**LESSON PLAN:**
**Context Clues and Idioms**

## Preparation

**Learning Objective**
Students will learn to use context to derive word, phrase, and sentence meaning. They will apply this skill in determining the meanings of idioms.

**Pacing**
45–90 minutes

**Suggested Readings**
- “Schools Take Steps to Stop Bullies” by Achieve3000
- “Helping Students and Teachers: A Career in the Classroom” by Achieve3000

## Lesson Overview

Research on vocabulary development shows that students learn the majority of their vocabulary indirectly through conversations mostly with adults, listening to adults read to them, and reading extensively on their own. This finding has serious consequences for English learners whose parents and other adults in their lives are often not fluent in English. It is therefore critical for educators of English learners to teach the ways that students learn vocabulary directly, including analyzing context to decipher unknown or idiomatic language (CIERA, 2001).

This lesson introduces students to the concept of using context to derive word, phrase, and sentence meaning. They also learn that idioms are phrases that mean something other than what is stated literally.

Students warm up by studying and writing about pictures that represent the literal and figurative meanings of the idiom *raining cats and dogs*. After some instruction and modeling, students work in pairs to match idioms with their meanings. Once students have a good understanding of idiomatic language, you provide instruction and modeling in using context to derive the meaning of unknown and idiomatic words and phrases. Students are guided as they practice using five types of context clues to derive word, phrase, and sentence meaning. Students then apply their learning independently using the 5-Step Literacy Routine. The lesson closes with a review of the concepts learned and an opportunity to record new academic vocabulary (*context clue, idiom*) in students vocabulary journals.
Do Before Teaching

1. Photocopy the lesson masters for Idiom-Meaning Match and Hard Words word recognition, one set for each pair of students.

2. Have students vocabulary journals ready for this lesson.

3. You may wish to provide the following supplementary materials to adapt the lesson for your particular students:
   - Spanish-English dictionaries
   - Before students enter the classroom, project “It’s raining cats and dogs!” from the Lesson Masters so that it’s ready for the first step of this lesson.

Resources


Teaching Routine

Before Reading
Introduce Lesson: Bell-Ringer Activity (5 minutes)

- Project “It’s Raining Cats and Dogs!” As students enter the classroom, have them silently review the directions and respond to the prompt in writing. Students should study the pictures, decide which picture best represents the intended meaning of the phrase raining cats and dogs, and explain how they know in writing.

Provide Direct Instruction and Modeling (15–20 minutes)

- Explain to students that they will often read or hear words and phrases they might not understand — including sometimes strange and confusing language like raining cats and dogs. Over time, they will get better at understanding these words and phrases. They can also use other information in the text to figure out the meaning of words and phrases. Tell students that, in this lesson, they will learn to use a strategy called analyzing context to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases. In the process, they will also review some idiomatic language and some difficult words.

- Ask two or three volunteers to share their responses to the bell ringer prompt and segue into a discussion about idioms. Explain that idioms are phrases that mean something different from the words themselves. On a really rainy day, if someone says It’s raining cats and dogs, they don’t mean that cats and dogs are literally falling from the sky (the left-hand illustration); rather, they’re speaking figuratively in order to exaggerate and to evoke a vivid image of a very rainy day (the right-hand illustration).

All languages have their own idioms:

- In Spanish, the idiom tomar el pelo literally translates as to take one’s hair and figuratively translates as to tease.
- The Spanish idiom meter la pata literally means to put your leg/paw in and figuratively translates as to mess up or to make a mistake.
- The Spanish idiom no pegar ojo literally translates as to not glue eye and figuratively translates as to not get any sleep. (Hace dos noches, Antonio no pegó ojo./Two nights ago Antonio didn’t sleep.)
- In Spanish, the phrase a ciencia cierta literally translates as to science correct, which has no meaning. The figurative translation is with complete certainty.

Extra Support

- Point to the rain in one of the illustrations and say “rain/lluvia; It is raining./Está lloviendo.” Point out a cat in the illustration and say “cat”; point out a dog in the illustration and say “dog.” Have students mimic your pronunciations. Point to each word as you say “It’s raining cats and dogs” and have students mimic your reading.

- Tell students the literal Spanish translation of está lloviendo perros y gatos. This is not an idiomatic expression in Spanish. (The figurative translation is “llover a cántaros,” which, in English, literally means “it is raining pitchers.”)
Some languages share idioms—

- In Spanish, we say *más vale tarde que nunca*; and in English, we say *better late than never*. In both languages, this expression means that even if you are going to be late, you should still go ahead and do the thing, because it is better to do it late than to never do it at all.

- In Spanish, we say *cruzar los dedos*; and in English, we say *cross your fingers* or *keep one’s fingers crossed*. In both languages, this expression means that we hope someone or something will be successful.

