

Topic/Lesson:	Fishing for a Meaning
Subject:	Exploring the various methods for learning the definition of a word
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Overview:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the context of surrounding words and sentences, students will figure out the meaning of new and unfamiliar words. • Students will practice looking for new and unfamiliar words and use context to determine meanings of words. • After reading a prepared article, students will choose new and unfamiliar words and use context to determine the meaning of these words. • Students will use dictionaries to double-check if their meanings are correct and to continue development of dictionary skills. • Students will share information with the class to improve abilities to articulate information in a group.
Objectives:	Students will be able to identify and successfully use four strategies for defining a word using context clues.
Background Knowledge:	Tell the students they are going to learn more about context clues (using the words, phrases, and other information around new and unfamiliar words to determine the meanings of these words). A helpful skill when you do not have a dictionary on hand and want to know what a word means.
Materials:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “How to Define a Word Using Context Clues” • “Atlantic Sturgeon” handout • Hard copy or online dictionary and thesaurus
Procedures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the “How to Define a Word Using Context Clues” handout, describe the various methods your students can use to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. • Explain that even when we have a dictionary, a word may have many different meanings depending on the context. For example, the word ‘fly’ has many different meanings. That’s when knowing how to look at the context around the word is very helpful in figuring out the meaning of that word. • Show students the sentence, “She caught the fly” and ask them what the meaning of the word “fly” is in this sentence. Ask them to explain how they know what the meaning is. Then have them

rate their confidence in their answer by raising their thumb up (very sure), thumb sideways (maybe), or thumb down (just a wild guess).

- Then show them the second sentence, “The outfielder caught the fly” and ask what they think the meaning of “fly” is. Then have them rate their confidence in their answer by raising their thumb up (very sure), thumb sideways (maybe), or thumb down (just a wild guess). Again, ask them to explain how they know what the meaning is.
- Repeat the procedure with the remaining sentence pairs below:

He had a fly on his pants.

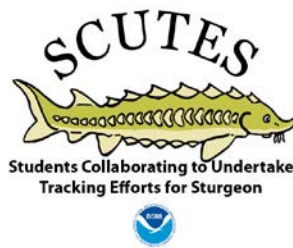
He swatted the fly on his pants.

Those are fly pants.

Those are fly pants, but the shoes are ugly.

- Ask students to identify the steps they used to identify the correct meanings of the word in context.
- Explain that after using the methods described in “How to Define a Word Using Context Clues” they can try substituting a familiar word and read the sentence again to see if their substitute word makes sense.
- Show students a sentence with an unfamiliar word. For example: “*The sturgeon had already been making its way up the earth’s rivers for 250 million years when human beings first appeared. It remains a big, slow-moving beast, sweetly curious about the goings-on above its head and **lumpenly** passive when it runs into danger. Scientists call the fish a living fossil because the sturgeon has changed little over the millennia.*” Ask students what words in the sentence give them clues about the meaning of the word “lumpenly”? What familiar word can they substitute for “lumpenly”? Does the familiar word make sense in the sentence?
- Guide students through an example using a nonsense word. For example, “John traveled a long distance to get to his friend’s home in California. The TALXIA took three days on the bus. He was exhausted when he arrived in California and was very happy to end that bus ride. He was glad to find his friend waiting for him at the bus station.” Ask the students what word could be put in the place of the nonsense word TALXIA in this sentence based on the clues in the passage? (Clues: traveled, bus, distance, California, etc. Answer: trip or journey). Suggest they read the sentence using the familiar word to see if it makes sense.
- Give students the sturgeon handout. Instruct them to read the

	<p>handout and underline unfamiliar words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go over passages with the students and check for subject comprehension. • In small groups have each student choose five unfamiliar words to define using context. Have students write on the handout the five unfamiliar words and the words they substituted for them. Then have students check their words with their group members and come to a consensus on the meaning of each word. Once the group has reached a consensus on their words each group will check the dictionary for pronunciation and to pick the definition that most closely fits the meaning of the word in this particular context. Monitor students as they work. • Let groups share their word lists with the class and tell what unfamiliar words they chose and what context clues they used to figure out what the words mean.
Conclusions:	Have students copy down the correct definition and create sentences using each word correctly.
Massachusetts Frameworks:	<p>Language Standards</p> <p>4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 6 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase. b. Use common, grade-appropriate Greek or Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., audience, auditory, audible). c. Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech. d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).
Resources:	<p>http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/3971</p> <p>http://academic.cuesta.edu/acasupp/as/309.htm</p> <p>www.vims.edu/features/research/sturgeon_restoration.php</p> <p>Saffron, Inga. <i>Caviar</i>. New York: Broadway Books, Random House, Inc. 2002. Page 30</p>



How to define a word using context clues:

General Sense

The meaning of a word may be suggested by the general sense of its context, as the meaning of the word ***incarcerated*** is hinted at in the following sentence:

Murderers are usually incarcerated for longer periods of time than robbers.

You may arrive at the meaning of ***incarcerated*** by answering the question "What usually happens to those found guilty of murder or robbery?"

Examples

When the meaning of the word is not clear by the general sense of its context, it may be hinted at by examples. For instance,

Those who enjoy belonging to clubs, going to parties, and inviting friends to their homes for dinner are gregarious.

