Clue Type	Definition	Example
Definition	...found when the definition of a word is explicitly embedded in the sentence or passage.	"*Igneous* rocks, or *those rocks formed by a volcano*, can be found in the region."
Synonym	...used when the sentence or passage contains a synonym for the vocabulary word.	"The air was *bitterly cold, quite frigid.*"
Antonym	...used when the sentence or passage contains a word or phrase that means the opposite of the vocabulary word.	"Although John was a *novice* at skateboarding, he was an *expert* at basketball."

Experienced readers will use these types of context clues and others to infer the meanings of new words.

Use of context is also connected to the Standards for K–5 Reading Foundational Skills beginning as early as first grade, when students are asked to "use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding" *(NGA/CCSSO, 2010, pp. 27–28)*.

Students' ability to use context to figure out a meaning of a word as it is used in a particular sentence or passage can be an important skill for self-checking comprehension. For instance, when primary students encounter the word *tears* in text, they need to learn to think about the word as it is used. Is it "water coming from the eyes because one is sad," or is it "holes in fabric"? Without consciously thinking about it, proficient readers automatically use context to confirm the meaning and pronunciation. Many students need to be taught this type of skill.

Use of word parts

Word parts, including common prefixes, roots, and suffixes, can be used to decipher the meaning of a word, a skill often called "morphology." The ability to understand the meaning of a word a student has never seen before by knowing the meanings of its parts is a significant comprehension skill. Understanding meaningful parts provides a "within-word" context clue to the meaning of an unknown word, and this realization immediately helps students figure out meanings of words they have never seen before. For example, knowing that the prefixes *dis-, il-, im-, in-, ir-,* and *un-* can all mean "not" is valuable knowledge when a student is faced with words like *disloyal, illegal, impossible, incorrect, irresponsible,* and *uncharted.*

Within-Word Context Clues

Knowing that the prefixes *dis-, il-, im-, in-, ir-,* and *un-* can all mean "not" is highly valuable when students are faced with words like *disloyal, illegal, impossible, incorrect, irresponsible,* and *uncharted.*

Likewise, when students know the meanings of common Greek and Latin roots, their abilities to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words soar. If a fourth-grade student knows that the Latin prefix *trans-* means "across," the Latin root *-port-* means "to carry," and the Latin suffix *-ation* means "the act or process of," then he or she can reasonably predict the meaning of the word *transportation* (the act or process of carrying across).

Teaching third graders that the prefix *tri-* means "three" (triangle, tricycle), or helping seventh-grade students understand that the Latin root *-belli-* means "of war" (*belligerent, rebel, bellicose, antebellum*) can empower them to predict the meanings of multisyllabic words they encounter in text. Even early-primary students can learn the meanings of some basic word parts, and, in fact, this is part of the expectations of the Language Standards.

Because a number of languages share the same Greek and Latin roots, learning the meaning of word parts also helps build English vocabulary for students whose first language is not English. Words that look similar and have related meanings in different languages are called *cognates*, and developing cognate awareness can streamline the acquisition of another language.

When English Language Learners engage in instructional experiences designed to teach roots, they often learn English words and concepts more deeply. For instance, English and Spanish both contain a number of Greek and Latin roots and so share a number of cognates.

The Standards for Reading Foundational Skills include using knowledge of common prefixes, suffixes, and roots to help students decode and understand the meanings of multisyllabic words in and out of context. This is a critical skill students need to develop in order to be stronger readers.

Cognates: Greek and Latin Roots

The Latin root *-aud-* means "*to hear.*" *Aud* is the root of the English words *auditorium* and *audition* and the corresponding Spanish words *auditorio* and *audición.* This small piece of knowledge can have a giant impact for students learning English. Knowing the meanings of a few Greek and Latin roots can open the door to thousands of words (*Vogt, 2015*).

Teaching Strategies: Using Word Parts

Teach students the meaning of common prefixes, suffixes, and Greek and Latin roots.

Provide cards showing common prefixes, suffixes, and roots so that students can arrange and rearrange multisyllabic words.

Use of reference materials

Students need to know when and how to use references such as print or digital glossaries, dictionaries, and thesauruses as resources for understanding the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases in text. When students see an unfamiliar word in a sentence and infer its meaning from the context, it is often helpful for them to use a dictionary to check the predicted meaning or understand how to pronounce the word. Also, a thesaurus is handy to choose more-exact words when writing or to find synonyms for a selected word.

However, research has shown that using dictionaries to look up words and write down definitions does not help students discover the meaning of words *(Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002)*. Using reference materials to provide definitions of words and then asking students to use those words in authentic ways to clarify meaning during instruction or research is more effective in acquiring vocabulary knowledge.

Teaching Strategies: Using Reference Materials

Use dictionaries and thesauruses to make charts of synonyms and antonyms of selected vocabulary words.

cramped
limited
meager
miniature

Find multiple meanings of a word in a dictionary or thesaurus, and select the meaning that best fits the context of a sentence or passage.

Word Learning Routine

Use the following steps to figure out unfamiliar words. If you figure out what the word means, continue reading. If not, then try the next step.

1. **Say the Word or Phrase Aloud.**
   Circle the word or phrase that you find confusing. Read the sentence aloud.

2. **Look Inside the Word or Phrase.**
   Look for familiar word parts, such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words. Try breaking the word into smaller parts. Can you figure out a meaning from the word parts you know?

3. **Look Around the Word or Phrase.**
   Look for clues in the words or sentences around the word or phrase you don't know and the context of the paragraph.

4. **Look Beyond the Word or Phrase.**
   Look for the meaning of the word or phrase in a dictionary, glossary, or thesaurus.

5. **Check the Meaning.**
   Ask yourself, "Does this meaning make sense in the sentence?"

I use this routine to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words while I am reading.

Use of word selection for direct instruction: High-power words

Teachers can review texts and content area concepts and choose a small number of high-utility words, perhaps five to seven, that advance student comprehension or learning. They can then work with students to add related synonyms and antonyms to help expand semantic networks (Marzano, 2010; Stahl & Nagy, 2006). This practice also increases the volume of words students learn. For example, if teachers choose six words for study and add two related synonyms or examples and two related antonyms or non-examples, they are actually working with six networks of words, totaling 30 words (Overturf, Montgomery, & Smith, 2013).

High-power words for deep study can be Tier 2 (general academic) or Tier 3 (domain-specific) words that advance students' understanding of the meaning of a specific text. For example, high-power words about the social studies concept of "Settling America" might include words like *ambition, artifact, origin, belief, permanent,* and *settler*—all pulled from the particular unit of study and texts that students will read. When the class adds synonyms/examples and antonyms/non-examples to the words, the vocabulary list might expand to:

Vocabulary Word for Deep Study	Synonyms/ Examples	Antonyms/ Non-examples
artifact	heirloom, relic, primary source	current, secondary source
origin	lineage, nationality	completion, termination
belief	conviction, presupposition	disbelief, indecisive
permanent	immutable, lasting	relocate, temporary
settler	pioneer, immigrant	vagabond, nomadic