

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE MAN WHO SURVIVED TWO ATOMIC BOMBS

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 MAN WHO SURVIVED TWO ATOMIC BOMBS

On the morning of August 6, 1945, Tsutomu Yamaguchi was walking to work in Hiroshima when the sky turned white. A moment later, the first atomic bomb in human history detonated less than two miles away.

The blast threw Yamaguchi to the ground. The heat seared the left side of his body with severe burns. The shockwave ruptured both eardrums. He was 29 years old, in Hiroshima on a business trip for his employer, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.

Stunned and badly wounded, Yamaguchi spent the night huddled in an air raid shelter. The city around him had been transformed into an apocalyptic wasteland—buildings flattened, fires raging, survivors stumbling through the ruins with horrific injuries. The next morning, despite his wounds, Yamaguchi dragged himself to the train station. Miraculously, trains were still running.

He boarded one heading home. His hometown was Nagasaki.

On August 9, just three days after surviving Hiroshima, Yamaguchi reported to work at Mitsubishi's Nagasaki office. He was in a meeting with his supervisor, trying to describe what he had witnessed. His supervisor was skeptical—how could a single bomb destroy an entire city?

Mid-sentence, the room filled with blinding white light.

The second atomic bomb had detonated over Nagasaki. Yamaguchi was again about two miles from ground zero. The explosion blew off his bandages, but the burns from Hiroshima had already damaged his skin so severely that he suffered fewer new injuries than he might have otherwise. He found his family—miraculously also alive—and they sheltered in the hills outside the destroyed city.

Yamaguchi survived both bombings. He went on to live for another 65 years, becoming the only person officially recognized by the Japanese government as a "nijyuu hibakusha"—a double atomic bomb survivor.

In his later years, Yamaguchi became a vocal advocate for nuclear disarmament, testifying before the United Nations and speaking to audiences around the world. He wanted humanity to understand what he had witnessed—twice. He died in 2010 at age 93, his message still urgent: such weapons must never be used again.

Word Count: 345 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: History.com

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1

Why was Yamaguchi in Hiroshima when the first atomic bomb was dropped?

- A) He lived there with his family
- B) He was on a business trip for Mitsubishi
- C) He was serving in the military
- D) He was visiting relatives

2

How much time passed between the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings?

- A) One day
- B) Three days
- C) One week
- D) Two weeks

3

What does 'nuclear disarmament' most likely mean based on context?

- A) Building more nuclear weapons
- B) Reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons
- C) Testing nuclear weapons safely
- D) Using nuclear power for electricity

4

Which detail creates the strongest dramatic irony in Yamaguchi's story?

- A) He was 29 years old when the first bomb fell
- B) His supervisor didn't believe a single bomb could destroy a city
- C) He escaped Hiroshima by traveling home to Nagasaki—the next target
- D) He lived to be 93 years old

5

The passage describes Yamaguchi's supervisor as 'skeptical' that a single bomb could destroy a city. Why might someone in 1945 have found this hard to believe? How does this moment add power to the narrative?

6

Yamaguchi spent his final years testifying about his experiences because he wanted 'humanity to understand.' Why do you think personal testimony is important when teaching about historical tragedies? What can survivor stories communicate that textbooks and statistics cannot?

ANSWER KEY

The Man Who Survived Two Atomic Bombs

1. B) He was on a business trip for Mitsubishi

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states he was 'in Hiroshima on a business trip for his employer, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.'

2. B) Three days

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'On August 9, just three days after surviving Hiroshima.'

3. B) Reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons

DOK 2 — Vocabulary in context. Yamaguchi advocated for this cause and said 'such weapons must never be used again'—suggesting he wanted them eliminated.

4. C) He escaped Hiroshima by traveling home to Nagasaki—the next target

DOK 2 — Literary analysis. The irony is that his escape route led him directly to the second bombing. The passage emphasizes this with the short paragraph: 'His hometown was Nagasaki.'

5. Sample Response:

In 1945, nuclear weapons were completely new—nothing in previous warfare could destroy an entire city with one bomb. The supervisor's skepticism makes sense given historical experience. This moment adds power because the second bomb proves Yamaguchi right while the supervisor is mid-doubt. It also shows how unprecedented the events were—even eyewitness accounts seemed unbelievable.

6. Sample Response:

Answers will vary. Personal testimony makes history human—it shows individual fear, pain, survival, and resilience that numbers can't convey. Statistics tell us 200,000 people died; Yamaguchi's story shows what one person felt, saw, and carried for 65 years. Personal stories create emotional connections that make events feel real and urgent. Strong responses will explain why this matters for preventing future tragedies—people remember stories more than statistics.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Man Who Survived Two Atomic Bombs

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
- 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

- Yamaguchi spent his final years advocating against nuclear weapons. Why might personal testimony be more powerful than statistics?
- His supervisor didn't believe one bomb could destroy a city—mid-sentence, the second bomb proved him wrong. What does this moment reveal about human nature?
- Should survivors of historical tragedies feel obligated to share their stories? What are the benefits and costs of reliving trauma publicly?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Timeline: Create a detailed timeline of August 6-9, 1945, showing Yamaguchi's journey between the two cities.
- Writing: Write a speech Yamaguchi might have given to the United Nations. What would he want the world to know?
- Research: Find another survivor who became an advocate. Compare how they used their experience to create change.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- History.com / Scientific American