Six Kinds of Context Clues

1. **Definitions and Synonyms:** The author gives a definition or uses a similar word immediately after or close to the unfamiliar word. A definition or synonym follows a comma, a dash, or words such as *or, is called, that is,* and *in other words.*

   **Example:** From *Terrible Typhoid Mary* by Susan C. Bartoletti: *In her wake are many cases of typhoid fever, she having unwittingly disseminated—or as we might say, sprinkled—germs in various households.*

2. **Concrete Examples:** The author offers an example that helps you figure out the word's meaning. Examples can be found in the sentence, in a new sentence or following these words or phrases: *for example, such as, and especially.*

   **Example:** From “Isaac Newton and the Day He Discovered the Rainbow” by Kathleen Krull: *A refracting substance, such as a prism, could bend each wavelength of light by a different angle or amount.*

3. **Restated Meanings:** Sometimes the author defines a difficult word by restating its meaning in simpler terms. Often commas set off the word from the meaning. You'll also find the meaning of a word stated after words and phrases such as *or, that is,* and *in other words.*

   **Example:** From *Tales From the Top of the World* by Sandra Athans: *To keep from getting sick on Everest, climbers must acclimatize, or adjust, to the low oxygen levels.*

4. **Comparison:** The author uses a comparison to help you understand a tough word.

   **Example:** From *Drowned City* by Don Brown: *The police were as stranded as the people who need their help* (p. 34).

5. **Words or Phrases That Modify:** Modifiers such as adjectives, adverbs, or relative clauses can have clues to a word's meaning. A relative clause begins with *who, which, that, whose, or whom* and often explains or extends an idea or word in the main part of the sentence.

   **Example:** From “Isaac Newton and the Day He Discovered the Rainbow” by Kathleen Krull: *He [Newton] observed that the beam spread out into colored bands of light, which he called a spectrum.*

6. **Conjunctions That Show Relationships and Link Ideas:** Coordinating and subordinating conjunctions show relationships and help you link unknown words and ideas to known words and ideas. *And, but, or, not, for, and yet* are coordinating conjunctions. Common subordinating conjunctions are *when, if, since, whenever,* and *because.*

   **Example:** From “New Horizons in Space” by Seymour Simon: *Planet earth and the many thousands of asteroids circling the sun in our solar system were all created from the same basic material when the solar system was formed.*

In addition to the vocabulary demands of nonfiction, students will find that knowledge and understanding of text features and text structures can also support recall, comprehension, and analytical thinking.