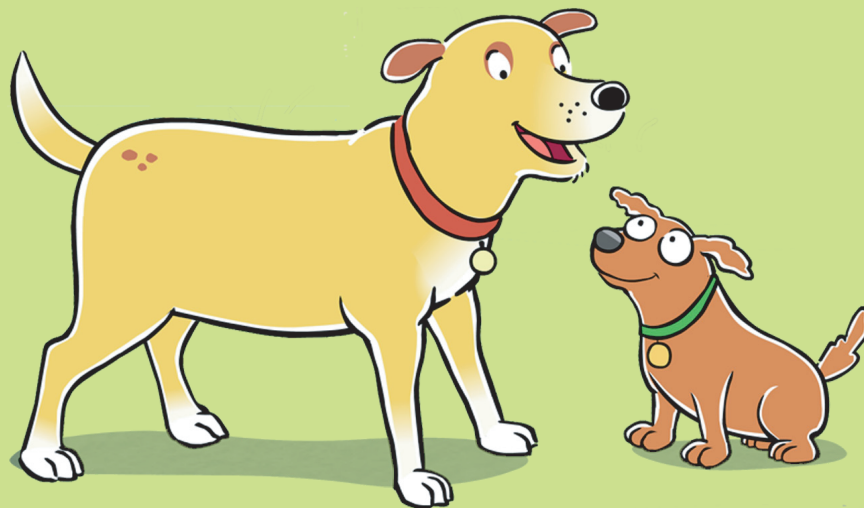


MARTHA SPEAKS™

Understanding Dog Talk

a lesson plan for teachers
grades: K-2





Goal

Students will begin to recognize and understand the communicative body language of dogs.

Objectives

- Students will learn to observe and interpret the expressive body language of dogs.
- Students will learn to interact with dogs safely and respectfully.
- Students will explore nonverbal communication and expand their descriptive vocabulary related to emotions.

Standards

National Science Education Standard: Life Science (Content Standard C)
IRA/NCTE Standards #4 and #12

Materials

- Book or video: Book: *Martha and Skits* by Susan Meddaugh. (Houghton Mifflin, 2000). Video: “Martha and Skits” from the PBS KIDS television series MARTHA SPEAKS, available from iTunes.
- Reproducible handouts (attached):
 1. The Many Moods of Martha
 2. Hello, Doggy! (to send home)
 3. Learn about Animal Communication (to send home)
- Scissors

This exploration of dog communication is introduced through the PBS KIDS television series MARTHA SPEAKS, based on an award-winning series of picture books by Susan Meddaugh. Martha is a lovable dog whose appetite for alphabet soup gives her the power of speech. But of course real dogs can't speak like Martha—they communicate with us and with each other by using expressive body language.

These activities will help young children learn to observe and understand the “language” of dogs and respond in appropriate and respectful ways. It will also help them expand their vocabulary as they observe, describe, and role-play different emotions and physical movements.



Activities

Martha and Skits: Discussion

Read the book or watch the episode “Martha and Skits.” Lead a discussion, focusing on the feelings of the characters at the various points in the plot. Introduce and encourage children to use descriptive words. For example:

- What was Skits like when he was a little puppy? Would you say he was excited and eager or calm and quiet? What sort of things did he like to do?
- When Skits was old enough, the family gave him his own bowl of alphabet soup and waited to hear Skits speak, just like Martha. But all Skits said was, “Woof.” The family was disappointed. How did that make Skits feel? Loved or unloved? Appreciated or unappreciated? Show me how Skits looked.
- After Skits ran away, he realized he was lost. He didn’t know how to get home. How do you think Skits felt: playful or upset? How do you think his family felt when they realized Skits was gone: worried or relaxed?
- Did you think the ending of the story was happy or unhappy? Why do you think that?

The Many Moods of Martha

1. Encourage children to share what they already know about dogs and how they communicate. What does a dog do when he or she is feeling happy, playful, sleepy, or angry? What sort of things can make a dog feel happy, playful, sleepy, or angry?

2. Distribute the activity sheet and have children cut out the four picture cards. Describe Martha’s body language (see below) in each picture and then have kids hold up the matching card. Review the word sets and provide simple definitions of each word. For instance, “eager” means “to feel excited about something.” Practice saying the word sets (for example, happy and eager) together. Have children pretend to be Martha and mime the body language that goes with that emotion.

Happy and eager: Martha looks like she’s smiling. Her mouth is open and her tail is wagging. She looks friendly and ready to play.

Playful and friendly: Martha looks like she is making a “bow,” with her paws in front of her. The front of her body is lower than the back and her tail is wagging.

Tired and sleepy: Martha is lying down. Her eyes are closed and her body is relaxed.

Angry and upset: Martha’s body is stiff and tense and she is showing her teeth. If you could hear her, she would be barking and growling.



Activities

3. Dogs aren't the only ones to communicate with body language. People do, too! Let a student pull a Martha picture card out of a bag. Without showing the card, have him or her use appropriate body language to act out how a person expresses that emotion as he or she completes one of the following actions: waves to the class, opens the door, walks to the board, or sits down at his or her desk. Let classmates guess the emotion.

Sing a Song: If you're happy and eager, wag your tail...

Sing this song (with feeling!) to the tune of "If You're Happy and You Know It." Children can hold up the appropriate picture card as they sing each verse and add the sound effects.

If you're happy and you're eager, wag your tail... (woof, woof)

If you're playful and you're friendly, make a bow...(scratch, scratch)

If you're angry and you're upset, show your teeth... (grr, grr)

If you're tired and you're sleepy, lie down... (zzzz, zzzz)

Hello, Doggy!

