



**RedRover Readers Program**

**Discussion and Activity  
Guide for**

***Max Talks to Me***

**Written by Claire Buchwald, illustrated by Karen Ritz**



P.O. Box 188890 | Sacramento, CA 95818  
916.429.2457 tel | 916.378.5098 fax | [www.redrover.org](http://www.redrover.org) web | [info@redrover.org](mailto:info@redrover.org)

**Concepts:**

- Could a dog and a person communicate?
- What does communication between a dog and a person look like?
- What are we learning about dogs (and other animals) when we listen and observe?

**Before Reading**

Ask students if they have talked to anyone today. Ask the students if they have ever talked to an animal. Ask the students if they have listened to anyone today. Ask the students if they have ever listened to an animal.

Read the title of the book: Max Talks to Me.

Ask: “What does it mean to communicate?” (Ask extending questions like, “Can you communicate without words?” “What might that look like?”)

Look at the students. Pause and listen silently.

Ask:

- Are we communicating right now? Listen to students’ responses, pausing and modeling active listening.
- How is listening part of communicating? Listen to students’ responses. Gently, make eye contact.

Share the cover of the book with the students.

- Who is Max?
- Who is telling the story?
- What else is similar between the boy and Max?

Ask students to listen to and watch Max as the boy in the story listens to and watches him. Ask students to notice the dog’s eyes throughout the story’s illustrations.

**During Reading**

On the page that begins, “When I get his leash,” ask, “How do you think Max feels in this picture?”

On the page with the boy and Max in the grass, ask, “How do you think the boy is feeling?” “How do you think Max is feeling?”

On the page that begins “With his brown eyes, he looked into my sadness,” ask, “What have you been noticing about Max’s eyes?” (Do eyes play a role in communication? How so? In what ways do you think?)

At the bottom of the page that begins, “We like to curl up on the couch,” ask, “Why do you think the boy feels good about himself when he’s with Max?”

## **After Reading**

Ask:

- Do Max and the boy communicate?
- What does Max use to communicate with the boy?
- If a dog uses senses to communicate with a person, what does the person need to do?

### **Activity: Communicating through senses**

On the whiteboard or chart paper, create a five-column chart and draw a dog's eye, nose (snout), ear, mouth and body. Use the character of Max as a model. Label the drawings. (Possible responses are in italics.)

<b>How do dogs communicate?</b>	<b>Max's eyes</b>	<b>Max's nose (snout)</b>	<b>Max's ears</b>	<b>Max's mouth</b>	<b>Max's body</b>
When Max is thirsty.	<i>watching the boy</i>	<i>facing the boy</i>	<i>up, alert</i>	<i>open</i>	<i>sitting</i>
When Max wants to go for a walk.	<i>watching the leash</i>	<i>facing the boy</i>	<i>up, forward</i>	<i>open</i>	<i>on his feet; tail up high</i>
When Max is walking.	<i>looking at things</i>	<i>sniffing, down and up</i>	<i>sideways</i>	<i>closed when he's sniffing</i>	<i>relaxed</i>
When Max is playing Frisbee.	<i>watching</i>	<i>Up</i>	<i>back</i>	<i>catching the Frisbee</i>	<i>jumping</i>
When Max is sitting with the boy being petted.	<i>soft, relaxed</i>	<i>resting on the boy</i>	<i>straight up</i>	<i>closed</i>	<i>paws on the boy, body laying down, relaxed</i>

For very young children: Have students point to their own eyes, noses, ears, mouths and bodies as you call out the terms. Review the story's illustrations. Have students describe the eyes, nose, ears, mouth and body (including the tail) of Max in several of the drawings. Encourage descriptive words. Complete the chart.

Ask:

- How does Max the dog use senses to communicate or "talk"?
- Why do you think Max communicates with the boy?
- Why do you think the boy listens to Max?
- Do you listen to dogs, cats or other animals? (Let students share their stories. These may be different from or similar to stories shared earlier.)
- What senses do we use to communicate? Have students point to their ears, noses etc. Invite students to explain how they communicate through watching, sniffing, etc.

## **Extensions**

### **A. Using senses**

Ask students how a dog, like Max, gathers information. Ask students to name the senses. Show items from a dog's life such as a chew toy (best if already slobbered on!), leash, water bowl, food bowl, dog food, chew bone, identification tag, squeak toy, dog treat, brush, pillow, etc. and have students use their senses to explore the items. Include all five senses. Share with students some facts about dogs' senses such as keen smell. (See facts on the last page of *Max Talks to Me*.) Pass around the items and have students imagine how the items look, smell, feel, taste and sound to a dog.

### **B. Dog body language**

Ask students how a dog uses body language to communicate.

Teach students a play bow. (Refer to the illustration in the story and also demonstrate.) Then, have students use their hands and bodies to make the movements of ears, tail and body in response to the emotions you describe (curious, happy, scared, sad, tired) by asking, "What might it look like when a dog is happy? Scared? Etc."

