



MARTHA SPEAKS™



Using the MARTHA SPEAKS Reading Buddies Program with English Language Learners

Because the MARTHA SPEAKS television series and the MARTHA SPEAKS Reading Buddies Program focus on oral vocabulary and explicit vocabulary instruction, they are excellent literacy tools to use with native English speakers and second language learners.

If you have English language learners (ELL) in your classroom, you may want to adapt the Reading Buddies program in particular ways. This tip sheet will help you support your ELL students, whether they are Little Buddies or Big Buddies.

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 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.

Pair Reading Buddies Effectively

Use the pairing of Little Buddies (kindergarteners) with Big Buddies (4th- or 5th-graders) 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 the Reading Buddies sessions, provide some extra time for all students to become involved in the classroom conversations. Remind all buddies to be patient with each other during their own discussions and activities.

Repeat Words and Definitions

All children need to hear words many times before they can fully understand and use them. As you coach the Big Buddies, emphasize the importance of repeating the key vocabulary words in their conversations. When you monitor the buddy sessions, make sure that Big Buddies are helping their Little Buddies to use the vocabulary words as they discuss the show and the book, as they play the game, and in their journal writing.

Add Additional Vocabulary Words

As you prepare for each Reading Buddies session by watching the MARTHA SPEAKS episode and previewing the read-aloud book, note additional words—including basic and simple words, as well as colloquialisms and expressions—that may need to be explicitly taught to ELL students.

Review and Reinforce Words

Prompt children to use the words they have learned by revisiting words from earlier sessions, using the words frequently as you talk, and encouraging students to use the words as they answer questions and express their opinions.

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 language to point out similarities, so that less proficient students can recognize and learn more words.

Use Pictures

Big Buddies will already have previewed the book they will be reading with their Little Buddies. If you have Little Buddies who are English language learners, you may want to add a class preview of the story by doing a “picture walk” through the book, engaging the children in conversation and explaining basic and more complex vocabulary as you go. Remind Big Buddies that Little Buddies who are less proficient in English may prefer to answer questions by pointing to pictures.

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 families 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.



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