



Discussion Guide for

MARTHA SPEAKS

Author:

Susan Meddaugh

Publisher:

Houghton Mifflin

THEME:

Dogs are terrific companions with unique characteristics and talents.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

READING RAINBOW goes to the dogs as LeVar's favorite pouch, Luke, steps to the forefront and takes over the show in Martha Speaks, narrated by Jo Hayden. Viewers get a dog's-eye view of life and get to meet some incredible canine daredevils who prove that a dog is truly a child's best friend - No bones about it

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Brainstorm a variety of ways in which animals communicate with people, such as wagging, barking in different "voices," purring, scratching, etc.

Explore the what if..." notion, that if animals could talk, what might they tell us? Use different groups of animals for this discussion, e.g., farm animals, zoo animals, rain forest animals, desert animals, and others. Students would also likely want to imagine that their own pets could talk.

Discuss the concept of "point of view." In the program, we see the world from Luke's point of view. Contrast this way of telling a story with the book Martha Speaks, which has a narrator who tells Martha's story.

Discuss "fantasy" as a type of literature. What aspects of Martha Speaks makes the book a fantasy?

Curriculum Extension Activities:

Read the sequel, Martha Calling. Discuss the nature of a sequel and how it continues a story or creates further adventures for a character. Have the children think of additional problems that Martha might encounter and write their own sequels.

Have the students write and then role play a segment for the evening news in which Martha is interviewed about thwarting the burglar.

Use alphabet pasta as a manipulative to make words. Have the students write a personal telephone directory for Martha including places that she would likely call. They might use an actual telephone directory to give them ideas.

Make Martha puppets, using lunch bags and construction paper or paper plates. Have students write a short biography of Martha and then introduce her to the class using their puppet.

Do some creative brainstorming in response to: What would Martha eat in order to be able to do math, or a science experiment, or create a work of art? Choose one of the generated ideas and write and illustrate a class book

Explore a list of "rewards" of pet ownership. Use the list as a stimulus for interested students to research ways in which pets help their owners. Balance this list with one that outlines the responsibilities of owning a pet.

Have the students create animal conversations. They can cut out pictures of animals from magazines, glue them to paper, and write the conversations in word balloons.

Start a "Dogs in the News" bulletin board with the class. Have students collect newspaper and magazine articles and pictures about dogs. Analyze the display with the students: Do they notice any common themes among the articles?

Do any of the articles make them feel happy, sad, angry? Did any of the articles give them new information? Do any of the articles make them want to take an action? In addition to further developing the study of dogs, this activity helps children understand the different purposes of newspaper articles.

Do a "Draw-a-Dog" activity that requires students to follow simple directions. Prepare a set of attribute envelopes, such as type of hair, colour, ears, tail, and size. In each of the envelopes, place cards with descriptive words related to that attribute. Students take one card from each envelope and draw the dog described by the cards. For example, a child might draw an enormous, black and white shaggy dog with pointed ears and a long fluffy tail. Display all pictures.

Make alphabet soup. As they eat, encourage students to think of "wonderful words" (these might be favourite words or unusual words or even long words) and jot these on a large soup bowl chart.



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RELATED THEMES:

- pets
- animal training
- pet ownership

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

- Best Friends
- The Adventures of Taxi Dog

About The Author

Susan Meddaugh (pronounced Med-aw) worked as a designer and art director in the children's book department of Houghton Mifflin before devoting herself to full-time writing and illustrating. She began telling herself stories through words and pictures as a child and still enjoys the process of creating a book, from the idea to the finished art. Susan lives in Massachusetts with her husband and son and her own dogs, Martha and Skits.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN

MY PUPPY IS BORN by Joanna Cole, Photographs by Margaret Miller (Morrow)

EARTH HOUNDS, AS EXPLAINED BY PROFESSOR XARGLE by Jeanne Willis, illus. By Tony Ross (Dutton)

THE NIGHT I FOLLOWED THE DOG by Nina Laden (Chronicle Books)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST

I AM THE DOG. I AM THE CAT by Donald Hall, illus. by Barry Moser (Dial)

SECOND-GRADE DOG by Laurie Lawlor, illus. by Gloria Fiammenghi ('Whitman)

MARTHA CALLING by Susan Meddaugh (Houghton Mifflin)

THREE STORIES TO READ TO YOUR DOG by Sara Swan Miller, illus. by True Kelley (Houghton Mifflin)

CAN I BE GOOD? by Livingston Taylor, illus. by Ted Rand (Gulliver/Harcourt Brace)

RIPTIDE by Frances Word Weller, illus. by Robert J. Blake (Philomel)

Programs Details

Length:

30 minutes

Subject Areas:

Animals (Dogs)

Audience Levels:

Ages 6 - 11

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5-4394SG

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