



Using *Martha's True Stories* with English Language Learners

Because the *MARTHA SPEAKS* television series and related materials, such as [Martha's True Stories](#), focus on oral vocabulary and explicit vocabulary instruction, they are excellent literacy tools to use with both native English speakers and English language learners.

Story Preview/Picture Walk

Introduce English language learners to the vocabulary and concepts of the story by previewing the story with the audio off. Use the pictures—along with objects, gestures, and drama—to clarify ideas and phrases. Invite students to activate the animated features. Ask, “What’s happening? What do you see?”

Because Martha as narrator speaks quickly, you may want to read the story aloud before students read or listen to the story on their own or with a reading buddy. If the amount of text on the page or the general reading level will be challenging for your students, decide when you may want to paraphrase the text. You may want to read the story aloud a second time, demonstrating how to click on and use the animated features. (Review these features beforehand to strategize how to use them to help explain processes or support vocabulary learning.)

Engage children in conversation and explain basic and more complex vocabulary and idioms as you go. Some simple words, as well as colloquialisms and expressions, may not be familiar to English language learners and may need to be explicitly taught. Act out action words or processes to aid in comprehension. Whenever possible, draw connections to objects in the classroom or familiar events in the children’s lives. Bring in objects that will help students understand the vocabulary words and show how they work.

Provide Sentence Frames

Sentence frames help get discussions started and keep students focused on the content during paired or whole group discussion. Using sentence frames reduces anxiety and encourages students to practice the new vocabulary.

For example, if you want students to talk about what the story was about, write the following sentence frame on the board: “This story was about _____ because ____.” Model how to complete the sentence. Lesson-specific examples include:

- Waste Not, Want Not
 - o "I think it is important to recycle because ____."
 - o "I disposed of my _____ in the garbage because _____."
- Getting to the Game
 - o When we go somewhere, my family usually uses a _____.
 - o I think the fastest way to travel is by _____.
- Sunflower Bone Biscuits
 - o "My ____ (mom, dad, etc.) used a recipe to make _____.
 - o Some of the ingredients in the recipe were ____."

Hands-On Activities

Another effective way to introduce vocabulary and concepts is to bring in actual materials related to the story for children to engage with. Using these props in creative ways can provide natural opportunities to teach and practice the key language.

Explore Cognates

Familiarize yourself with the concept of cognates (words in different languages that are derived from the same original word or root, such as *family* in English and *familia* in Spanish). Invite students who have strong language skills in both English and their home languages to point out similarities, so that less proficient students can recognize and learn more words.

Use the PDFs

Each story is accompanied by a printable PDF (See the [Martha's True Stories Chart](#)). Use these to support the reading of the story and the activities that follow. Depending on the activity, you can use the printout to remind students what the story was about or the meaning of specific vocabulary words. You can also use the printout for additional activities, such as labeling objects in the pictures or putting the sequence of events in order.

Repeat Words and Definitions

All children need to hear words many times before they can fully understand and use them. In class, provide lots of opportunities for students to repeat the key vocabulary words and use them in their conversations. In particular, have students listen to the Word Bones glossary and play the Quizmo game at the end of each story.

Review and Reinforce Words

Prompt children to use the words they have learned by revisiting words from *Martha's True Stories*, using the words frequently as you talk, and encouraging students to use the words as they answer questions and express their opinions.

Pair Students Effectively

If you are using *Martha's True Stories* in a buddy session, use the pairing of students as an opportunity to strengthen the language skills of your English language learners.

Whenever possible, pair Little Buddy ELLs with Big Buddies who speak the same home language. For Little Buddies who have lower English proficiency, consider expanding the Big Buddy/Little Buddy team by adding a second Little Buddy with higher level or fluent English language skills. Similarly, you may want to provide a Big Buddy English language learner with an extra partner—a high-proficiency or fluent English-speaking Big Buddy. The two Big Buddies can work together with one or two Little Buddies. As you prepare Big Buddies before each session, provide additional support (such as extra prep time or more teacher intervention) for Big Buddies who are less proficient in English.

Provide Wait Time

ELL students may need a little more “wait” time before conversing or answering questions in English.

Before, after, and during reading *Martha's True Stories*, provide some extra time for all students to become involved in the classroom conversations. Remind children to be patient with each other during their own discussions and activities. Students who are less proficient in English may prefer to answer questions by pointing to pictures.

Talk, Talk, Talk!

Each student has different learning needs. As *MARTHA SPEAKS* curriculum advisor Mariela Páez says in her video, “[Vocabulary for English Language Learners](#),” getting to know your students who are English language learners is very important. Remember to set aside time every day to engage students in one-on-one conversation. This will not only help you evaluate students’ English language proficiency, but will model correct usage as you rephrase their questions and respond to their comments.

Involve Families

Children who acquire extensive oral vocabulary and literacy skills in their first language will find it easier to develop those skills in English. Encourage parents and caregivers to read to and talk with their children in their home language. Reassure them that doing so will boost their children’s overall language and literacy skills.

Adults, including those who have limited English, can read *Martha's True Stories* at home. Clicking on the highlighted vocabulary words will help them learn and teach new words. They can also click on the “Parent Tip” button on the upper right, which offers advice and activity ideas to extend the learning.

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