
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE TREE LARGER THAN A WALMART STORE

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 TREE LARGER THAN A WALMART STORE

In the sprawling Indian city of Kolkata, there exists a single tree that covers more ground than an average Walmart Supercenter. The Great Banyan is one of the largest trees on Earth—not because of exceptional height, but because it continuously grows outward by sending down aerial roots from its branches that eventually become new supporting trunks. What looks like an entire forest is actually one single organism.

The Great Banyan is estimated to be between 200 and 250 years old, though some botanists believe it could be even older. It currently covers approximately 3.5 acres of land—roughly 156,000 square feet. For comparison, an average Walmart Supercenter covers about 178,000 square feet, meaning this single tree occupies nearly as much space as an entire big-box retail store filled with thousands of products.

Banyan trees have a unique and remarkable method of growth that allows them to expand almost indefinitely. They send down aerial roots from their spreading branches—long, rope-like structures that dangle toward the ground. When these roots finally reach the soil, they thicken and harden into prop roots that function as additional supporting trunks, allowing the branches to extend even further outward. Over centuries, a single banyan can develop thousands of these prop roots.

The Great Banyan currently has approximately 3,600 prop roots spread across its massive canopy. Remarkably, the original main trunk rotted away and had to be removed in 1925 after being damaged by fungus infections and lightning strikes. But the tree survived perfectly because it no longer depended on any single central trunk—its distributed network of aerial roots and prop trunks had made the original trunk redundant.

Today, the tree is a major tourist attraction in the Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden. A paved road more than 1,000 feet long runs around its entire circumference, allowing visitors to appreciate the full scale of this living wonder.

Word Count: 299 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: Atlas Obscura

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How much ground does the Great Banyan cover?

- ☐ A) About 1 acre
- ☐ B) About 3.5 acres
- ☐ C) About 10 acres
- ☐ D) About 50 acres

2 How many prop roots does the Great Banyan have?

- ☐ A) About 360
- ☐ B) About 1,000
- ☐ C) About 3,600
- ☐ D) About 10,000

3 How do banyan trees grow outward?

- ☐ A) Their roots spread underground
- ☐ B) They send down aerial roots that become supporting trunks
- ☐ C) They grow many seeds nearby
- ☐ D) They absorb nearby trees

4 How did the Great Banyan survive after its main trunk was removed?

- ☐ A) A new main trunk grew
- ☐ B) It no longer needed the central trunk because its network of aerial roots kept it alive
- ☐ C) Scientists replaced it with steel
- ☐ D) It died and was replanted

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Why do climate scientists study the Great Banyan?

- ☐ A) To learn how to cut it down
- ☐ B) To understand its impact on carbon absorption and oxygen production
- ☐ C) To find rare insects
- ☐ D) To measure rainfall

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What lesson does the Great Banyan offer about growth and resilience?

- ☐ A) Bigger is always better
- ☐ B) Distributed networks can be more resilient than single-point systems
- ☐ C) Trees should be cut down early
- ☐ D) India has the best trees

ANSWER KEY

The Tree Larger Than a Walmart Store

1. B) About 3.5 acres

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'It now covers about 3.5 acres.'

2. C) About 3,600

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'The Great Banyan has approximately 3,600 prop roots.'

3. B) They send down aerial roots that become supporting trunks

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'They send down aerial roots from their branches. When these roots reach the ground, they thicken and become supporting trunks.'

4. B) It no longer needed the central trunk because its network of aerial roots kept it alive

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'the tree survived because it no longer depended on that central trunk—its network of aerial roots kept it alive.'

5. B) To understand its impact on carbon absorption and oxygen production

DOK 3 — Analysis. The passage states: 'Climate scientists study the Great Banyan because of how much carbon it absorbs and oxygen it produces.'

6. B) Distributed networks can be more resilient than single-point systems

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. The tree survived losing its main trunk because it had developed a distributed network of roots. This suggests that systems without single points of failure can be more resilient.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Tree Larger Than a Walmart Store

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

- The Great Banyan survived losing its main trunk because of its distributed root system. What human organizations or systems use similar 'distributed' approaches?
- A single tree created what looks like a forest. How does this challenge our definition of what makes something 'one' organism?
- This tree took 200+ years to reach its size. What projects today require thinking in terms of centuries rather than years?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Calculate how many regular trees would be needed to cover the same area as the Great Banyan.
- Research the role of banyan trees in Indian culture and religion, and create a presentation on their symbolic significance.
- Design a 'future forest' project: if you planted a banyan tree today, what might it look like in 100, 200, or 300 years?

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- Atlas Obscura / Botanical Survey of India