

READING NEW WORDS IN CONTEXT

Why We Read Strategically

Reading is active. As you read, you step into the writer's world. When you come across a new idea, you usually look for a clue to help you determine the writer's meaning. You move ahead to see if the idea is explained, or you retrace your steps to look for any signs you missed.

You can use these same strategies to build your vocabulary. If you do not know the meaning of a word, you should look in the passage surrounding the word for hints. These hints are called context clues. The more you practice hunting for context clues, the better you become at reading new words, and the larger your vocabulary will grow. Remember, strengthening your vocabulary skills will help you to score higher on standardized vocabulary tests.

The following reading selection shows the kinds of context clues you will find in the Reading New Words in Context lessons.

Strategic Reading: An Example

Long, long ago, long before there were humans on Earth—much less humans who could record history—dinosaurs walked the earth. During these prehistoric times, strange and wonderful creatures ruled the entire earth. All in all, this reign lasted 135 million years.

The dinosaur was one descendant of the thecodonts, mighty reptiles whose later generations also included many other reptiles, as well as all of today's birds. One of these relatives was a huge flying reptile. Another was a creature with a body like that of a turtle but with a 25-foot-long neck. Like the dinosaurs, these unusual and extraordinary creatures became extinct. Any of these creatures has the power to *stun, astonish, and amaze* us, but it is the dinosaurs that most people find especially fascinating.

Some dinosaurs were mammoth creatures. *The euhelopus, for example, was 60 feet tall and weighed 50,000 pounds.* In contrast, the 20-foot, 7,000-pound stegosaurus seems almost small. Although enormous size was a characteristic of many dinosaurs, others were much, much smaller, no bigger than a chicken or a duck. Some of these smaller ones looked much like either the iguana or the komodo dragon, two reptiles that inhabit Earth today.

Note that a *summary* indicates the meaning of **prehistoric**.

A *pronoun* (*this*) refers us to the meaning of **reign**.

The meaning of **descendant** is made clear through *restatement*, that is, through saying the same thing in a different way.

A *coordinating conjunction* (*and*) provides a clue to the meaning of **extraordinary**. The words *but, or, and nor* are other coordinating conjunctions.

Note that a clue to the meaning of **astonish** is provided by using the word in a *series* of words that have similar meanings.

An *example* provides the key to understanding **mammoth**.

A form of the verb *to be* (*was*) links an example of a quality to the word **characteristic**.

Some of the dinosaurs were fierce, meat-eating creatures. Often, other *milder and gentler dinosaurs were unable to defend themselves from the more savage ones and thus became their victims*. Even the vegetarian dinosaurs who roamed about peacefully snacking on plants could be quite frightening to other species that shared the planet. A 55-ton brachiosaurus lumbering across the countryside would have presented a real **threat**, *a clear danger*, to any unsuspecting creature who got in its way. The huge Triceratops had frightening horns on its nose and over both of its eyes. The sight of this 10-ton animal bounding along at 30 miles per hour certainly scared the newly emerging mammals that had to scurry out of its way. Nevertheless, it was also a threat to any other dinosaur that tried to attack it.

Although groups of dinosaurs might be in **competition** with each other, *cooperation within a group was also common*. Members of a species might travel in a herd, eat and nest together, share responsibility for the young, and present a united defense against enemies.

Scientists are still debating about why the dinosaurs disappeared. We do not know for sure. All we know is that **twilight** *arrived for these creatures at the same time all across the earth*. *Then, in a twinkling, it was night*, and the dinosaurs were gone.

A Final Note

How can you learn strategic reading? Practice is a great way to improve your skill. The following lessons will help you learn the different context clues a writer uses. As you complete each lesson, you will become a more effective reader.

In a *cause-and-effect* relationship, one thing causes another thing to happen. The meaning of **victims** is established through a cause-and-effect relationship. *Thus* is a cause-and-effect clue word.

An *appositive phrase* contains a noun or pronoun that explains the noun or pronoun beside it. An appositive phrase indicates the meaning of **threat**.

Note that the meaning of **competition** is established through *contrast*, the placement of opposites near each other to point out their difference. The word *although* indicates contrast.

The meaning of **twilight** is established through *figurative language*. Figurative language is language that imaginatively describes one thing by comparing it to something else.

Hint #1 The second word will usually be a word that you already know well. For example, you probably already know that *rewrite* means "to write again."

Hint #2 The first word or its root (in this case, *adjust*) is a word you learned in *Making New Words Your Own*. When you remember that *rewrite* means "to write again," you can guess that *readjust* means "to adjust again." That leads you to the correct choice, D.

Note: The tables in the front of this book list some common prefixes and suffixes. These tables will help you to complete the exercises on *Prefixes* and *Suffixes* in the lessons that follow.

Word Origins

Many words in the English language come from Greek, Latin, French, and other languages. Word Origins exercises will give you practice in learning the roots of Vocabulary Words. In these exercises, you will be asked to identify the choice that best completes the sentence.

Here is an example of a Word Origins exercise:

debt decrease definite descriptive

The Latin word *crescere*, "to grow," combined with the prefix *de-*, "away," gives us the word _____.

Hint #1 Compare the Latin root to the list of words provided above the item. If you remove *de-* from all of the choices, the part of the word left that most resembles the Latin root would be *-crease*, from the word *decrease*.

Hint #2 The choices in Word Origins will be Vocabulary Words you studied in *Making New Words Your Own*. In the introduction to *Making New Words Your Own*, you learned that to decrease means "to grow smaller." *Decrease* is the correct response.