

# MARTHA SPEAKS

## STUDY GUIDE

### DEAR TEACHER,

We have created the following study guide to help make your students' theater experience with Martha Speaks as meaningful as possible. For many, it will be their first time viewing a live theatrical production. We have learned that when teachers discuss the play with their students before and after the production, the experience is more significant and long-lasting. Our study guide provides pre and post production discussion topics, as well as related activity sheets. These are just suggestions; please feel free to create your own activities and areas for discussion. We hope you and your class enjoy the show!

### BACKGROUND

Our play is based on the books Martha Speaks and Martha Calling by author Susan Meddaugh.

### THE STORY

- Helen and her parents own a dog named Martha. One day Martha eats some alphabet soup and begins to talk. Everyone who hears Martha speak is shocked and surprised including the mailman and the neighbors. Martha soon learns to use the telephone. One day, even though she is forbidden, Martha uses the phone to call into a radio trivia quiz show and she wins a trip for the family to the luxurious *Come On Inn*.
- To get to the Inn, the family must fly on an airplane. Martha gets upset because she has to travel in the baggage area. When they arrive at the Inn, they discover that it has a "no pets" policy. To get Martha inside, Helen dresses her up as her Grandma. They fool the innkeeper and some guests for a while but Martha really wants to be able to be herself and act like a dog.
- After Martha orders food from room service, the innkeeper discovers her eating and mistakenly thinks that a dog has eaten Grandma. Everyone in the hotel goes crazy chasing what they think is a mad dog. Eventually Martha and Helen confess to fooling the innkeeper and the guests. As they are being kicked out, other guests complain about the "no pets" policy and the innkeeper gets an idea. He renovates his inn, changing it to the "*Sit N' Stay Hotel*" where people can bring their pets. He hires Martha as the hostess who welcomes everyone, humans and pets alike.

### BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

1. You may want to read Martha Speaks and Martha Calling and review the plots and characters with your students.
2. Ask your students about their pets. Have them describe some activities they do with them.
3. One theme in the play is speaking up for what is right. Discuss what it means to speak up for what you believe in. Have students give examples of a time they spoke up for something that was important to them.

## AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

1. Ask your students how the play was different from the Martha books you read. How was it the same? Discuss the actor who played Martha. How do you think she prepared for her role? How would you portray a dog on stage?
2. If your dog or pet could speak, what would you ask it? What do you think it would want to talk about? How would your family life change with a talking animal in the house?
3. Why did Martha think she was being treated unfairly? What rules were different for dogs in the play than for humans?
4. Do you think a “no pets” rule is fair? What are some places pets should be allowed? Where should pets be forbidden from going?

## ACTIVITIES

### *Creative Dramatics*

Have your students re-enact scenes from the play. First, have the students discuss specific scenes – who were the characters, where did it take place, what happened? Examples of scenes might be:

- Martha speaking for the first time to the family
- Martha trying to get on the airplane
- Martha, dressed as Grandma, entering the hotel

### *Creative Writing*

1. *Comics* Write a comic strip with Martha and Helen using word bubbles for their conversation. Individual students can create several comic frames and then connect them for a whole class story.
2. *Fill in the words* Use the attached sheet to complete the sentences using the words in the text box.
3. *Vocabulary* Use the attached sheet and a dictionary to find the meanings of words used in the play. Match the words to the definitions by drawing a line connecting them.

## ALL ABOUT DOGS

Learn about dogs by doing some research. Do dogs really act like Martha does in the play? Explore your library or the Internet for information. Students can work individually or in groups and create presentations displaying their work. Some facts to get you started:

- The first living creature sent into space was a DOG! His name was Laika and he was sent into orbit by the Soviet Union in 1957.
- Studies show that petting a dog can lower a person’s blood pressure.
- Dog nose prints are as unique as human finger prints and can be used to identify them.
- The first dog movie star was Rin Tin Tin, a five-day-old German Shepherd found wounded in battle in WWI France and adopted by an American soldier, Lee Duncan. He would sign his own contracts with his paw print.
- In 1925 dog sled teams raced to deliver life-saving medicine to Nome, Alaska during a diphtheria outbreak when the entire town was snowed in. A statue in Central Park of Balto, one of the lead dogs, commemorates this amazing heroic event that saved the lives of 300 people exposed to the disease.

### *Breeds of dogs*

There are hundreds of breeds of dogs. The 10 most popular, according to the American Kennel Club are:

- Labrador retriever
- German shepherd
- Yorkshire terrier
- Boxer
- Shih tzu
- Golden retriever
- Beagle
- Dachshund
- Poodle
- Chihuahua

Learn about all the different breeds at: <http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/index.htm>

### *Working dogs*

At the end of the play, Martha has a job at the hotel. Did you know that dogs can have jobs?

Some working dogs include:

- Hunting dogs
- Search and Rescue dogs that find people who are trapped
- Herding dogs who help farmers herd sheep and cattle
- Sled dogs that transport people and supplies across the snow
- Guide, service and therapy dogs that can act as a person's eyes, ears or hands and even help them recover from injuries
- Police dogs that can detect drugs or poisons

Learn about different working dogs at:

- Therapy and guide dogs: <http://www.canismajor.com/dog/helping.html>
- Dogs in the Iditarod sled race: [http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/iditarod/dogs\\_life/index.asp?article=dogs\\_life](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/iditarod/dogs_life/index.asp?article=dogs_life)
- Police dogs: <http://people.howstuffworks.com/police-dog.htm>

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### *Books:*

Susan Meddaugh has written 6 children's books about Martha. They are:

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

### *Internet:*

Did you know that there is a TV show about Martha? Check it out at:

<http://pbskids.org/martha/index.html>

Learn about author Susan Meddaugh and the Martha books :

<http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/features/marthathetalkingdog/author.html>

Print and color pictures of Martha and Helen at:

[http://www.pagecoloring.com/viewcategory.php?cat=Martha\\_Speaks](http://www.pagecoloring.com/viewcategory.php?cat=Martha_Speaks)



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Complete the sentences using a word from the text box:

policy	disguise	luggage	restaurant	alphabet
allergic	trivia	Grandma	allowed	unfair

1. Martha started to speak after she ate \_\_\_\_\_ soup.
2. Martha answered a question in a radio \_\_\_\_\_ contest and won a trip.
3. The family celebrated winning the contest by going out to a fancy \_\_\_\_\_.
4. On the plane, Martha had to ride in the \_\_\_\_\_ compartment.
5. The *Come On Inn* had a “No-Pets” \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Helen put Martha in a \_\_\_\_\_ and pretended that she was her Grandma.
7. The manager of the inn was \_\_\_\_\_ to dogs.
8. The guests at the inn all thought that Martha had eaten \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Martha and Helen thought the rules for dogs at the inn were \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The new rule at the *Sit N’ Stay* hotel said that pets were \_\_\_\_\_ to stay.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Martha Speaks* Vocabulary Sheet

Draw a line from the vocabulary word from the play on the left to the correct definition on the right. Use a dictionary to help find meanings of new words.

debate	Elegant or fancy
unique	pellets of dry dog food
dungarees	a discussion with opposing views
velvet	shyness
kibble	blue jeans
considerate	uncivilized, like barbarians
trivia	A thick, soft fabric
swanky	things that are very unimportant
demure	faithful to someone or something
barbaric	having no equal, one of a kind
loyal	showing concern for someone's feelings