Skill 4: Students can find meaning from morphologically complex words

Deconstructing difficult words
Purpose: Help students use all the tools available for accessing meaning while reading
Time: embedded within reading- time is variable
Grade: all
Best Part: this instructional strategy is highly flexible and can become a regular routine you used while reading

Directions:
Before class
1. This works best with a little bit of preparation ahead of time. It should be done with a full class and out loud reading, but then can be transitioned to group or partner reading.
2. Review the section of text that you will be working with in class, trying to identify 5-7 morphologically complex words. Things to consider when picking words – the context of the sentence, which words have roots, prefixes, or suffixes that students might be familiar with, or high frequency words. Identifying these words ahead of time makes it more likely that you will bring morphology into your lesson.

During class
1. When you reach the first pre-selected word, model how you might "solve" that word. Think aloud about how the structure of the sentence provides clues, how the word itself is made up of different roots and affixes which offer information about both meaning and structure.

> Example: *"During the period of reconstruction, southern states were required to address racial inequality throughout their societies." Hmmm. I notice the word "reconstruction" which I don't recognize. Since I don't fully understand that word, I want to use all the clues in the word and sentence to figure it out. First of all, within the word there are some clues. I know the "re" means to do something again, like "redo". Okay, and construct is easy! It means to build. Also, "tion" is always kind of like a process or act. So this seems to be maybe the process of building again? Rebuilding? Also – let's think about context clues. The sentence says the "period of reconstruction" which suggests it's a moment in time. So this seems to be saying that this time period, of rebuilding, required southern states to do specific things. Okay. That makes sense to me. [Turn to students] What strategies did you hear me use to figure out that unknown word?*

2. After your model, have students identify the different strategies that you used in your think aloud. Record their observations on the board or overhead.
3. When you get to the next preselected word – refer to the strategies on the board. Don't ask students if they know the word yet (some might call out a definition and it prevents the activity from being useful). Instead, go through context, roots, structure etc. At the end, see if students can provide a definition for the word.
4. If you want to do this in small groups or partners, having some sort of small worksheet will help ensure that students practice the strategies you modeled.

5. While you can wing this, highlighting the appropriate words ahead of time will allow you to be more strategic in your instruction. Eventually, if this becomes a normal aspect of your reading instruction, winging it will likely become easier! ☺