

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS ROAD

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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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!

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Reading they'll actually do.

THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS ROAD

In Bolivia, there's a highway nicknamed 'Death Road.' Officially called North Yungas Road, it claims an estimated 200 to 300 lives per year—making it one of the deadliest roads on Earth.

The road stretches 43 miles from La Paz, Bolivia's capital, down into the Amazon rainforest. In that short distance, it drops over 11,000 feet in elevation. The road is barely 10 feet wide in most places—not enough room for two vehicles to pass safely. There are no guardrails. Sheer cliffs plunge 2,000 feet straight down into the jungle below.

Death Road was carved into the mountainside by Paraguayan prisoners during the 1930s. The construction was primitive, the engineering basic. The road was never designed for the heavy traffic it eventually carried. For decades, it was the only route connecting La Paz to the northern regions of Bolivia.

The dangers multiply in bad weather. Fog reduces visibility to nearly zero. Rain turns the dirt surface into slippery mud. Waterfalls cascade directly across the road during the wet season. Drivers must navigate hairpin turns with nothing between them and oblivion but their own skill and luck.

By Bolivian traffic law, vehicles drive on the left side of Death Road instead of the normal right. This rule exists so drivers on the cliff edge can better see how close their wheels are to the drop-off. When two vehicles meet, the uphill driver must reverse to find a wider spot—even if that means backing up for a mile.

In 2006, a new bypass road was completed, and most commercial traffic now uses the safer route. But Death Road hasn't disappeared. It's been reborn as a tourist attraction. Thousands of adventure seekers now bike down the route every year, calling it the ultimate thrill ride.

Death Road is a monument to human determination—both the determination to build roads through impossible terrain and the determination to survive traveling them.

Word Count: 316 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: National Geographic

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Approximately how many people die on Death Road each year?

- A) 20 to 30
- B) 50 to 100
- C) 200 to 300
- D) Over 1,000

2 Who originally built Death Road?

- A) Spanish colonists
- B) Paraguayan prisoners
- C) American engineers
- D) Bolivian farmers

3 Why do vehicles drive on the left side of Death Road instead of the right?

- A) It's a British territory
- B) So cliff-side drivers can better see how close they are to the edge
- C) The road is one-way
- D) There are traffic lights on that side

4 What happens when two vehicles meet on Death Road?

- A) Both vehicles stop and wait for help
- B) The uphill driver must reverse to find a wider spot
- C) One vehicle must drive off the cliff
- D) They drive side by side carefully

5

How has Death Road's purpose changed since the new bypass was built in 2006?

- A) It was completely closed
- B) It transformed from a necessary route into a tourist attraction
- C) More commercial trucks use it now
- D) It became a residential street

6

What does the continued popularity of Death Road as a tourist destination reveal about human psychology?

- A) People don't understand danger
- B) Bolivia has no other attractions
- C) Some people are drawn to controlled risk and extreme experiences
- D) Tourists are forced to visit

ANSWER KEY

The World's Most Dangerous Road

1. C) 200 to 300

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'it claims an estimated 200 to 300 lives per year.'

2. B) Paraguayan prisoners

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'Death Road was carved into the mountainside by Paraguayan prisoners during the 1930s.'

3. B) So cliff-side drivers can better see how close they are to the edge

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'This rule exists so drivers on the cliff edge can better see how close their wheels are to the drop-off.'

4. B) The uphill driver must reverse to find a wider spot

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'When two vehicles meet, the uphill driver must reverse to find a wider spot—even if that means backing up for a mile.'

5. B) It transformed from a necessary route into a tourist attraction

DOK 3 — Analysis. The passage explains that after the bypass, 'most commercial traffic now uses the safer route. But Death Road hasn't disappeared. It's been reborn as a tourist attraction.'

6. C) Some people are drawn to controlled risk and extreme experiences

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. Thousands choose to bike Death Road for thrills, even knowing its deadly history. This suggests humans sometimes seek controlled danger and extreme experiences, treating risk itself as entertainment.

TEACHER GUIDE

The World's Most Dangerous Road

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

- Thousands of tourists now bike down Death Road for fun. Why do people seek out dangerous experiences?
- The road was built by prisoners in the 1930s without proper engineering. Who is responsible when infrastructure built poorly causes deaths decades later?
- If you were Bolivia's transportation minister, would you close Death Road completely or keep it open for tourism? Defend your choice.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Calculate the grade (steepness) of Death Road using the information provided (11,000 feet drop over 43 miles). Compare this to roads in your area.
- Research the engineering challenges of building roads in mountainous terrain and create a presentation on how modern roads handle steep slopes safely.
- Write a travel blog post from the perspective of someone who just biked Death Road, describing both the thrill and the fear.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- National Geographic / BBC