
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE WOMAN ALLERGIC TO WATER

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

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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!

THE WOMAN ALLERGIC TO WATER

Imagine being allergic to water. Every shower burns your skin. Every raindrop leaves a welt. Your own tears cause pain, and even sweating during a hot day triggers agony.

This is reality for people with aquagenic urticaria, one of the rarest medical conditions on Earth. Fewer than 100 cases have ever been documented in medical literature. When water touches the skin of someone with this condition—whether from rain, sweat, tears, a bath, or even humidity—they break out in painful, burning hives that can last for hours.

The condition typically strikes without warning during puberty. One day, a teenager takes a normal shower. The next day, the same shower leaves them screaming in pain, their skin covered in angry red welts. For most sufferers, the reactions grow more severe over time, not less.

Scientists still don't fully understand why this happens. The human body is roughly 60 percent water, so a true allergy to water molecules seems biologically impossible. Current theories suggest the reaction occurs when water interacts with oils or other substances on the skin's surface, creating a compound that triggers an immune response. But no one knows for certain, and research remains limited due to the condition's extreme rarity.

Living with aquagenic urticaria requires constant vigilance. Sufferers limit showers to just a few minutes, rushing through the pain. They check weather forecasts obsessively, avoiding any chance of rain. Some cannot exercise at all because their own sweat becomes a weapon against them. Drinking water is usually safe—the reaction only affects external skin—but even eating water-rich foods like oranges or watermelon can sometimes irritate the mouth and throat.

There is no cure. Treatments focus only on managing symptoms: antihistamines to reduce reactions, barrier creams to protect skin, and lifestyle changes to minimize water contact. For people with this condition, activities most of us never think twice about—washing dishes, swimming, getting caught in a summer storm, or crying at a sad movie—become calculated risks with painful consequences.

Word Count: 332 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: National Institutes of Health

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 What happens when water touches the skin of someone with aquagenic urticaria?

- ☐ A) Their skin becomes temporarily numb
- ☐ B) They break out in painful, burning hives
- ☐ C) They develop a fever
- ☐ D) Their skin changes color permanently

2 When does aquagenic urticaria typically first appear?

- ☐ A) At birth
- ☐ B) During early childhood
- ☐ C) During puberty
- ☐ D) In old age

3 What does the word 'vigilance' most likely mean in this passage?

- ☐ A) Carelessness
- ☐ B) Careful watchfulness
- ☐ C) Medical treatment
- ☐ D) Physical exercise

4 Why do scientists find a true 'water allergy' biologically puzzling?

- ☐ A) Water is not a natural substance
- ☐ B) The human body is about 60 percent water
- ☐ C) Allergies only affect children
- ☐ D) Water doesn't interact with human skin

5

The passage describes several ways this condition affects daily life. Choose two specific examples and explain how each one transforms an ordinary activity into a 'calculated risk.'

6

The passage mentions that even crying causes pain for people with this condition. What emotional and psychological effects might this have on a person's life? How might being unable to cry freely change the way someone processes grief, stress, or even joy?

ANSWER KEY

The Woman Allergic to Water

1. B) They break out in painful, burning hives

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states they 'break out in painful, burning hives that can last for hours.'

2. C) During puberty

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states 'The condition typically strikes without warning during puberty.'

3. B) Careful watchfulness

DOK 2 — Vocabulary in context. The passage describes people limiting showers, checking weather 'obsessively,' and avoiding rain—all examples of careful watchfulness.

4. B) The human body is about 60 percent water

DOK 2 — Text evidence. The passage explicitly states: 'The human body is roughly 60 percent water, so a true allergy to water molecules seems biologically impossible.'

5. Sample Response:

Two examples: (1) Exercise—most people exercise to stay healthy, but for someone with this condition, 'their own sweat becomes a weapon against them,' causing painful hives. A simple jog could mean hours of burning skin. (2) Crying—something most people do naturally during sad moments becomes dangerous because tears touching the face cause pain. This transforms emotional expression into a physical threat.

6. Sample Response:

Answers will vary. Crying is a natural emotional release that helps people process difficult feelings. If crying causes physical pain, a person might try to suppress emotions to avoid reactions, potentially leading to bottled-up feelings or difficulty processing grief and stress. Even happy tears—at weddings or reunions—would be painful. This could create isolation, as the person can't express emotions the way others do. Strong responses will consider both the physical and emotional dimensions.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Woman Allergic to Water

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

- How might being unable to cry freely affect someone's emotional health and relationships?
- What everyday activities do we take for granted that would become impossible with this condition?
- If scientists could cure this but it required risky experimental treatment, would you try it? What factors would you consider?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Design Challenge: Create a daily schedule for someone with this condition. What adaptations would they need?
- Research: Find another rare medical condition and create an informational poster explaining it.
- Writing: Write a diary entry from the perspective of someone experiencing their first allergic reaction to water.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- National Institutes of Health