- All languages have their own idioms, some languages share idioms, but they always take time — and multiple exposures — to learn. Pair students or have students arrange themselves into pairs. Distribute a copy of the Idiom-Meaning Match and Hard Words to each pair. Ask pairs to match the idioms on the left with the meanings on the right. Model an example to help students get started. As a class activity after they have finished, review the meanings of the idioms. The correct matches follow:

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**Extra Support**

- Provide a book of Spanish and English idioms with translations as well as a Spanish-English dictionary to support each pair during this activity. If any students have trouble, model how to look up an idiom or unknown word using these resources. Then guide students as they practice looking up another example.

- Model pronunciations of the idioms as needed.
Next, to transition to contextual analysis as a class activity, review the meaning of the underlined words in the sentences in the Hard Words section. Read each sentence aloud while students follow along on their copies. After reading each sentence, have students discuss what the sentence means. Have them explain the meaning of each underlined word, using the meaning of the sentence to figure it out. If students have difficulty with any of the sentences, use the think-aloud technique to show how you would figure out the meaning of the words.

Explain that context clues are the words, phrases, and sentences that surround an unfamiliar word. Introduce the five helpful kinds of context clues: definition, example, synonym, antonym, and general. Project the Types of Context Clues chart. Review the context clues by reading the text aloud while students follow along silently. Elaborate on the descriptions by using the think-aloud technique to explain how each one can be used with the example. You may want to focus on one or two types of context clues for students who are new to this strategy.

Next, project the article “Schools Take Steps to Stop Bullies.” Read the article and think aloud to demonstrate how skillful readers use context clues to decipher unknown, sometimes idiomatic, words and phrases. For example, in paragraph 1 (level 6), reread the phrase “to bring bullying out into the open.” Then pause and think aloud: “The text says that more kids are reporting bullying than ever and that schools are making the reporting of bullying easier. So I think that in this context ‘out into the open’ means ‘to make public’ or ‘to make it an issue we can all talk about openly.’” Finish reading the article in this manner, pausing three or four times to think aloud about difficult or idiomatic language.

Preteach idioms and difficult phrases needed for understanding the independent reading. Project the article “Helping Students and Teachers: A Career in the Classroom” so all students can see it. Select idioms or phrases from the article (examples from level 6 follow). Pronounce each phrase and briefly explain its meaning. Remind students to be on the lookout for these and other difficult phrases as they read and to use contextual analysis to predict their meanings:

- just right for you
- non-instructional settings
- in addition
- extremely rewarding
- more than just a fondness
Extra Support

- Depending on students’ education background, they may or may not be familiar with teaching assistants. Explain this career to them and ask volunteers to describe any teaching aides or assistants they know.

- Circulate among students. Choose difficult words in the selection and ask students to explain what they mean. Provide them with whatever help they need to understand the words using contextual analysis.

- Conduct a short mini-lesson on the word college, which is among the 100 most commonly misspelled words in grades 6, 7, and 8 (Cramer, 1998). Pronounce the word college and have students say it aloud. Provide an example of the word used correctly, like, “Daniel went to community college to work toward becoming a teaching assistant.” Model an oral and written spelling of the word college. Explain that a college is a learning institution like a high school, but for older students. College has an unusual spelling because it derives from the Latin words collegium, meaning “society,” and collega, meaning “colleague,” and the ending letters –ege derive from French and Middle English. Explain that the soft “g” sound is always followed by “i,” “y,” or “e” as in the words magi, effigy, and age. Ask students to think of other words that end in –ge (e.g., page, oblige, huge, scrooge). Pronounce the word college one more time and have students mimic your pronunciation. Ask students to write a sentence using the word college and check their spellings.

During Reading

Student Practice (15-25 minutes)

- Next, have students work independently to apply their learning using the 5-Step Literacy Routine with “Helping Students and Teachers: A Career in the Classroom.” Tell students to watch for hard words and phrases and idiomatic language as they read and to use contextual analysis as a tool for understanding the English words and phrases.

The 5-Step Literacy Routine

Students begin the routine by voting in a Poll. This allows them to access their prior knowledge and share their opinions about the topic of the day.

1. Email — Brings students’ prior knowledge into the classroom as they make connections and express opinions about the topic of the day.

2. Article — Students derive information from nonfiction articles differentiated to their levels. Repeated exposure to vocabulary and embedded strategy support enables all students to participate in classroom discussions. Access to grade-level text and activities ensure that students have frequent interactions with grade-appropriate complex text.

3. Activity — Students demonstrate successful close reading of text by responding to text-dependent questions that require higher-order thinking skills.

4. Poll — All students express their opinions again, based on the reading they did that day, with teachers requiring students to provide evidence for their opinions. Teachers then facilitate discussion and debates in the classroom.

5. Thought Question — A critical-thinking activity guides students to write in more formal scenarios with the intent to either argue or inform about a situation or narrate an event.

