Lesson in Action

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AT A GLANCE

Before Reading

- Review the skill: context clues.
- Explain purpose of the lesson, building on past lessons using context clues.
- Model how to find context clues.

During Reading

- Display a short passage about da Vinci on the whiteboard.
- Have students read the passage in pairs.
- Invite students to come up to the whiteboard and highlight unfamiliar words and surrounding context clues.
- Have students share their thinking and discuss.
- To confirm their thinking, have students search for words in dictionaries and in other resources.
- Repeat the process for one or two more words.
- Have students use context clues to understand new vocabulary and track these words on the class wiki.

After Reading

- Have students share answers and prompt them to explain their process.
- In pairs, have students discuss at least two ways to learn the meaning of a new word.
- Create a reference list of strategies.

Context Clues: Vocabulary Building

Context

Mr. Williams's Grade 4 class has been studying the Middle Ages in social studies. Now the class is exploring the impact the Humanists had on society. To begin this section, Mr. Williams wants his students to read a short text about Leonardo da Vinci in the course textbook. He knows that while most of his students will understand the text, his struggling readers will need differentiated support to succeed.

Common Core State Standards

- ▶ CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.4 (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RI/4/4) Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a *Grade 4 topic or subject area.*

- ▶ CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.4.4c (http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RF/4/4/c) Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Lesson Objective

Students will review types of context clues and practice using them to define vocabulary words.

Technology

- ▶ Mixed devices: tablets, e-readers, laptops
- ▶ Visual Thesaurus (http://www.visualthesaurus.com/), to practice finding the relationships between words that can help in defining unfamiliar ones
- ▶ Online dictionaries, to confirm definitions crafted from context clues
- ▶ Class wiki, on which class notes and updates can be shared
- ▶ Museum of Science website on Leonardo da Vinci (http://www. legacy.mos.org/leonardo/) for reference and information-gathering

Assessment

- ▶ Observation of participation and proficiency in partner discussions

Mr. Williams' Class in Action

Before Reading

Today, Mr. Williams' class will be reading a textbook section on Leonardo da Vinci. Because Mr. Williams anticipates that the many unfamiliar words will be a barrier to understanding, he begins class with a refresher on determining the meaning of new words through context clues.

The list of different types of context clues is accessible on a bulletin board, in digital writing portfolios, and on the class wiki.

Mr. Williams begins by drawing students' attention to the list of context clue types and examples displayed on his interactive whiteboard:

> *Da Vinci is surrounded by fertile farmland. The hillsides are planted with grape vines and fruit trees and patches of silvery green olive trees dot the landscape.*

"Which unfamiliar word should we focus on?" When the class volunteers *fertile*, Mr. Williams highlights it.

"Let's search for context clues, using our chart as a guide."

The students suggest definitions, synonyms, and antonyms, but none of these prove very useful until a student says they should look for clarifying detail.

"Who would like to mark clarifying details that we can use to define *fertile*?" A volunteer comes to the whiteboard and in a different color highlights the references to grape vines, fruit trees, and olive trees. Mr. Williams leads the class in using these clarifying details to describe the farmland as "growing lots of stuff" and being "full of trees and vines." He congratulates them on having successfully used context clues to define *fertile*.

During Reading

The day's reading assignment will be an exploration of the Museum of Science's Web portal on da Vinci's life and works. He instructs students to first read the passage independently on their own devices. Then they will work in pairs to mark any words that are unfamiliar. Those students who need to hear the text read aloud will use headphones along with the text-to-speech function.

> *In the fifteenth century, Italy was not the unified country we know today. At that time the boot-shaped peninsula was divided into many small independent states. Naples in the south was ruled by a series of kings. Popes of the Roman Catholic Church ruled the middle section. To the north different families controlled the largest and wealthiest city-states of Florence, Milan, and Venice. They fought wars against each other and against smaller neighboring states to increase their power.*

He carefully pairs students, making sure that those who struggle have a stronger partner. Pairs are asked to reread the passage together, marking unfamiliar words. When they are done, he asks students to come up to the whiteboard and highlight words that were unfamiliar. The first word they highlight is *unified*.

A volunteer reads the sentence: "Fifteenth century Italy was *not* unified." Mr. Williams asks students to underline the word *not*. "So that means that whatever the structure of Italy was in the fifteenth century, it's the opposite of the meaning of *unified*. What does the passage tell us about fifteenth century Italy?"

"It was divided into many small states," suggests a student, and Mr. Williams highlights this clue in another color.

"Let's confirm our guesses by looking up *unified*," Mr. Williams says, asking the class to use their tablets to look the word up in an online dictionary. He also reminds them that they can use Visual Thesaurus, a tool students have used previously to help them visualize the relationship between related words. Both tools allow students to hear the definition and how the word is pronounced. In addition, some of the students go to Google images and find graphics of clasped hands and teams, illustrating the concept of unification.

The second word students choose is *peninsula*. Mr. Williams has students refer to the list of concept clue types to determine where they might find clues to the meaning of *peninsula*, but the text does not provide much help.

"What about the picture?" a student asks.

"Fantastic sleuthing!" exclaims Mr. Williams. "The map shows Italy, and the text tells us that Italy is a peninsula. Now we know that the word *peninsula* refers to the type of land mass that Italy is. But it's still not enough information—we are going to have to consult an outside tool." He also pauses to add *illustrations* to the class's list of possible context clues. Students work with their partners to determine the meaning of the vocabulary word by using a variety of online resources (e.g., Visual Thesaurus, Google Images).

Mr. Williams distributes a semantic map handout tailored to the da Vinci website, which cues students to find biographical information about da Vinci and calls for using browsing, navigating, and reading behavior in using the site. Several of the questions are vocabulary focused. Mr. Williams arranges the students in groups of three to work together through the handout and the website by using their tablets or laptops. As he circulates around the room, he encourages students to use context clues to define unfamiliar words and to work together to find all the useful context clues for each word. He also asks each group to keep a list on the class wiki of the new words they encounter.

After Reading

Mr. Williams leads a class discussion in which the students identify the words and explain how they used context clues to determine the meanings. Mr. Williams prompts these think-alouds. As needed, he points out the types of clues to emphasize what students are saying about how they were able to make meaning of the words.

Mr. Williams asks students to choose a new partner and discuss at least two ways to learn the meaning of a new word. When the pairs finish their work, he creates a list with their suggestions and posts the list on the class wiki. He adds two more items to the list: looking words up in a dictionary and in online resources. During future lessons, when the class comes across a new word, he will direct them to the chart and talk about which method they want to use to figure out the word's meaning.

Reflection

Mr. Williams thinks that students recognized the benefit of using context clues, especially when they appeared motivated to dive right into practicing the strategy. Although some students remembered many of the types of context clues, others needed to refer to his chart as a support. Gradually everyone seemed more confident in using the strategy to decipher the meaning of new words. The website and Visual Thesaurus are great tools, and he'll keep encouraging students to use them. He realizes that his struggling students will benefit from more explicit instruction and modeling, and he plans to build that into the next lesson. He will also remind students to keep using this strategy so it can become part of their reading skills repertoire.