prac- tice, and a quiz |

*Prefix Removal and Replacement Strategy*

When you come to an unknown word that may contain a prefix:

* + Remove the “prefix.”
  + Check that you have a real word remaining. If you do, you’ve found a prefix.
  + Think about the meaning of the prefix and the meaning of the root word.
  + Combine the meanings of the prefix and the root word, and infer the meaning of the unknown word.
  + Try out the meaning of the unknown word in the sentence, and see if it makes sense. If it does, read on. If it doesn’t, you’ll need to use another strategy for discovering the unknown word’s meaning.