Teaching Notes: Determining the Meaning of Words and Phrases

The goal of RI.5.4 is for students to be able to determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Have the class divide into groups of three to four students. Give each group the following fourth-grade level words: *experiment*, *locate*, *pattern*, *surrender*. Focusing on one word at a time, have the student groups list as many words as possible that have the same meanings. After about five minutes, check the students' answers against a thesaurus. The target of the game is to name the most synonyms for the given word.

2. Referring to their science or history textbooks, have students make a list (as a class) of the domain-specific vocabulary they are currently learning. With a dictionary as a guide, ask students to indicate whether any of these words have definitions that are not domain-specific. What are the differences between the definitions?

3. Give students a brief explanation of root words and how they relate to affixes. Then, write the following root words on the board: *duct*, *ment*, *script*, *vent*. Ask students to identify words that contain these roots, and study the words in the context of the affixes students include. (Examples: *conduct*, *mental*, *subscription*, *convention*)

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RI.5.4:

- http://www.fcrr.org/curriculum/PDF/G4-5/45VPartTwo.pdf
- https://www.risd.k12.nm.us/assessment_evaluation/Context%20Clues.pdf

Self-Check: RI.5.4

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Stimuli ID and/or Title	ELA_G4_STIM00006
Passage Title	"Meet The Maya"
Author	NA
Word Count	559

"Meet The Maya"

1 Take a journey back nearly 3,000 years in time. Around 900 BCE, a group of people called the Maya formed a splendid and advanced civilization in the area between the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of Honduras. They had magnificent palaces, an elaborate system of writing, an accurate calendar, and more.

2 The Maya had advanced scientific knowledge of astronomy. They were able to plot the movements of the sun and moon. They tracked the movement of stars and planets across the sky and were able to accurately predict events such as solar and lunar eclipses. They even calculated the length of one revolution of Venus around the sun. They believed it took 584 days. After many centuries of study, today's scientists find it to be 583.92 days!

3 The Mayan system of recording time is the most accurate calendar of the ancient world. Ancient Mayan astronomers calculated of the length of one year on Earth as 365.4240 days. The figure used today, more than 1,000 years later, is 365.2422 days! That is an impressively close calculation, made without the help of modern scientific tools.

4 Mayan mathematics was equally amazing. The Maya invented a numerical system based on 20 (ours is based on 10). They were one of three civilizations that understood the concept of zero. This allowed them to be one of the first peoples to be able to count to very large numbers.

5 The Maya created and invented many things. They built pyramids. They had medicines. They made weapons and tools of sharp minerals, not metal. They developed sophisticated water-delivery systems, with waterways that supplied water to all the communities. This helped improve farming techniques and the ability to provide food to a large population.

6 The Maya also developed a complex system of writing. The system had an alphabet as well as symbols that represented whole words or thoughts.

7 The Maya used writing tools made from animal hair and feathers. Writing was recorded in books called codices. These books were long strips of paper made from the bark of fig trees. The strips of bark were then folded back to back, forming pages. These were then enclosed in covers of animal skin or wood. In 1973, a young boy, the child of two archaeologists, started to draw the symbols, or glyphs, he saw on stone tablets. Then he started to study and decode them. Three years later, as a teenager, he was able to read many of the tablets—something that had taken scholars five years to do!

8 The Maya painted and adorned their buildings with carvings. The carvings show gods and histories of ruling families. They also painted colorful murals on interior walls.

9 Mayan civilization flourished for many centuries. In the 16th century, Spanish explorers came to the area and conquered the Mayan people and their glorious culture. Most of that culture lay hidden for years. It took archaeologists a long time to discover this fascinating civilization. One reason is that the Spanish forbade foreigners to travel in its colonies. Another reason is that much of the Mayan land is hard to reach because of dense rain forests and mountains.

10 Dedicated people spent years unearthing what has become the lost culture of the ancient Maya. By studying what remains of their art and architecture, we can continue to learn more about the people of the ancient world.

1. Read the following sentence from the passage:

"Another reason is that much of the Mayan land is hard to reach because of dense rain forests and mountains."

Based on the context of this sentence, which statement best describes a dense rain forest?

A. The trees are very tall.
B. The trees are very thin.
C. The trees are close together.
D. The trees are sources of food.

Item ID	ELA_G4_MCQ_WN00040
DOK level	2
Answer Choice Rationale 1	Tall trees wouldn't necessarily make it hard to reach Mayan land.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	Thin trees would not make it hard to reach Mayan land.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Correct answer.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	If the trees are sources of foods, then explorers would have energy to continue traveling.