

Classroom Activity

Martha's True Stories: A Tale of Two Soup Cans

Overview

Students read the interactive, informational text "[A Tale of Two Soup Cans](#)," which explains the fate of a soup can after it is used—what happens if it's discarded, reused or recycled. Using the special features of the *Martha's True Stories* texts, students explore words related to the topic and discuss the importance of protecting the environment. Working in pairs, they choose an item to reuse and present their work to the class.

Standards

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- Key Ideas and Details:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.1
With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.2
With prompting and support, identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.
- Craft and Structure:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.4
With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.K.7
With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear (e.g., what person, place, thing, or idea in the text an illustration depicts).
- Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.1.4
Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 1 reading and content, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.1.4.A
Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.1.5
With guidance and support from adults, demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.1.5.C
Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., note places at home that are cozy).
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.1.6
Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts, including using frequently occurring conjunctions to signal simple relationships (e.g., because).

Lesson Objectives

- To learn content-specific vocabulary about the environment and recycling.
- To reuse a common household object (milk carton) and make something useful (bird feeder).

Literature Suggestions

- Don't Throw That Away!
by Lara Bergen
- Making a Difference, Respecting Our Earth
by Sue Barraclough
- Recycle! A Handbook for Kids
by Gail Gibbons
- The Dumpster Diver
by Janet Wong
- The EARTH Book
by Todd Parr
- The Three R's: Reuse, Reduce, Recycle
by Nuria Roca
- Where Does the Garbage Go?
by Paul Showers

Materials

- Art supplies (colored paper, crayons, markers, glue)
- Milk cartons (1/2 gallon, rinsed and cleaned)
- Scissors and/or hole puncher
- String
- Sunflower seeds (or other bird food)
- Wooden stick, dowel, or tree branch
- [PDF of Teacher's Guide](#)
- [PDF of ELL Tips](#)

Lesson Description

1. Lead a discussion in class about the environment. What does the word *environment* mean? What are some of the ways we take care of the environment? Why is it important?
2. Walk through the interactive text with students. For students who are less familiar with computers, explain how to use features such as the forward and back arrows, how to click on highlighted words to get definitions, and how to turn the narration on and off.
3. Working in pairs, have students read "[A Tale of Two Soup Cans.](#)" Depending on their reading level, they can listen to the story with sound or take turns reading it aloud to each other. They can have fun clicking on the animated features.
4. Be sure that they click on the highlighted words to hear or read the definitions. (See Vocabulary Words, below.) Have each student choose two words to remember from the story.
5. As a class, discuss the text. Check for understanding of the highlighted words. Ask: What was the story about? Why was it called "A Tale of Two Soup Cans"? What was your favorite "interactive" feature that you clicked on? What did it show? Why was it your favorite? What happens when you throw a used soup can in the trash? What happens when you recycle or reuse it?
6. Invite students to talk about two words (and their definitions) that they remember from the story. Create a Word Wall for students to refer to during the week. Encourage students to use one of the words in class discussions and as they do the activity.
7. Make connections by asking students what they do at home with their trash. What do they recycle? How do they recycle it (e.g., single stream recycling, sorted recycling bins, going to the dump)?
8. If you have recycling in your classroom or school, revisit the school rules about recycling.

9. Make a list of items at home and at school that are commonly thrown away. Have students brainstorm ideas for reusing the items. You can refer back to this list if you decide to do additional projects.
10. Explain to students that they will be reusing a milk carton to make a bird feeder. Ask, *How can this activity help the environment?*
 - Help students cut out two facing sides of the carton.
 - Next, make a hole on two sides of the base of the carton so students can insert a stick or dowel through the carton for birds to perch on. (Make sure that the dowel is longer than the bottom of the carton.) Poke or cut a hole in the top of the carton for the string. Fill the bottom of the carton with sunflower seeds or other bird food.
 - Students can take their bird feeders home or choose several to hang on trees around the school. Have them watch the birds that come to the bird feeder and report back to class on what they observe.

Vocabulary List

- **choice:** When you make a choice, you pick between different things.
- **consequences:** Consequences are things that happen because of something else.
- **decompose:** When something decomposes, it means it breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces until it's gone.
- **garbage:** Anything that you throw away.
- **environment:** All the things in nature—plants, animals, the water we drink, and the air we breathe.
- **landfill:** A landfill is a place where garbage is taken and covered with dirt.
- **reuse:** When you reuse something, it means you use it again.
- **pollute:** When you pollute something, it means you make it dirty.
- **repurpose:** When you repurpose something, you use it different than how it was originally used.

Teacher Tip

There are many different ways to make bird feeders from common household items. You may want to research additional ideas online and offer a variety of options with different materials. Display the related books and encourage students to browse through them.

