

Using Context Clues

Here are three keys for unlocking word meaning from context.

Key 1. Watch for a word or phrase that defines an unfamiliar word.

Example: Maybe John Stetson's hats would appeal to other Westerners, too, including drovers, who herded cattle or sheep.

What do you think a drover is?

Key 2. Watch for a word or phrase that gives a clear hint of the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

Example: "Fur can be made into cloth without tanning," John Stetson announced.

"Can't be done," the others scoffed.

What do you think scoffed means?

Key 3. If one word doesn't give a clue, look at the whole sentence for clues to the meaning of an unfamiliar word.

Example: As everyone watched, John took a swig from the canteen and gently sprayed water through his teeth onto the fur until it matted.

What does it mean to take a swig?

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"Can't be done," the others scoffed.

What do you think scoffed means?

Scoffed means showed disbelief.

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Example: As everyone watched, John took a swig from the canteen and gently sprayed water through his teeth onto the fur until it matted.

What does it mean to take a swig?

To take a swig means to take a large mouthful of liquid.
