Word Detectives Crack New Words

Teacher		**Class**	Grade 3
Subject	ELA	**Topic**	Context clues
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United States

Students learn to use sentence clues to figure out new words. They act as detectives with magnifiers and solve word mysteries.

Curriculum links

- Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase. [1]

Learning objectives

- Students will use sentence clues to figure out unknown words' meanings.
- Students will point to helper words that show the word's meaning.
- Students will check guesses by putting them back in the sentence.

Success criteria

- I can guess a word from its sentence.
- I can point to the clue words.
- I can check if my guess makes sense.

What students already know

Show thumbs up/down: When you see a word you do not know, do you stop, skip, or look for clues? Ask one student to tell what they do.

Key words

context clue	a hint in nearby words that shows what a new word means [3][9]
synonym	a nearby word that means almost the same thing [8]
antonym	a nearby word that means the opposite thing [8]
definition	words that tell what something is or means [21]
example	one or more things that show what a word is about [8]

Materials

- paper magnifiers - one per pair
- sentence strips made from Passage The Lost Map Hike sentences
- pencils
- Slides 1-7, 9-12
- printed copies of Passage The Lost Map Hike paragraphs 1-3
- three-box detective sheet: word / clue words / my guess

Before the lesson

- Print Passage The Lost Map Hike paragraphs 1-3 and sentence strips using only those sentences
- Print three-box detective sheet for each student
- Cut out and test paper magnifiers
- Load Slides 1-7, 9-12 and test Video clip 6 Context Clues for Kids (0:00-3:11) on slide 6 with sound
- Set desks for pairs with open space to hold up magnifiers

Lesson outline

0–10 min **Starter** 10 min · Whole class

Hook students as word detectives and recall what to do with a hard word.

YOU DO

1. Welcome class with Slide 1 Word Detectives! and read its line: Use clues in the sentence to crack new words.
2. Show Slide 2 Today we will and read objectives: Use sentence clues to figure out new words.
3. Show Slide 4 Skip It or Crack It? and Slide 5 vote question: You find a word you don't know. What first?
4. Take votes for Reread the whole sentence, Keep reading for more hints, Look for helper words, Guess fast and move on, then praise looking and rereading.

STUDENTS DO

1. Students hold up imaginary magnifiers and repeat the hook line.
2. Students vote with fingers for what to do first with a hard word.
3. Students say the success lines: I can guess a word from its sentence. I can point to the clue words.

Say: A tricky word is hiding in this sentence. Get your magnifier — let's zoom in and catch its clues! Good readers do not skip and stay confused. They use the clues and make a smart guess.

Ask: If you skip a hard word, what can happen to the story? (You stay confused and the story stops making sense.) · Where will we look first for clues today? (In the same sentence as the hard word.)

Check understanding: Show thumbs up if you can say where clues hide. If many are unsure, point to Slide 1 line again and repeat that clues are in the sentence.

Support: Let students vote by pointing to large A-B-C-D cards instead of speaking. **Stretch:** Ask students to tell one time a nearby word helped them guess a word before.

Use: Slides 1-2, 4-5

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10–25 min **Teaching** 15 min · Whole class

Model the four detective steps for using same-sentence clues.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 3 Clues to Hunt For and explain same-meaning, opposite, telling, and example helpers, since clues typically fall into synonym, antonym, example, and general sense [8].
2. Play Video clip 6 Context Clues for Kids (0:00-3:11) on Slide 6 and tell students to listen for helper words.
3. Show Slide 7 chain and model steps on the board: underline the unknown word, reread that sentence, look for clues, guess and put it back to see if it makes sense [4]. Remind that the clue may appear within the same sentence as the word [3].
4. Think aloud the worked example and substitute the guess back to check it [4].

STUDENTS DO

1. Students watch, hold magnifiers up when they hear a helper, and track the four steps on fingers.
2. Students read the example sentence aloud with the teacher and say the clue words together.

Say: Detectives follow steps. Read the whole sentence. Find helper clue words. Guess what fits. Put it back - does it make sense? Because most of your vocabulary is gained through reading, it is important to use these clues [3].

Worked example: Sentence: After one mile, they felt exhausted, or very, very tired, and sat on a flat rock to rest. Step 1: I underline exhausted. Step 2: I reread the whole sentence. Step 3: I find or very, very tired right after a comma — a restatement often set off by a comma or the word or [5]. Step 4: I guess exhausted means very, very tired. Check: After one mile, they felt very, very tired, and sat on a flat rock to rest — yes, that makes sense.

Ask: What words told us what exhausted means? (or very, very tired) · How do we know our guess is right? (Put it back in the sentence and see if it makes sense.) · Was that clue a same-meaning twin or an opposite? (Same-meaning twin, a synonym clue with the same meaning [8].)

Check understanding: All hold up magnifiers if they can name the clue words for exhausted. Reteach Step 2-3 with the gloomy sentence if many cannot.

Support: Keep Slide 7 steps posted and point to each step as you do it, reading the example sentence twice [3]. **Stretch:** Ask students to name the signal — the comma and or — that flagged the restatement [5].

Use: Slides 3, 6-7, Video clip 6 (0:00-3:11)

25–45 min **Main activity** 20 min · Pairs

Practise in pairs to guess words using same-sentence clues.

YOU DO

1. Give each pair a paper magnifier, three-box sheet, and three strips made only from the passage: exhausted sentence, gloomy sentence, and fragile sentences.
2. Remind pairs to underline the unknown word, reread that sentence, look for clues, guess and check by substitution [4].
3. Circulate, prompt with What words helped you? and ask pairs to swap guesses back into the sentence to see if it makes sense [4].
4. Stop after 15 minutes and have two pairs share one word, clue, and guess.

