
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE OCTOPUS THAT ESCAPED THE TANK

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.

TERMS OF USE

Thank you for your purchase! By purchasing this resource, you agree to the following terms:

- **FOR YOUR CLASSROOM:** You may use this resource with your own students, print copies for your classroom, and save to your personal computer.
- **PLEASE DO NOT:** Share this resource with other teachers (please direct them to purchase their own copy), post this resource online where it can be publicly accessed, or claim this resource as your own.
- **NEED MULTIPLE COPIES?** Additional licenses are available at a discount. Please contact us or check our store for site license options.

CREDITS & COPYRIGHT

© Not Boring Media. All rights reserved. This resource was created for single-classroom use only.

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!

THE OCTOPUS THAT ESCAPED THE TANK

In 2016, an octopus named Inky became the world's most famous escape artist. He lived at the National Aquarium of New Zealand—until he decided he'd rather not.

Inky had arrived at the aquarium years earlier, rescued from a crayfish pot by local fishermen. He quickly became a favorite among staff and visitors, known for his intelligence and curious personality. Octopuses are remarkable creatures—they can solve complex puzzles, unscrew jar lids from the inside, and even recognize individual human faces. But no one expected what Inky would do next.

One night, after the aquarium closed and the lights went dark, Inky made his move. He squeezed through a small gap at the top of his tank—a space no bigger than a few inches. This might seem impossible, but octopuses have no bones. Their only hard structure is a small beak, about the size of a quarter. If the beak fits, the whole octopus fits.

Inky dropped to the wet floor and began crawling. Staff later found the evidence: a trail of suction-cup prints leading across the concrete. He moved with purpose, as if he knew exactly where he was going. And perhaps he did.

He found a drain pipe. The pipe was only six inches wide, but it stretched 164 feet through the building's plumbing before emptying into Hawke's Bay and the open ocean beyond. Inky squeezed in and disappeared into the darkness.

When staff arrived the next morning, they found an empty tank and a damp trail ending at the drain. Inky was gone. Despite searches, he was never seen again.

Scientists weren't entirely shocked. Octopuses have escaped aquariums around the world—some to raid neighboring tanks for fish, others seemingly just to explore. A few have even been caught climbing out at night, wandering the halls, and returning before dawn. But those octopuses came back.

Inky didn't want a snack or an adventure. He wanted out. And unlike those other octopuses, he found a path that led somewhere better than a glass box—the sea he came from. Somewhere in the waters off New Zealand, Inky is still out there, living life on his own terms.

Word Count: 352 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: National Geographic, 2016

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How did Inky first come to live at the National Aquarium of New Zealand?

- ☐ A) He was born there in captivity
- ☐ B) He was rescued from a crayfish pot by fishermen
- ☐ C) He was transferred from another aquarium
- ☐ D) He was purchased from a pet store

2 Why are octopuses able to squeeze through extremely small spaces?

- ☐ A) They can deflate their bodies like balloons
- ☐ B) They have no bones—only a small beak
- ☐ C) Their skin is covered in slippery oil
- ☐ D) They can temporarily shrink their organs

3 What does the phrase 'moved with purpose' suggest about Inky's behavior during his escape?

- ☐ A) He was wandering randomly and got lucky
- ☐ B) He seemed to know where he was going and acted deliberately
- ☐ C) He was frightened and trying to hide
- ☐ D) He was following another animal

4 How does the passage show that Inky's escape was different from other octopus escapes?

- ☐ A) Inky was the first octopus ever to leave a tank
- ☐ B) Other octopuses escaped to explore or find food, then returned—Inky left permanently
- ☐ C) Inky used tools to escape while others didn't
- ☐ D) Other octopuses escaped during the day, but Inky escaped at night

5

The passage says scientists 'weren't entirely shocked' by Inky's escape. What evidence does the author provide to explain why octopus escapes might not surprise scientists? Use at least two details from the text.

6

The passage ends by saying Inky is 'living life on his own terms.' What do you think the author wants readers to feel or think about Inky's choice? Do you think freedom was worth the risks he faced? Explain your reasoning using evidence from the text.

ANSWER KEY

The Octopus That Escaped the Tank

1. B) He was rescued from a crayfish pot by fishermen

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states Inky 'arrived at the aquarium years earlier, rescued from a crayfish pot by local fishermen.'

2. B) They have no bones—only a small beak

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage explicitly states 'octopuses have no bones. Their only hard structure is a small beak.'

3. B) He seemed to know where he was going and acted deliberately

DOK 2 — Inference. The phrase 'moved with purpose' combined with 'as if he knew exactly where he was going' suggests deliberate, planned action.

4. B) Other octopuses escaped to explore or find food, then returned—Inky left permanently

DOK 2 — Comparison. The passage contrasts octopuses that 'raid neighboring tanks' or explore and return with Inky, who 'didn't want a snack or an adventure. He wanted out.'

5. Sample Response:

The author provides several pieces of evidence: First, octopuses 'can solve complex puzzles, unscrew jar lids from the inside, and even recognize individual human faces,' showing high intelligence. Second, 'octopuses have escaped aquariums around the world' before—some raiding tanks for fish, others exploring at night and returning. This history of escapes, combined with their problem-solving abilities, explains why scientists weren't entirely surprised.

6. Sample Response:

Answers will vary. The author's tone suggests admiration for Inky—words like 'famous escape artist' and 'living life on his own terms' frame him as heroic rather than foolish. Students might argue freedom was worth the risk because Inky returned to 'the sea he came from,' his natural home. Others might note the dangers of the ocean versus the safety of the aquarium. Strong responses will weigh both sides and use text evidence about Inky's intelligence and deliberate actions.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Octopus That Escaped the Tank

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
- NGSS — Connections to scientific practices

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

- Inky chose freedom over safety and guaranteed food. When is that trade-off worth it?
- Should aquariums keep highly intelligent animals like octopuses? Where should we draw the line?
- What does Inky's planned escape suggest about what animals might 'want' or 'think'?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research: Investigate another famous animal escape. Compare the methods used and what each suggests about animal intelligence.
- Writing: Write a short story from Inky's perspective—what was he thinking as he made his escape?
- Creative: Design a habitat that would keep an intelligent octopus engaged and less likely to escape. Label your features.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- National Geographic, 2016