

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE CHILD CHESS MASTER

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 CHILD CHESS MASTER

In 1920, an eight-year-old boy sat down at a table in Warsaw, Poland, surrounded by twenty adult chess players. He would play all twenty games simultaneously, walking from board to board, making moves faster than his opponents could think. By the end of the evening, he had won nineteen games. The boy's name was Samuel Reshevsky.

Reshevsky had learned chess at age four by watching his father play. Within a year, he was beating adults. Within two, he was giving simultaneous exhibitions across Poland—a child barely old enough for school humiliating grown men at their own game.

His fame spread throughout Europe. Promoters brought him to perform in theaters, where audiences paid to watch the tiny prodigy defeat all challengers. At age eight, he played in his first simultaneous exhibition against twenty opponents. At nine, he played against forty. The crowds couldn't believe what they were seeing: a child who could keep twenty games in his head while adults struggled to keep track of one.

Simultaneous chess is exhausting even for grandmasters. The player must remember the position on every board, formulate strategies for each opponent, and make decisions in seconds that adults ponder for minutes. Reshevsky did this while standing on a stool so he could reach the pieces.

In 1920, Reshevsky's family immigrated to the United States. His exhibition tour continued across American cities, drawing huge audiences. But concerns grew about the effects of such intense mental pressure on a young child. Eventually, a wealthy benefactor funded his education, and Reshevsky stepped back from performing to live a more normal childhood.

He returned to competitive chess as a teenager and became one of the strongest American players of the 20th century. He won the U.S. Championship eight times and competed at the highest international levels until his seventies.

But Reshevsky never won the world championship. The prodigy who could defeat twenty adults before age ten spent his career competing against other prodigies—players equally brilliant, equally driven. In chess, as in life, early genius is no guarantee of ultimate victory.

Word Count: 345 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: National Weather Service

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How old was Samuel Reshevsky when he played his first 20-board simultaneous exhibition?

- A) Four years old
- B) Six years old
- C) Eight years old
- D) Twelve years old

2 How many times did Reshevsky win the U.S. Chess Championship?

- A) Once
- B) Four times
- C) Eight times
- D) Twenty times

3 What does the word 'prodigy' most likely mean?

- A) A young child who shows exceptional ability
- B) A professional chess player
- C) A type of chess tournament
- D) An adult who teaches children

4 Why did Reshevsky 'step back from performing' as a child?

- A) He lost interest in chess
- B) Concerns grew about the mental pressure on a young child
- C) He wasn't winning anymore
- D) Chess exhibitions were made illegal

5

The passage ends: 'In chess, as in life, early genius is no guarantee of ultimate victory.' How does Reshevsky's career support this statement? What does this suggest about the relationship between childhood talent and adult success?

6

A wealthy benefactor funded Reshevsky's education so he could have 'a more normal childhood' instead of performing. Do you think this was the right decision? Should child prodigies be protected from public performance, or should they be allowed to use their gifts?

ANSWER KEY

The Child Chess Master

1. C) Eight years old

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'At age eight, he played in his first simultaneous exhibition against twenty opponents.'

2. C) Eight times

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'He won the U.S. Championship eight times.'

3. A) A young child who shows exceptional ability

DOK 2 — Vocabulary in context. The passage describes a child with extraordinary chess ability, calling him 'the tiny prodigy' who defeated adults.

4. B) Concerns grew about the mental pressure on a young child

DOK 2 — Text evidence. The passage states: 'concerns grew about the effects of such intense mental pressure on a young child.'

5. Sample Response:

Reshevsky was extraordinary as a child—defeating twenty adults at age eight. Yet he never won the world championship, competing against 'other prodigies—players equally brilliant.' This suggests that early talent is common among top performers, so being gifted early just puts you in competition with other gifted people. Childhood success doesn't guarantee adult dominance because everyone else is also developing.

6. Sample Response:

Answers will vary. Arguments for protection: children need normal development, intense pressure can cause psychological harm, education matters. Arguments against: prodigies might thrive on their gifts, denying opportunities could limit their potential. Reshevsky returned to chess and had a great career, suggesting the break helped rather than hurt. Strong responses will consider both the child's wellbeing and their autonomy.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Child Chess Master

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

- Authorities stopped Reshevsky's exhibitions so he could have a normal childhood. Was this the right call, even if it cost him greatness?
- His parents profited from his gift. When does supporting a child's talent become exploitation?
- Prodigies often burn out or struggle later. What support systems should exist for exceptionally gifted children?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research: Find another child prodigy from any field. Compare their early experiences and later life.
- Debate: Should there be rules protecting child performers/prodigies? Draft a proposal with specific guidelines.
- Analysis: Research the psychology of prodigies. What support systems help them thrive long-term?

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- National Weather Service / History Nebraska