

“The Open Boat” Vocabulary Exercise: Using Context Clues

The words that surround a particular word in a sentence or paragraph are called the context of that word. In many cases, the context of a word can provide clues about that word's meaning. For example, consider the following sentence in which context clues provide hints about the meaning of the word *nocturnal*.

"Soon after sundown, the nocturnal creatures of the desert begin to stir and venture out of their dens and nests."

In this example, the phrases "Soon after sundown" and "venture out of their dens and nests" indicate that the "nocturnal creatures of the desert" become active after dark. Consequently, these clues reveal that the word *nocturnal* means "active during the nighttime."

Being able to use context clues is an important skill to develop. One, because you will be taking aptitude tests for college entrance and scholarships and vocabulary is important to a good score. You won't be able to look up the definition of the words you don't know; you will have to use context clues to help you come to some suggestion to the word's meaning.

Secondly, the amount of reading you will be doing in college and the work place is such that it will be impractical to look up the dictionary definition of every word that you are unfamiliar with.

tumultuous
impetuous
scatheless
epithets
beneficent
emphatic
ingenuous
waif

supplicant
implacable
motley
diabolical
impending
carmine
cessation

Directions: Employing the text of “The Open Boat” only (no dictionaries), infer the definitions of the words listed above through context clues. Below is a fictitious journal entry from a member of the governing body of an unnamed country. Using the context of the passage, fill in each blank with the most appropriate word from the list of words above.

What a(n) _____ debate we had on the floor today, all that shouting and fighting and jumping up and down to make motions. Fortunately, I had carefully worked out a(n) _____ proposal for a bill that would mean the _____ of homework assignments for every high school student in the country and the introduction of a two-hour lunch period. By sponsoring the bill, I will surely get the votes of high school students once they reach eighteen. My campaign manager was _____ in her belief that this was a sure thing. Not only would I have

millions of votes, but I would also be seen as a truly _____ leader, one with only the best interests of the constituents at heart. My underhanded opponents, however, cooked up a _____ scheme to keep the bill from passing. First, they brought in a _____ crew of lobbyists, some dressed in patriotic colors, waving "Save Our Country" posters; others clutching stacks of homework assignments that would be useless under the new bill. However, with _____ composure I withstood all the hysterical opposition. It was not a(n) _____ act on my part to introduce the bill— I had put years of planning into my strategy, and no _____ shouted at me by a bunch of lobbyists would deter me.

Adapted from <http://www.geocities.com/soho/den/1151/naturalism/crane.html>