Name _____ Date_____Class_____

Vocabulary Skill: Use Context Clues

If you stopped to figure out how many words you know, you would probably find that you know many thousands. And you didn't use a dictionary to learn most of them! How did you learn so many words? As you listened to people talk, you learned the meanings of the words in context. The **context** of the word is the collection of words, phrases, and sentences that surrounds it. The context provides clues to a word's meaning.

When you read a new term in your science textbook, a complete definition often appears with it. But what about unfamiliar words that are not defined? You can use context clues to help you.

Look For a Description or an Example

A description of a new term or an example can serve as a clue. Look for clue words, including *for instance*, *for example, called, means*, and *such as*. Examine the context of the sentence below.

Tropical grasslands called savannas have distinct dry and wet seasons.

The clue word *called* tells you that savannas are tropical grasslands with distinct dry and wet seasons.

Look For a Comparison

Writers often provide clues to a word's meaning by pointing out ways that something is similar to or different from a familiar object. Here is an example.

A swamp looks like a flooded forest, with trees and shrubs growing in the water.

The comparison word *like* tells you that a swamp is a water-covered area where trees and shrubs grow.

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Use Context Clues *(continued)*

TRY THIS

Underline context clues, descriptions, examples, and comparison words. Then write the definition of each word on the lines below.

1. intertidal zone

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On many seashores, there is a strip of land called an intertidal zone that is under water at high tide but becomes dry land at low tide.

2. tether

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Several shuttle flights have experimented with tethered satellites. Basically, the idea is to drag a satellite through space on a tether.

3. tule

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Wetlands contain tule and other tall grasslike plants.

4. exoskeleton

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As an animal grows larger, it can become trapped in its exoskeleton like a knight in armor that's too tight. The animal sheds its outgrown exoskeleton and grows a new, larger one.

5. surface tension

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Because of surface tension, which makes the water's surface like a tight skin, an insect can actually skip across the top of the water.

6. virus

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A virus is not a living thing. The virus particle is tiny enough to get into the cells of a living thing, but the virus itself has no cells. It does not need food or energy to grow or respond to its surroundings. The only way a virus is like a living thing is in its ability to reproduce.