



# Teacher Notes

## The Making of Martha Mayfield

by Jo Dabrowski

Teacher notes prepared by Bec Kavanagh

### Publication Details

Publisher: Affirm Press  
ISBN: 9781923022928  
Size/format: 128 x 198mm, 304 pages, PB  
RRP: \$17.99  
Pub Date: 26 August 2025  
Reader ages: 9-12 years

### Themes

- Friendship
- Ideas
- Confidence
- Family
- Personal growth
- Overcoming shyness
- Celebrating differences

### About the Book

Martha Mayfield has always been the quiet kid. Martha is, after all, her mother's daughter. The shy child of an even shyer mum. And she likes it this way. That is, until Martha's mum loses her job. And Martha's teacher overlooks her at school. And soon, Martha realises something has to give. Can she really go through life being so quiet that nobody takes her seriously? Should she really keep all her good ideas to herself forever? Putting yourself out there is every quiet kid's worst nightmare, but Martha is determined to make

the most of it. And perhaps to make something of herself along the way ...

*The Making of Martha Mayfield is an endearing yet funny story about coming out of your shell, finding out what you're capable of, and showing the world who you really are.*

### About the Author

Jo Dabrowski is a children's author and illustrator whose debut middle-grade novel, *Get Your Act Together, Doris Kozlowski*, was shortlisted for the 2024 Readings Children's Prize. She loves readings adult and kids books in all genres, but gets most excited about the books she can see a bit of herself in, and hopes that her readers find a bit of themselves in her books too. She lives in Melbourne, Australia, and loves rock climbing, marathon running, learning French and lying about her interests.

### Before Reading

- Read the blurb of the book aloud – what does it tell you about who or what the book is about? Does this seem like the kind of book you'll enjoy? Why/why not?
- Martha has to grapple with overwhelming shyness in the book. Is this something that you're familiar with?
- Discuss the title – what does 'the making of...' mean in this context?

### Comprehension Questions

- What is your first impression of Martha?
- What is Mrs Gordon's 'Golden Rule'?
- What happens when Martha starts to feel nervous about something? Can you relate to this?
- 'When you're quiet, people assume you don't have anything to say. But I have plenty to say. I just say most of it inside my head' (p10). What are some of the things that Martha wishes she could say out loud?
- How is Martha's house different from other people's houses?
- How does Martha feel about the assumption that Grace will be school captain? How does she feel when Mrs Gordon doesn't even give her a form?
- What's the difference between Real Martha and Paper Martha? How does Paper Martha help Real Martha figure out what she wants?
- Which of the school captain skills does Martha recognise that she needs to work on? What helps her to develop each of these skills?
- Why is Martha angry at Sadie's response when she tells her that she wants to be school captain? How could Sadie have responded in a more supportive way?
- How are Paper Dad's 'what ifs' different to Martha's own 'what ifs'?
- What does someone write on Martha's campaign poster? Is she right – does their comment reveal something awful about her? Or is Mr Peeples right – does it say more about the person who wrote it?
- What does Iris say to Martha that provokes her into cutting up Iris's formal dress? Does she deserve this?
- What does Stella tell Martha about her sister? How are Martha and Paula alike?
- In what way does Iris wish that she was more like Martha?
- What does Paper Dad tell Martha to get her to do her speech?

- What are some of the things that Martha's friends and family say to her that make her feel as if they don't believe in her? What could they say instead?
- How is Martha rewarded for what she's managed to achieve in her efforts to become school captain? How does this make her feel?

### Literacy

#### Figurative language

Figurative language is when words and phrases are used outside of their literal meaning to bring depth and complexity to a story. Two types of figurative language are metaphors and idioms. Look up a definition for each of these words.

Consider the following idioms from the book:

'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree'

'Eleanor hides her light under a bushel'

'it's now or never'

'you never know until you try'

'when they go low, we go high'

- What does the phrase 'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree' mean? How does it relate to Martha and her mum?
- What other idioms can you think of?

Martha uses one of these idioms as inspiration for her school captain application. Choose one of these (or another that you've heard) and use it as inspiration for a short reflective piece.

Martha likes Yolanda's jam and cream doughnuts because 'they might look plain, but there's so much good stuff inside' (p53).

- What might this be a metaphor of?
- What other metaphors can you find in the book?

#### Democracy

A democracy is described in the book as 'a system of government that allows people to decide who leads them' (p38).

Democracy can take place at federal, state and local levels of government. Give an example of an organisation for each level of government and discuss the role of democracy within this organisation.

- What is the democratic process that Martha is going to be involved in?
- What are the steps involved in this process?
- Martha is frustrated that everyone always thinks that 'leader means louder' (p75). What are some ways to be a leader without being loud?

### Final Reflections

- How would you describe what this book is about? Did you relate to Martha's journey? Why/why not?
- Who would you recommend this book to and why?
- What did you learn from Martha?

### Creative Activities

'In the theatre and in movies and on TV, the space where the actors perform is called a set. A set can be designed to look like it's indoors, like a café or a living room. Or it can be painted to look like it's outdoors – there could be mountains in the distance and even real dirt on the ground. A set can be on stage or in a studio. It can be an actual house or a whole neighbourhood. It can even be an entire town or city. Basically, you can build a set to look like any place you can imagine.' (p42)

- Martha builds sets in the book. What does she make them in?
- Build a shoebox-set for one of the scenes from the book. Write a short summary of what happens in the scene to accompany your set.
- Be creative – think of the way that Martha uses a metal bottle cap to create a miniature version of a big clock. What can you use to recreate a scene in miniature?
- How does Martha create the people for her sets? Why doesn't she want to show anyone?

Create a 'Martha for School Captain' campaign. What makes a good school captain? What do you think her strengths would be as a school captain? How would you convince people to vote for her? As a part of your campaign, you will need to design the following:

- A campaign slogan
- A poster
- A button/banner/cookie
- A list of campaign promises
- Write a speech for Martha to read out if she wins

'I don't have a handwritten note from Dad. If I did, what would it say?' (p61) Martha imagines that things would be different if her dad, Patrick, hadn't died. She thinks her mum would be more confident, and maybe she would be too.

- Write a letter from Martha's dad to Martha. What do you think he would want her to know or believe about herself?
- Write a letter from Martha at the end of the story to Martha at the beginning. What do you think she'd want to tell herself?