For students in third grade or higher, share the labeled illustrations of dog body language from the link below. Ask students what each behavior communicated. Provide handouts of the dog body language (several on one large sheet of paper). Have students draw pictures of what they imagine the dog is responding to. Encourage students to write a one-sentence description. Ask students what they have drawn and why.

A dog body language activity is at the bottom of this lesson and can also be found on the RedRover Readers resource page:

Canine Body Language Coloring Page:

[http://redrover.org/sites/default/files/Readers/Discussion\\_Guides/Canine-Body-Language-Coloring-Page-Tip-Sheet.pdf](http://redrover.org/sites/default/files/Readers/Discussion_Guides/Canine-Body-Language-Coloring-Page-Tip-Sheet.pdf)

Canine Body Language Coloring Page:

[http://redrover.org/sites/default/files/Readers/Discussion\\_Guides/Canine-Body-Language-Coloring-Page-SarahWilsonDogExpert.com\\_%20%281%29.pdf](http://redrover.org/sites/default/files/Readers/Discussion_Guides/Canine-Body-Language-Coloring-Page-SarahWilsonDogExpert.com_%20%281%29.pdf)

Both resources were created by Sarah Wilson and used with permission.

### C. A Dog for a Day

Help students better understand what dogs communicate through body language. First have students complete the matching activity below or do the activity as a class together. Discuss as a class the kinds of situations they think these dogs would be responding to, ask, “What would make a dog happy?” “What would make a dog scared or nervous?” “What would make a dog feel threatened?” Then pretend to be dogs together. Lastly, invite students to write and illustrate a story on their own that includes dog body language.

Physically practice a few dog postures with your students using the images below. Get on all fours on the ground and make sure each child has enough room to move around. Start with “happy/relaxed” with your mouth loosely opened, ears relaxed/loose/up but to the side (use your hands to model ears) with a light tail wag (move your back end). Then try raising a hand/paw up while leaning back or away from what is scary with a crouched posture (your head and rear-end lowered) to practice a “frightened/submissive” posture. Then practice a play bow by lowering your front arms down and sticking your rear-end up in the air to communicate that you are a dog who wants to “play.”

Now ask students to think about what it would be like to be a dog for one day? Ask, “What would you want to do if you were a dog for a day?” “What would you think about?” “Where would you go?” “What would you look like as a dog doing all of these things throughout your day?”

Invite students to write a story and complete this sentence, “If I was a dog for a day, I would...” Encourage students to include illustrations. The dog body language should match what is happening in their story. For example, “If I was a dog for a day, I would go to the dog park and play.” [Picture of a dog doing a play bow or looking happy/excited]. “After the dog park I would go to my favorite pet store to get yummy treats.” [Picture of a dog with a wagging tail/ relaxed mouth.] “On the way to the pet store I saw a huge truck that scared me.” [Picture of a dog who is frightened.] “At night I’d curl up with my human brother while he read books.” [Picture of a happy/content dog curled up.]

Draw a line from each picture to the three words that describe it.

May Be Friendly

Nervous

Frightened

Leave Alone

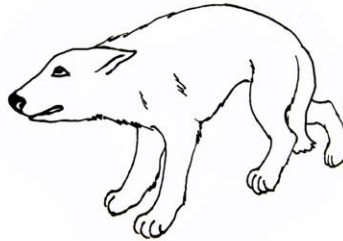
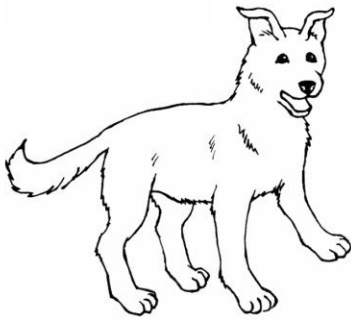
"Angry"