Extension Ideas

Have students view the related MARTHA SPEAKS video, [“Paws and Effect.”](#) or interactive texts, [“Can You Dig It?”](#) and [“Waste Not, Want Not.”](#) Have students make pencil containers with used soup cans, as is shown in the story. You can arrange a visit from the school janitor to explain how the school or town recycles. Invite parents to talk about how they reuse and recycle in their home. If possible, take a field trip to a recycling plant.

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MARTHA'S TRUE STORIES: TEACHER'S GUIDE

Martha's True Stories: Introduction

[*Martha's True Stories*](#) is a collection of 12 interactive nonfiction texts that are ideal for classroom use. Featuring the popular characters from the *Martha Speaks* show, the stories cover a range of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) topics and include vocabulary prompts and definitions.

You can use *Martha's True Stories* in conjunction with existing lessons or build lessons around them. The focus on vocabulary—the underlying curriculum of the *Martha Speaks* television show and related educational materials—also make *Martha's True Stories* ideal for lessons with English language learners.

Martha's True Stories: Overview

Martha's True Stories are divided into four STEM categories: Environment (Science), Technology, Inventions (Engineering) and Measuring (Math). Within each category, there are two nonfiction texts about the topic, plus other kinds of nonfiction texts (instructions, recipes, a made-up website, and a poster). There are also four related *Martha Speaks* videos (one for each STEM topic).

After students read the texts, they can review the words using the Word Bones interactive glossary. There is also a short, but fun Quizmo (vocabulary quiz) for each story or text that will help reinforce new vocabulary and concepts.

Created especially for this site, the lessons listed below are accompanied by this Teacher's Guide and [Teaching Tips for English Language Learners](#).

Martha's True Stories Lessons

[How Do You Measure Up?](#)

[Operation Ice Cream](#)

[Super Inventions](#)

[A Tale of Two Soup Cans](#)

Martha's True Stories Lessons for English Language Learners

[Getting to the Game](#)

[Sunflower Bone Biscuits](#)

[Waste Not, Want Not](#)

Because *Martha's True Stories* were originally designed for children to enjoy on their own or with a family member, activity ideas and tips for parents are provided (click on "Tips" in the upper right hand corner of the page). You can easily adapt these for your classroom.

The handy [Martha's True Stories Chart](#) provides a description of each text, the targeted vocabulary words, downloadable PDFs of each text, videos, and ideas for families about where to find and how to use similar types of nonfiction.

Focus on Nonfiction

Increasingly, the value and importance of reading nonfiction has been reflected in the Common Core and other ELA standards. As 21st-century readers, it's essential for elementary school students to find, understand, and evaluate information. Reading nonfiction helps to build background knowledge and vocabulary, as well as critical thinking and media literacy skills.

The fun and appeal of *Martha's True Stories* will help engage students. Because they are interactive, the nonfiction texts are especially accessible and will encourage children to read and reread them.

Here are some strategies to help children understand and appreciate the nonfiction genre:

- Introduce *Martha's True Stories* by modeling the interactive features. Demonstrate how the sound button works. Note the highlighted vocabulary words and their definitions. Tap and move objects as you click within the story.
- Build on the topic by providing other nonfiction books. When using print books, note typical nonfiction elements (table of contents, chapter and section headings, sidebars, captions, diagrams, indices, and so on).
- Compare and contrast print books with *Martha's True Stories*. What elements do they have in common? How are they different?
- Be sure to include the non-narrative texts (recipe, poster, website, instructions) as examples of different kinds of nonfiction. Find examples of these types of texts that we use every day.
- Note the playful way the Word Bones glossary and the Quizmo vocabulary quizzes in *Martha's True Stories* are designed, which would not be possible in a print book.

The interactive texts are ideal for partner or group reading. You can create cross-age (with younger and older buddies) or same-age Reading Buddies sessions. Less proficient readers can use the "sound on" option to check their decoding and understanding.

Average or more advanced readers may enjoy rereading the texts with the sound on to check their own understanding, to hear the characters' voices, or for another kind of reading experience. You can also display the story on an interactive white board in order to share with the whole class as part of a lesson. You can download and print out PDFs of each story as well.

Focus on Vocabulary

In addition to providing informational text, each story has been designed to teach nine high-level oral vocabulary words. As they read the text, children can use the pictures and the context for clues to the meaning of the words or they can click on the word for a child-friendly definition.

Children can go back and forth through the story to get more comfortable with the vocabulary. As they read the story several times through, their fluency will also improve. The Word Bones interactive glossary that comes at the end of each story is another great way to reinforce vocabulary knowledge and to check on children's understanding of the words. The Quizmo vocabulary quizzes give children a chance to test their knowledge. Student pairs can take turns answering the questions or picking out words from the glossary. They can also repeat the quizzes until they know all of the words.

For additional tips on vocabulary strategies, refer to [Teaching Tips for English Language Learners](#). Although aimed at ELL students, these strategies can be adapted for use in any classroom.

The interactive stories can be an inspiration for children to create their own nonfiction texts. Whether they choose a narrative style or another nonfiction format, they can create reports, homework assignments, and multimedia presentations.

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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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