You may figure out the meaning of ***gregarious*** by answering the question "What word or words describe people who belong to clubs, go to parties a lot, and often invite friends over to their homes for dinner?"

Antonyms and Contrasts

When the meaning of a word is not made clear by the general sense of its context or by examples, it may be hinted at by an antonym or by a contrasting thought in a context. ***Antonyms*** are words that have opposite meanings, such as happy and sad. For instance,

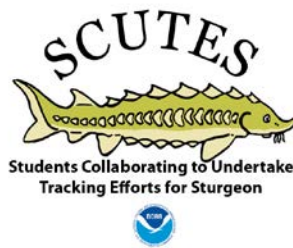
Ben is fearless, but his brother Jim is timorous.

You may understand the meaning of ***timorous*** by answering the question "If Ben is fearless and Jim is different from Ben with regard to fear, then what word describes Jim?"

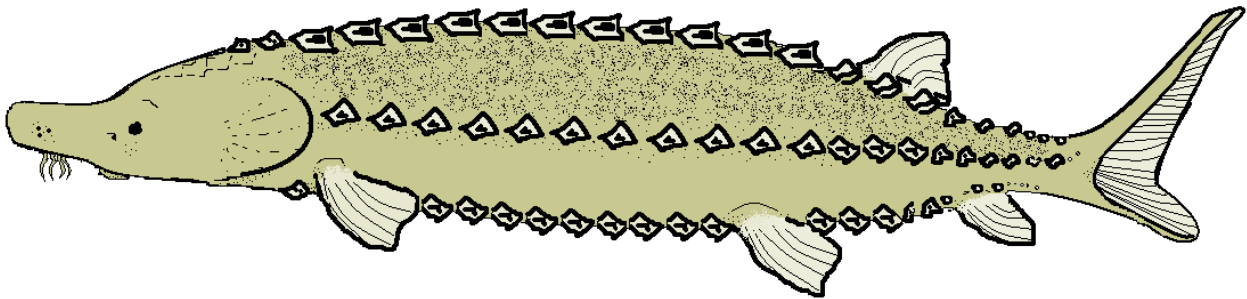
A ***contrast*** in the following sentence suggests the meaning of ***credence***:

Dad gave credence to my story, but Mom's reaction was one of total disbelief.

You may guess at the meaning of ***credence*** by answering the question "If Mom's reaction was disbelief and Dad's reaction was different from Mom's, what was Dad's reaction?"



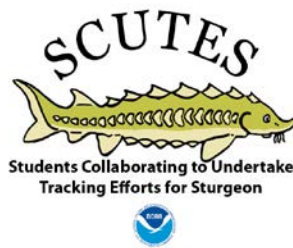
Atlantic Sturgeon



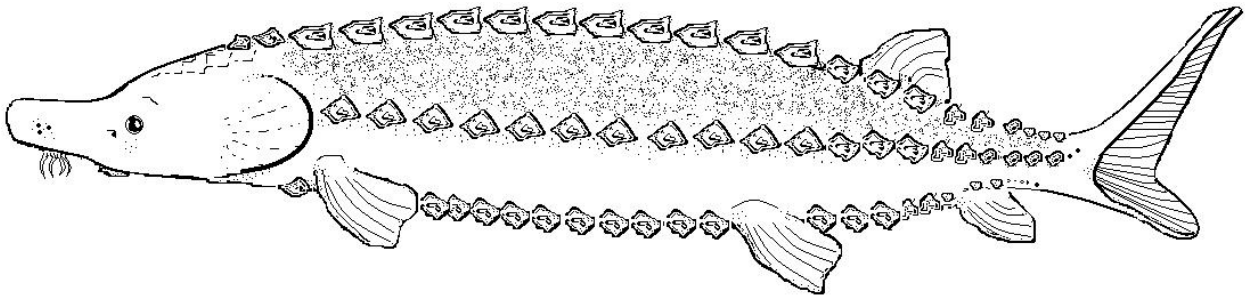
Atlantic sturgeon are members of an elite group of fishes whose relatives have been around since the time of the dinosaurs. While the fossil record of sturgeons dates back at least 85 million years, only 25 species of these "living fossils" persist worldwide. Atlantic sturgeon are therefore a unique and important part of the fauna of Chesapeake Bay. But in just 400 years since Europeans colonized the New World, overfishing and habitat destruction have pushed sturgeon to extinction or near extinction in rivers all along the Atlantic seaboard. Similar pressures have devastated sturgeon populations across the world, and virtually all species are in peril.

Sturgeon — an anadromous species that resides in the ocean but enters freshwater rivers to spawn — have suffered from a "triple whammy". First, research shows that sturgeon historically preferred to lay their eggs just below the upstream extent of navigation on local rivers. Unfortunately for these fish that's exactly where we have built a string of major cities, including Richmond on the James River and Washington, D.C. on the Potomac. Second, sturgeon prefer to lay their eggs on gravel banks. The widespread deforestation that accompanied the growth of agriculture fed vast quantities of silt into Virginia's previously clear tidal rivers. Last, sturgeon suffer from their low reproductive potential: females don't reach sexual maturity until they're around 12 years old and they only spawn every two to six years.

Adapted from: www.vims.edu/features/research/sturgeon_restoration.php



Atlantic Sturgeon



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