

Using Context Clues (*continued*)

Context Clues in Action

Read the following passage.

The husband of Loreta Velázquez had always vacillated about which side he should take in the Civil War. He was born in Texas, which was part of the South. Like many other Southerners in the U.S. Army, he was divided between loyalty to the Union, which gave him his career, and his family's allegiance to the Confederate South. He wavered between the two sides. Velázquez, having been raised in the South, convinced her husband to quit his job with the Union army and join the Confederate army. As soon as he went east to begin training for battle, she formed a plan to join him. Since women were prohibited—forbidden by law—to be soldiers, she decided to disguise herself as a man.

Velázquez went to New Orleans in early 1861 to carry out her plan. First, she had a tailor sew a special padded uniform that made her waist appear larger and more masculine. Then she had a barber cut and style her hair to resemble that of a man. Next, a trusted male friend helped her glue on a false mustache. He also helped her practice disguising her voice and feminine mannerisms, like tossing her head and taking short, dainty steps. Finally she selected the name Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, CSA. The transformation was complete.

Adapted from *Latino Heroes of the Civil War* by Michael Walbridge. ©1997 by J. Weston Walch, Publisher.

In this passage, some challenging words have been underlined. At first glance, these words may appear baffling. However, you can begin to make sense of them by analyzing context clues. The following is an example of how you might use context clues to figure out the meaning of new words.

The first underlined word, vacillated, is not defined or explained in the sentence in which it occurs. But I see that the next two sentences restate vacillate's meaning: Velázquez's husband "was divided" between loyalty to the North (the Union) and the South (the Confederates). He "wavered" between the North and the South. Let me try substituting "was divided" or "wavered" for vacillated. That works! "The husband of Loreta Velazquez had always been divided about which side he should take in the Civil War." Now I know that vacillated means "felt divided" or "wavered between."

The next underlined word is allegiance. In the first part of the sentence, I see what looks like a related phrase: "he was divided between loyalty to the Union . . . and his family's allegiance to the Confederate South." The related term for allegiance is loyalty; I think they are synonyms.

