



MEANING AND CONTEXT!

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When we say we know a word, we probably often mean that we know its meaning.

However, there is more to a word than its definition. Being aware of its various other aspects can help our students to become better at applying their vocabulary knowledge to reading comprehension and writing. In this series of posts, we will take a look at the different aspects of what it means to know a word. This article looks at how the meanings of words change according to the context they are used.



If we read in the news that police officers caught an **arms** dealer who had an entire crate of pistols, we would know that the arms dealer is in the business of selling weapons, not upper limbs.

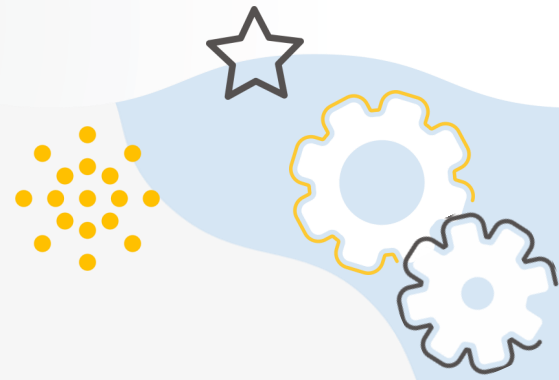
If someone complains to you that the latest smart phone cost them an **arm** and a leg, you know they meant it is expensive, and not that they are suddenly missing some limbs!

The word **arm** or **arms** can refer to weapons, or take on the idiomatic meaning of being very expensive. Often, it is the **context that informs a reader which meaning is intended.**

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For our students, understanding the context can help them identify the meanings of words they are not familiar with.

For example, let us assume that a student does not know the meaning of **froze** in the following sentences below:



The adventurer was halfway up the **snow-capped** mountains when an **avalanche** buried him in layers of **snow**.
He froze.



The adventurer was halfway up the mountain when he was **confronted** by a **grizzly bear**, its **razor sharp claws** raised above his head. **He froze.**

Using the highlighted words in the context, they can come to the conclusion that the first **froze** refers to turning to ice, since it has to do with being covered in a lot of snow, and the second one refers to being paralysed with fear since there is a bear that seems to be threatening to claw the adventurer apart.

Hence, the above examples illustrate the importance of context when it comes to understanding texts.

It is, therefore, necessary for students to always keep in mind how the meanings of words may change depending on the context they occur as they read and answer questions.

Find out more about DAS Literacy Programmes, made accessible to any student who is struggling to learn.

