



# Literacy Connects

*A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional  
Professional Development Program-Issue XVI*



## **Contextual Redefinition: A vocabulary activity to facilitate context recognition and establish a purpose for reading**

Often the purpose of vocabulary study is to remove barriers to comprehension of text, as well as model for students how to use context clues to determine unknown word meanings (see *Literacy Connects, Issue XV* for more on levels of word knowledge). Prior to reading or learning a new concept, it is important to pre-teach unfamiliar terms to enable students to construct meaning during reading and/or instruction. **Contextual Redefinition** is a strategy that introduces new vocabulary in rich contexts that help to define words and facilitate memory by giving the words meaningful associations. When paired with discussions of text structure and context clues, it can help move your students to higher levels of reading comprehension. **Contextual Redefinition** is designed to facilitate **word recognition** (see *Literacy Connects, Issue XV*) and should be clearly focused on immediate, short-term learning needs.

1. **Select Unfamiliar Words**—Select no more than 10 words from the text or from the lesson to be introduced.
2. **Write a Sentence**—Create context rich sentences using the word. Categories of context clues can be experience, compare and contrast, description, synonyms, etc. If your text uses the words in well-written, context rich sentences, you may want to use words directly from the reading.
3. **Present the Word in Isolation**—Using the overhead or board, write the word and have the students generate meaning as they refer to the context sentences; they can do this in small groups or individually. Once the student definitions are written, have the class share and come to an agreement on the meaning. Finally, have the students use the **Think-Aloud** strategy (see *Literacy Connects, Issue I*) to describe how they came up with their definitions (modeling the thinking process).
4. **Predict**—Based on the student-generated definitions, have the class predict the topic to be read/learned and link to prior knowledge.
5. **Read**—Students are now ready to read the selection or receive instruction. As they read or take notes, have students verify or refute their selected definitions. This gives them both meaning and a purpose for reading.
6. **Define the Word**—Finally, have the students write down the correct definition taken from a reliable source (text, dictionary, or teacher). Discuss differences and similarities between their definitions and dictionary or textbook definitions.

*It often helps to have the students put the word, class/individual generated definition, and final text/dictionary definition in a 3-column chart for easy access.*