Meaning Detectives

Decide when a sentence gives you enough clues.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.4 "Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9-10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies."

NAME _____ DATE _____

MEANING FROM CONTEXT

The sentence gives enough clues to infer the bracketed word's meaning. Look for actions, descriptions, examples, or contrasts.

The [brittle] cookie snapped when I bit it.

MEANING NEEDS RESEARCH

The sentence does not give enough clues for a clear meaning. Use a dictionary, glossary, or another reliable source.

The scientist adjusted the [apparatus].

1 SORT

8 items

For each sentence, circle CONTEXT or RESEARCH for the bracketed word, then choose two sentences and explain which clues or missing details led you to each choice.

1.	After hiking for hours, Lena was [famished] and ate two sandwiches.	CONTEXT RESEARCH
2.	The toddler was [jubilant], clapping and laughing at the parade.	CONTEXT RESEARCH
3.	The committee will [convene] on Thursday.	CONTEXT RESEARCH
4.	The old bridge was [precarious], swaying over the river in the wind.	CONTEXT RESEARCH
5.	The poem uses [anaphora] in its second stanza.	CONTEXT RESEARCH
6.	The court issued a [writ].	CONTEXT RESEARCH
7.	Because the instructions were [ambiguous], three students assembled the model differently.	CONTEXT RESEARCH
8.	The novel's [protagonist] faces a moral dilemma.	CONTEXT RESEARCH

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 two original sentences, one with a bracketed word whose meaning is clear from CONTEXT and one with a bracketed word that would require RESEARCH.

CONTEXT _____

RESEARCH _____

CHALLENGE

Write a sentence with a word that has two possible meanings, then add enough context to show which meaning you intend.

ANSWER KEY

Meaning Detectives

PART 1 · SORT

#	ITEM	CATEGORY	WHY
1	After hiking for hours, Lena was [famished] and ate two sandwiches.	**CONTEXT**	Eating two sandwiches after hours of hiking shows that famished means very hungry.
2	The toddler was [jubilant], clapping and laughing at the parade.	**CONTEXT**	Clapping and laughing provide clues that jubilant means very joyful.
3	The committee will [convene] on Thursday.	**RESEARCH**	The sentence gives a time but does not explain what convene means.
4	The old bridge was [precarious], swaying over the river in the wind.	**CONTEXT**	Swaying in the wind suggests precarious means unstable or dangerous.
5	The poem uses [anaphora] in its second stanza.	**RESEARCH**	The sentence identifies where anaphora appears but does not define the literary term.
6	The court issued a [writ].	**RESEARCH**	The legal setting does not provide enough information to determine the precise meaning of writ.
7	Because the instructions were [ambiguous], three students assembled the model differently.	**CONTEXT**	Different assemblies suggest that ambiguous means unclear or open to more than one meaning.
8	The novel's [protagonist] faces a moral dilemma.	**RESEARCH**	The sentence does not explain the literary role of a protagonist.

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 glassy pond was [placid], with no ripples or waves.
- **RESEARCH**: The historian examined the [codex].

Challenge: After the storm, the volunteers cleared the fallen branches from the road.

Accept any explanation that names the deciding feature from the rule box for the chosen item. Sort key: CONTEXT for 1, 2, 4, and 7; RESEARCH for 3, 5, 6, and 8. For the explanation task, accept answers that identify useful context clues or explain that the sentence lacks a definition-level clue.