Happy

Threatening

Stay Away

Relaxed

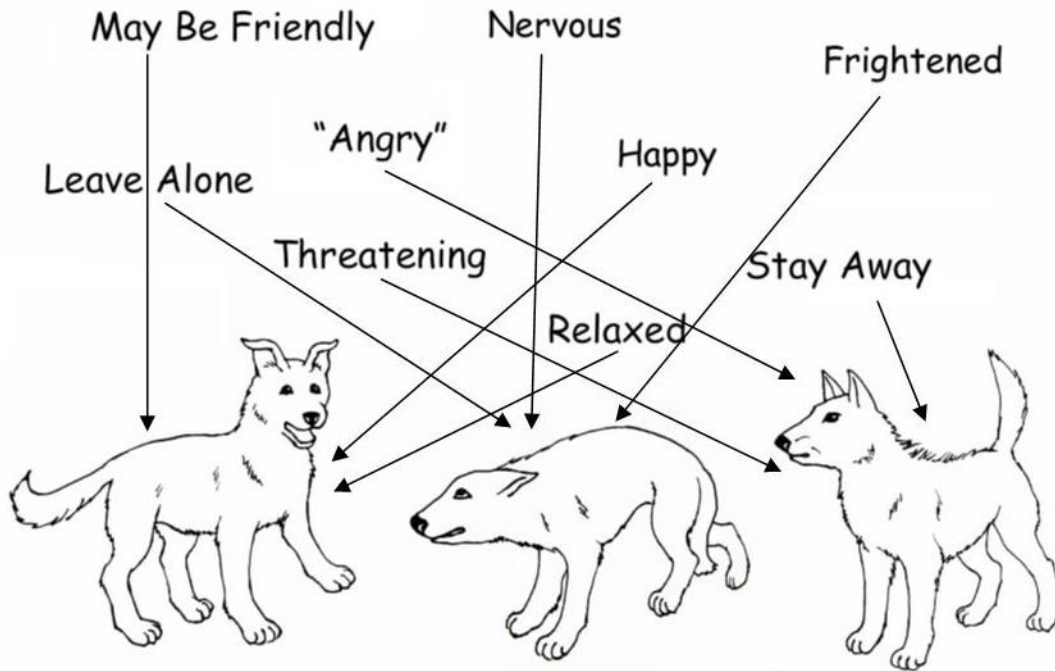


Sarah Wilson, SarahWilsonDogExpert.com

Drawn by Arielle Fischer

## Dog body language answer key

Draw a line from each picture to the three words that describe it.



Sarah Wilson, SarahWilsonDogExpert.com

Drawn by Arielle Fischer

## **D. Friendship**

Ask students to share stories of animals they have been friends with. These stories may be real or imaginary. As you listen, focus on the qualities of the friendship. Invite students to illustrate a friendship between themselves and a dog or another animal. Take time to listen to the students describe their pictures. Ask students why an animal might be a good friend. Ask students how friendship is the theme (main message) of *Max Talks to Me*.

## **E. Animal Behavior Observation**

Visit a real shelter to observe animal behaviors for dogs and cats. Some animal shelters may offer virtual tours or be willing to Skype with your class to show off their animals and the facility if a field trip to the actual building is not possible.

Encourage children to choose one animal to focus on and record what they notice about the animal's behavior and body language. Use the form below or create your own to capture the students' responses. A sketch sheet to draw what they observe can also be added.

## **F. Design a Dream Animal Shelter**

Invite students to think about how an animal shelter keeps animals happy, healthy and safe during their stay. Brainstorm as a group some of the things that are needed. (Possible answers include soft beds, food, water, a way to keep animals separated, water bowls, food bowls, an area to play, balls to play, blankets, toys, music, caring staff and volunteers, collars, etc.)

If possible, include a visit to a real animal shelter so they can make observations.

Tell students to imagine they have community support and all of the money in the world to design their dream animal shelter. If they have visited a real animal shelter, ask how their dream shelter might be different from the animal shelter they visited and if there are ways their dream shelter would be the same. Invite students to get creative and design their own dream animal shelter. Ask students to draw their shelter and label what they decide to include in it. Before they begin drawing ask the following questions:

What will your dream animal shelter look like? (How big is it? How many animals can stay there at one time?)

Where will your animal shelter be located?

What types of things will it have in it? What will make animals like it?

(How will it keep them healthy, happy and safe?)

What will make people like it? (How will you get people to visit and adopt animals?)

Why is it a dream animal shelter?

Have students share their designs with a partner or in front of the class.



## **Final Thoughts**

Leave the students thinking by asking some or all of these questions:

- Do you think Max and the boy are friends?
- Why would a dog and a person become friends?
- What is friendship?
- Why do we like to have friends?
- How can we be good friends to each other and to animals?
- Is Max a good friend?
- Why do you think the author of *Max Talks to Me* gave Max the dog a name but not the human boy? What does it mean to name an animal? How do we think of names for animals? Why do we name animals?
- *Max Talks to Me* is about a dog. Could a person be friends with a cat or rabbit or other animal? Listen to the students' ideas. Be sure to ask the students what communication ("talking") looks like in those friendships.
- Ask the students, "What are some ways you could "listen" to a pet in your life?" (list these on the board)

## **At the End of the Lesson**

Ask students to reflect on the questions, "What did you learn from today's book and discussion that you didn't know before?" You can do this with the whole group, in a sharing circle or related class meeting format, by having students fill out index cards, or other formats as you choose. We recommend that you have a variety of formats. After getting a sense of what the students learned, reinforce key themes that they mentioned and add perhaps one or two that you would like them to keep in mind from the key concepts. Also discuss any follow up assignments or take home materials. Remember the students' responses to the question, "What did you learn?" to add to your report about this reading.



## Shelter Animal Behavior Observation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Species/Type of Animal: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What was the animal doing before you came up to him or her?

---

---

Did the animal's behavior change when you came up to him or her? Yes or no? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, what changes did you notice?

---

---

Describe the animal and his or her environment:

---

---

What do you notice about the animal's ears? (Are they up, down, forward, back or flat against the animal's head?)

---

---

What do you notice about the animal's eyes? (Are they bright, open and alert or dim and partly closed?)

---

---

What do you notice about the animal's body?

---

---

What do you notice about the animal's tail?

---

---

Based on your observations above, what do you think this animal is communicating and how do you think he or she is feeling?

---