Clue or Reference?

Choose the best way to figure out an unfamiliar word.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.4 "Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies."

NAME _____ DATE _____

USE CONTEXT

Use context when nearby words or details show what the unfamiliar word means.

The glass was fragile, so Mia carried it gently.

USE A REFERENCE

Use a dictionary, glossary, or other reference when the sentence does not give enough clues.

The word condensation appears in a heading with no explanation.

1 SORT

8 items

For each item, circle CONTEXT or REFERENCE, then choose two items and explain which clues or missing information led you to each choice.

1.	The rabbit was wary, staying close to its burrow when the hawk flew overhead.	CONTEXT REFERENCE
2.	The twins were exhausted, so they fell asleep before dinner.	CONTEXT REFERENCE
3.	The geography book says that Florida is a peninsula.	CONTEXT REFERENCE
4.	The museum label names the object an astrolabe.	CONTEXT REFERENCE
5.	The sour lemon made Jada pucker and squint.	CONTEXT REFERENCE
6.	The history book describes a group called the Phoenicians.	CONTEXT REFERENCE
7.	A narrow path wound through the forest, twisting between tall trees.	CONTEXT REFERENCE
8.	The snowdrift was enormous, towering over the small fence.	CONTEXT REFERENCE

2 PROVE IT

Explain your thinking

Pick two items from Part 1. For each one, tell how you knew where it belonged.

ITEM # _____ **HOW I KNEW** _____

ITEM # _____ **HOW I KNEW** _____

3 MAKE YOUR OWN

One of each

Write one sentence that belongs in CONTEXT and one sentence that belongs in REFERENCE.

CONTEXT _____

REFERENCE _____

CHALLENGE

Write a sentence in which context clues give only a partial idea of an unfamiliar word. Name a reference source you would use to confirm the meaning.

ANSWER KEY

Clue or Reference?

PART 1 · SORT

#	ITEM	CATEGORY	WHY
1	The rabbit was wary, staying close to its burrow when the hawk flew overhead.	**CONTEXT**	Staying close to the burrow when danger is near shows that wary means cautious or careful.
2	The twins were exhausted, so they fell asleep before dinner.	**CONTEXT**	Falling asleep early gives a clear clue that exhausted means very tired.
3	The geography book says that Florida is a peninsula.	**REFERENCE**	The sentence does not explain what peninsula means.
4	The museum label names the object an astrolabe.	**REFERENCE**	The sentence gives no details about what an astrolabe is.
5	The sour lemon made Jada pucker and squint.	**CONTEXT**	Puckering and squinting show the effect of the sour lemon.
6	The history book describes a group called the Phoenicians.	**REFERENCE**	The sentence does not tell who the Phoenicians were.
7	A narrow path wound through the forest, twisting between tall trees.	**CONTEXT**	Twisting between trees shows that wound means curved or turned.
8	The snowdrift was enormous, towering over the small fence.	**CONTEXT**	Towering over a fence shows that enormous means very large.

PART 2 · PROVE IT

Accept any explanation that names the deciding feature from the rule box for the chosen item.

PART 3 · MAKE YOUR OWN (SAMPLE ANSWERS)

- **CONTEXT**: The icy path was slippery, so Noor walked slowly and held the rail.
- **REFERENCE**: The textbook names a tool called a hygrometer.

Challenge: The hikers crossed a barren plain under the hot sun. I think barren may mean dry or empty, and I would use a dictionary to confirm it.

Accept any explanation that names the deciding feature from the rule box for the chosen item. Accept CONTEXT when students identify nearby details that reveal the word's meaning. For REFERENCE, students should explain that the sentence lacks enough information and name an appropriate source, such as a dictionary or glossary.