STUDENTS DO

1. Pairs read each strip aloud, circle the hard word, and underline clue words with magnifiers.
2. Pairs write word, clue words, and guess in three boxes and try the swap check.
3. Pairs rehearse to share: our word, our clue, our meaning.

Say: You are the detectives. Zoom your magnifier on one strip at a time. Write the unknown word, the clue words, and your guess in the three boxes. Put your guess back. Does it sound right? Prove it with the clue.

Worked example: Strip: Soon the sky turned gloomy, dark and cloudy, so they pulled on light jackets and drank cold water. I underline gloomy. Clue words: dark and cloudy. Guess: gloomy means dark and cloudy. Check: Soon the sky turned dark and cloudy — yes, jackets and cold water fit gloomy weather.

Ask: Inside was a map that felt fragile. It would tear very easily, so they held it with care. What does fragile mean and what helped? (It tears very easily; It would tear very easily helped — a definition stated shortly after the word [21].) · In Unlike the rough, bumpy trail, the way back felt smooth and easy, what does smooth mean and what helped? (Not rough, easy to walk; Unlike and rough, bumpy helped, and but, however, and yet show a contrast [8].)

Check understanding: Collect three-box sheets quickly: all should have word + clue + sensible guess. Pull one pair for reteach if clue box is blank.

Support: Pre-underline the clue words so students only focus on connecting the clue to the guess [4]. **Stretch:** Students explain if the clue was a synonym, antonym, or example, since clues typically fall into those categories [8].

45–55 min **Practice** 10 min · On their own

Apply the steps alone to two new sentence clues.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 9 and read both lines exactly: After the hike, the kids were famished and ate everything fast. Unlike the hot soup, the juice was chilly and cold.
2. Ask students to write what each word means and underline what helped, using the general sense of the sentence as a clue when needed [8].
3. Show Slide 10 and remind them that context clues are hints in the surrounding text that help figure out an unfamiliar word [9].
4. Collect two quick answers and model the swap check for chilly.

STUDENTS DO

1. Students read both Slide 9 sentences silently then aloud.
2. Students write guesses for famished and chilly and underline ate everything fast and hot versus chilly and cold.

Say: Now try alone. Read the whole sentence first. Famished is in the first sentence. Chilly is in the second. Write what you think each means and underline the helper words. Then put your guess back.

Worked example: After the hike, the kids were famished and ate everything fast. Underline famished. Clue: ate everything fast. In the passage, The dog looked famished. It ate everything in sight and licked every crumb. So famished means very hungry. Check: The kids were very hungry and ate everything fast — that makes sense.

Ask: What helped you guess famished? (ate everything fast / ate everything in sight — the whole sentence sense.) · What helped you guess chilly? (Unlike and hot and cold — opposite words show the meaning, and but may signal a contrast [5].)

Check understanding: Hands up for famished means very hungry and chilly means cold. If split, reread Unlike the hot soup sentence and swap cold back in.

Support: Give a frame: I think ___ means ___ because I read ___. **Stretch:** Ask students to tell if the chilly clue is opposite or same-meaning and why.

Use: Slides 9-10

55–60 min **Plenary** 5 min · Whole class

Review which helpers worked best and check the objectives.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 11 Think, pair, share and ask: Which helper words helped you most, and how?
2. Take two pair answers: same word, opposite, telling, or example.
3. Show Slide 12 Exit ticket and have students say or write: One new word I cracked means clue.

STUDENTS DO

1. Students tell a partner one helper and how it helped in 30 seconds each.
2. Students complete the exit line: one word cracked and what it means.

Say: Turn to your partner. Tell which helper helped most. Was it a twin word, an opposite with unlike or but, words that tell, or examples? Then we will finish our exit ticket.

Ask: Which helper words helped you most today? (Answers name or very, very tired, dark and cloudy, would tear very easily, or unlike / rough.) · Where must the clue be for today's work? (In the same sentence as the hard word.)

Check understanding: Read two exit lines aloud. If guesses lack clues, point back to Slide 7 steps before dismissal.

Support: Allow students to point to their three-box sheet instead of writing a new sentence. **Stretch:** Ask students to name the clue type for their exit word: same, opposite, telling, or example.

Use: Slides 11-12

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Guessing fast without rereading the whole sentence	Guess does not fit when put back, or no clue words underlined	Reread the sentence with the unknown word and the sentences around it and look for clues, then substitute the guess to see if it makes sense [4].
Mixing opposite clues with same-meaning clues	Student says chilly means hot because they missed Unlike	Look for but, however, yet, and unlike that show a contrast and signal an antonym with opposite meaning [8][5].
Looking outside the sentence when the clue is inside	Student says I cannot find it though or, comma, or examples are in the same sentence	Zoom in first: the clue may appear within the same sentence as the word [3], often set off by a comma or or [5].

Support

- Pre-underline clue words on strips and keep Slide 7 steps visible
- Provide sentence frame: I think ___ means ___ because I read ___

Stretch

- Name clue as synonym, antonym, or example and find the signal word [8][5]
- Write a new sentence with a strong same-sentence clue for a known word

For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit with target pairs in main activity; prompt reread of that sentence only, point to pre-underlined clues, and help them try the swap check aloud.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
After one mile, they felt exhausted, or very, very tired. What does exhausted mean?	very, very tired
Unlike the rough, bumpy trail, the way back felt smooth and easy. What does smooth mean here and what word signals it?	easy / not rough and bumpy; Unlike signals opposite
Inside was a map that felt fragile. It would tear very easily. How do you check your guess for fragile?	Put it back: a map that tears very easily — it makes sense

Homework

Draw two boxes and write one sentence with a strong clue for a word you know.

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