

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE INVISIBLE SCULPTURE WORTH \$18,000

High-Interest Nonfiction Reading Passage

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ Reading Passage ✓ Comprehension Questions
- ✓ Answer Key ✓ Teacher Guide

GRADES 4-6 • LEXILE ~750L • DOK LEVELS 1-4

Reading they'll actually do.

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WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ High-interest nonfiction reading passage (300-400 words)
- ✓ 6 comprehension questions spanning DOK levels 1-4
- ✓ Complete answer key with explanations
- ✓ Teacher guide with standards, pacing, and extensions

Questions or feedback? Leave a review or message us through TPT!

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THE INVISIBLE SCULPTURE WORTH \$18,000

In 2021, Italian artist Salvatore Garau sold a sculpture called 'Io Sono' ('I Am') for 15,000 euros—about \$18,000. The catch? The sculpture doesn't exist. There's nothing to see, nothing to touch. The buyer paid thousands of dollars for empty air.

Garau describes his work as an 'immaterial sculpture.' The piece consists only of the idea of a sculpture—the space where art could exist. When it was displayed at an art auction, there was simply a small square of tape on the floor marking where the invisible artwork supposedly stood.

The buyer received a certificate of authenticity, instructions for displaying the work, and nothing else. The instructions specify that the sculpture should be displayed in a private space, in an area roughly five feet by five feet, free from obstructions. You must look at the empty space and believe.

'The vacuum is nothing more than a space full of energy,' Garau explained. 'Even if we empty it and there is nothing left, according to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, that nothing has a weight. Therefore, it has energy that is condensed and transformed into particles.'

Critics were divided. Some called it brilliant—a statement about the nature of art, value, and belief. Others called it a scam, proof that the art world had lost all connection to reality. Late-night comedians had a field day mocking the sale.

Garau wasn't the first to challenge what counts as art. In 1917, Marcel Duchamp displayed a urinal in an art gallery. John Cage composed a piece of music that was four minutes and thirty-three seconds of complete silence. Conceptual art has always pushed boundaries.

The question Garau raises is profound: what exactly are we paying for when we buy art? The physical object? The idea behind it? The status of owning something others consider valuable? In selling nothing for \$18,000, Garau forced everyone to confront these questions—whether they liked the answers or not.

Word Count: 316 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: The Art Newspaper

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How much did 'Io Sono' sell for?

- A) \$1,800
- B) \$8,000
- C) About \$18,000
- D) \$180,000

2 What did the buyer physically receive for their purchase?

- A) A small statue
- B) A certificate of authenticity and display instructions
- C) A painting
- D) Nothing at all

3 How did Garau mark where the sculpture was displayed at the auction?

- A) With a pedestal
- B) With a small square of tape on the floor
- C) With a spotlight
- D) He didn't mark it at all

4 According to the passage, what earlier artworks challenged traditional definitions of art?

- A) The Mona Lisa and The Last Supper
- B) Duchamp's urinal and Cage's silent music composition
- C) Greek sculptures and Roman paintings
- D) Modern photography

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What is the main question Garau's artwork forces viewers to consider?

- A) How much art supplies cost
- B) What we're actually paying for when we buy art—the object, the idea, or the status
- C) Why auctions exist
- D) How to create sculptures

6

Based on the passage, what does the sale of 'Io Sono' reveal about the art market?

- A) All art must be physical to have value
- B) Value in art is partly created by belief, status, and the art world's acceptance rather than just physical materials
- C) Only Italian art is valuable
- D) Art should never be sold

ANSWER KEY

The Invisible Sculpture Worth \$18,000

1. C) About \$18,000

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'sold a sculpture... for 15,000 euros—about \$18,000.'

2. B) A certificate of authenticity and display instructions

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'The buyer received a certificate of authenticity, instructions for displaying the work, and nothing else.'

3. B) With a small square of tape on the floor

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'there was simply a small square of tape on the floor marking where the invisible artwork supposedly stood.'

4. B) Duchamp's urinal and Cage's silent music composition

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage mentions: 'In 1917, Marcel Duchamp displayed a urinal in an art gallery. John Cage composed a piece of music that was four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence.'

5. B) What we're actually paying for when we buy art—the object, the idea, or the status

DOK 3 — Analysis. The passage concludes that Garau raises the question: 'what exactly are we paying for when we buy art? The physical object? The idea behind it? The status of owning something others consider valuable?'

6. B) Value in art is partly created by belief, status, and the art world's acceptance rather than just physical materials

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. Someone paid \$18,000 for nothing physical—only an idea and a certificate. This demonstrates that art value comes from belief, status, and acceptance within the art world, not just materials.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Invisible Sculpture Worth \$18,000

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1 — Refer to details and examples in a text
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4 — Determine meaning of words and phrases
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8 — Explain how author uses evidence
- C3 Framework — Historical thinking skills

PACING OPTIONS

- Quick Read (10-15 min): Passage + questions 1-4
- Standard (20-25 min): Full passage + all questions
- Deep Dive (35-40 min): Add discussion + extension

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is 'Io Sono' really art, or is it a scam? What makes something qualify as art?
- The buyer paid for an idea, not a physical object. What other things do people pay for that aren't physical (experiences, status, etc.)?
- Some critics called this brilliant; others called it ridiculous. Can both be right? How?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Create your own piece of conceptual art and write an artist's statement explaining what it means and why it should be considered art.
- Research Marcel Duchamp's 'Fountain' (the urinal) and John Cage's '4'33"' (silent music). Write a comparison of these works to 'Io Sono.'
- Survey 10 people about whether they consider 'Io Sono' to be real art. Present your findings in a graph with analysis of the responses.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Struggling: Pre-teach vocabulary, partner reading
- Advanced: Add research, compare to related events
- ELL: Visual supports, pre-teach context

SOURCE

- The Art Newspaper / NPR