Give children copies of the take-home handout, "Hello, Doggy!" Before sending it home, review the information. Invite children to join you in role-playing encounters with owners and dogs. (Example: "May I pet your dog?" "Sure! He's very gentle and friendly." or "May I pet your dog?" "No, I'm sorry. She's not comfortable with children.") Offer children the opportunity to play various roles: owner, dog, visitor. (Be sure to remind children of general safety rules about talking with strangers.)

Learn More

Do a class research project on Dogs or Animal Communication. Invite a local animal shelter, dog trainer or groomer, or veterinarian to your class to talk about dog behavior, grooming, and so on. Distribute the take-home handout, "Learn about Animal Communication" for children to take home. Read aloud books about dogs and research different breeds of dogs on the web.

Visit The Humane Society of the United States website at www.humanesociety.org or the websites for your local animal shelters and rescue groups. Children can share their knowledge with the school community by making a class book about dogs, informational posters, or dog trading cards (with information about specific breeds on one side and a picture on the other).

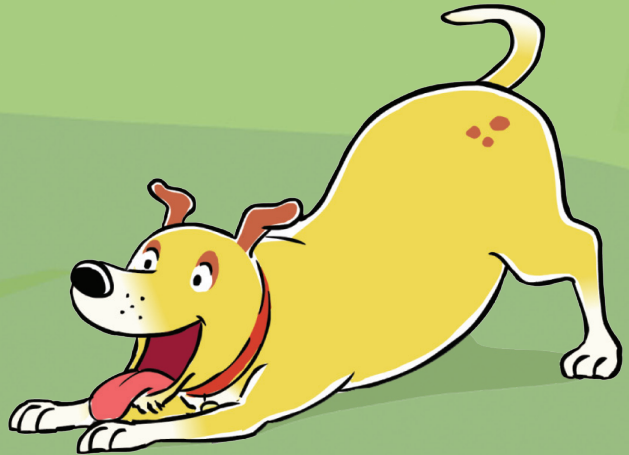


MARTHA SPEAKS™

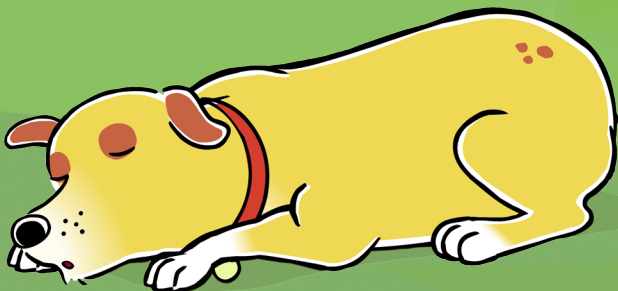
The Many Moods of Martha



happy and eager



friendly and playful



tired and sleepy



angry and upset

Hello, Doggy!

MARTHA SPEAKS™

Review with your children the safety tips below for meeting and greeting a new dog. You may also want to review general safety rules about not talking with strangers without being accompanied by a trusted adult.

- Before you approach a new dog, make sure the owner is there. If the dog is looking happy, eager, and friendly, ask, “May I pet your dog?”
- If the owner says “yes,” walk up to the dog quietly. Let the dog sniff the back of your hand. Dogs use their sense of smell to get to know someone.
- Stay calm and quiet as you pet the dog gently and say pleasant things, like “Good dog!” and “What a great puppy!”
- If you want, ask the owner if the dog has a special place where he or she likes to be stroked or scratched—such as behind the ears or under the chin.
- Some dogs do not feel comfortable with people they don’t know. If a dog looks nervous, upset, threatened, or angry, do not get close and do not try to pet it. Give him or her plenty of space. This will help the dog feel calmer and it will keep you safe.

For more fun and learning, visit the MARTHA SPEAKS Web site at pbskids.org/martha. For more about dogs, cats, and all kinds of animals, visit The Humane Society of the United States at www.humanesociety.org.



Follow the adventures of Martha, the talking dog, in the animated PBS KIDS series, MARTHA SPEAKS. The show offers lots of laughs and fun but also a serious educational purpose—to help children expand their vocabulary.

Learn about... Animal Communication

MARTHA SPEAKS™

Dogs have important things to tell each other—and their human friends. Share some of these books with your child. You'll learn lots of interesting facts about the ways dogs and other animals communicate.

Animal Talk: How Animals Communicate through Sight, Sound and Smell by Etta Kaner. (Kids Can Press, 2002)

Hello, Hello! by Miriam Schlein. (Simon & Schuster, 2002)

How to Speak Dog by Sarah Whitehead. (Scholastic, 2008)

How to Talk to Your Dog by Jean Craighead George. (HarperTrophy, 2003)

May I Pet Your Dog? by Stephanie Calmenson. (Clarion Books, 2007)

Slap, Squeak and Scatter: How Animals Communicate
by Steve Jenkins. (Houghton Mifflin, 2001)

Why Do Dogs Bark? by Joan Holub. (Puffin, 2001)

Follow the adventures of Martha, the talking dog, in the animated PBS KIDS television series, MARTHA SPEAKS, based on the award-winning books by Susan Meddaugh. The TV series offers lots of laughs and fun but also a serious educational purpose—to help children expand their vocabulary.

For more fun and learning, visit the MARTHA SPEAKS Web site at pbskids.org/martha. For more about dogs, cats, and all kinds of animals, visit The Humane Society of the United States at www.humanesociety.org.

You can purchase episodes of MARTHA SPEAKS on iTunes. Look for these and TV tie-in books at your library or bookstore:

Martha Speaks and Martha Habla
Martha Blah Blah
Martha and Skits
Martha Calling
Martha Walks the Dog
Perfectly Martha

All books in the *Martha Speaks* series by Susan Meddaugh are published by Houghton Mifflin.



**This dog
has something
to say!**