After mastering the concepts at reading-level, students have the opportunity to complete the same Article and Activity at grade level. They can also review their Poll results from both before and after reading and reflect on how their readings and experiences affect the evolution of their opinions.

Extra Support

As students answer the questions, circulate among them to make sure they understand what they are supposed to do. Explain any unfamiliar words or sentence formations that might be confusing by using contextual analysis and the think-aloud technique.
After Reading

Whole-Class Wrap Up (10-20 minutes)

- When all students have completed the 5-Step Literacy Routine (or at least the first two steps), bring the class together to review the lesson, discuss any questions students have, and provide any reteaching that is needed. Review any idioms and difficult phrases students encountered during reading. Have students describe their attempts at contextual analysis, prompting them as needed to clarify the meanings of the phrases.

- Have students enter new vocabulary in their vocabulary journals and indicate their level of understanding for each of the new terms learned in this lesson, including these academic terms: *context clue* and *idiom*.

Lesson Extensions

- Have students get back into their pairs from the fourth step and share their vocabulary-journal entries for the academic terms learned in this lesson: context clue and idiom. They should explain their descriptions and drawings to one another and explain how they represent the meaning of the terms. Students may wish to modify their own entries and their level of understanding after this activity.

- Project this website so all students can see it: http://www.idiomsite.com. Review some of the more humorous idioms with students, explaining both the literal and idiomatic uses of the phrases. This is also a great independent activity. Have students select one idiom from the website to present to the class. The presentation can include an oral as well as a visual explanation of the idiom.

- Ask for volunteers to provide examples of idioms from their home languages. Have them explain both the literal and idiomatic uses of the phrases.

- Have students draw literal and figurative representations of idioms. For instance, for the idiom “hold your horses,” students could illustrate someone holding two big horses for the literal depiction and then someone waiting patiently for the figurative depiction. Afterwards, ask students to write a few sentences using the idiom correctly.
• Project the following sentences and answers so students can see them. Explain that the underlined word in each sentence is called a nonsense word. They don’t mean anything in English. As a class activity, have students figure out which answers can best replace the nonsense words. The correct answers are: *go to*, *confusing*, *small*, *show*, *very tired*.

1. Students will *wintrag* a movie about dinosaurs.
   A. set up
   B. order
   C. go to
   D. enjoy

2. The directions were so *balgist* that no one could understand them.
   A. confusing
   B. silly
   C. frightening
   D. bad

3. The *orthish* car could hold only two people.
   A. foreign
   B. broken
   C. old
   D. small

4. Lucy wants to *vindro* her friends her new bicycle.
   A. begin
   B. show
   C. fix
   D. build

5. Eduardo was *malvid* after running for ten miles.
   A. dizzy
   B. very happy
   C. very tired
   D. bruised
“It’s Raining Cats and Dogs!”

**Directions:** Look at the following illustrations. Write one sentence that explains what is happening in each illustration.

Next, choose the illustration that you think best represents the intended meaning of the phrase “raining cats and dogs.” How do you know? Write your response on paper and be prepared to share.
**Idiom-Meaning Match**

**Directions:** Match the idiom on the left with its meaning on the right.

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Hard Words

Ethan couldn’t find anything. His room was in such disarray.

Animals that dwell in the desert need little water.

Maria was tentative. She could not decide which college she liked.

The nomadic tribe never stayed in one place very long.

Marco had an alibi for being late. The bus had a flat tire.
## Types of Context Clues

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<th>Description</th>
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<td>definition</td>
<td>A definition of the unfamiliar word is stated directly in the text. SIGNAL WORDS: <em>is, are, means, refers to</em></td>
<td>An American Goldfinch <em>is a small, yellow bird.</em> OR The American Goldfinch, <em>a small yellow bird,</em> is common in California.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>synonym</td>
<td>Another word or phrase that is similar in meaning is used in the text. SIGNAL WORDS: <em>also, as, identical, like, likewise, same, similarly, too, or</em></td>
<td>A school, <em>or group, of fish moves in a harmonious pattern through the water.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>antonym</td>
<td>Another word or phrase that is opposite in meaning is used in the text. SIGNAL WORDS: <em>but, however, in contrast, instead of, on the other hand, though, unlike</em></td>
<td>I thought a tomato <em>was a vegetable,</em> but it turns out to be a fruit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>example</td>
<td>The text includes words or phrases that are examples of the unfamiliar word. SIGNAL WORDS: <em>for example, including, such as</em></td>
<td>To use less salt in cooking, try fresh herbs, <em>such as basil, oregano, and rosemary.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general</td>
<td>Nonspecific clues are spread over several sentences in a text.</td>
<td>Lacrosse <em>is becoming more popular.</em> Players have to be able to run up and down the field. They also have to use a stick with a little net to throw the ball and make goals.</td>
</tr>
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