
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE ISLAND THAT APPEARED AND VANISHED

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 ISLAND THAT APPEARED AND VANISHED

In November 2013, something strange rose from the Arabian Sea near Pakistan. A new island had appeared overnight, pushed up from the ocean floor by a powerful earthquake. Within hours, people were walking on land that hadn't existed the day before.

The island measured about 250 feet long and stood 60 feet above the water. Locals called it Zalzala Koh, meaning 'earthquake mountain' in Urdu. Curious visitors began arriving almost immediately, some planting flags and claiming the new land for themselves. Local fishermen even began harvesting the methane gas bubbling up from the seabed, a dangerous but profitable activity.

But here's the twist: the island wasn't really new, and it wouldn't last. What had risen from the sea was actually a 'mud volcano'—a mixture of mud, sand, and rock pushed up by gas pressure released during the earthquake. Similar islands have appeared in this region before, dating back to recorded sightings in 1945 and 1999.

For a few weeks, Zalzala Koh attracted visitors and sparked debates about ownership. Both Pakistan and India, who dispute territory in the region, seemed interested in the new land. Real estate speculators wondered about development opportunities. Scientists rushed to study its composition before it disappeared.

And disappear it did. Within two years, wave action and erosion had completely washed the island away. By 2016, satellite images showed nothing but open water where Zalzala Koh had stood. The earthquake mountain had returned to the sea, as if it had never existed.

This cycle has repeated throughout history. Mud volcanoes create temporary islands that last anywhere from a few months to a few decades before the ocean reclaims them. In 1999, a similar island lasted just one year. Another from 1945 remained visible for over 20 years.

Zalzala Koh's brief existence reminds us that the Earth is constantly changing. Solid ground isn't as permanent as we assume. The land beneath our feet—and beneath the waves—is always in motion.

Word Count: 302 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: BBC

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1

What caused the island to rise from the sea?

- ☐ A) Volcanic lava
- ☐ B) An earthquake
- ☐ C) Human construction
- ☐ D) A meteor impact

2

What does 'Zalzala Koh' mean in Urdu?

- ☐ A) 'Ocean treasure'
- ☐ B) 'New land'
- ☐ C) 'Earthquake mountain'
- ☐ D) 'Fisherman's island'

3

What is a 'mud volcano' according to the passage?

- ☐ A) A volcano that erupts liquid mud instead of lava
- ☐ B) A mixture of mud, sand, and rock pushed up by gas pressure
- ☐ C) An island made entirely of volcanic glass
- ☐ D) An underwater cave system

4

Why were both Pakistan and India interested in the island?

- ☐ A) It contained valuable minerals
- ☐ B) They dispute territory in the region
- ☐ C) Both countries helped create it
- ☐ D) It was a popular tourist destination

5

What broader point is the author making about Earth's geography?

- ☐ A) Islands are more valuable than continents
- ☐ B) Earthquakes only happen near Pakistan
- ☐ C) Land formations are constantly changing, not permanent
- ☐ D) All islands will eventually disappear

6

If another mud island appeared in this region, what could scientists predict based on historical patterns?

- ☐ A) It will become a permanent nation
- ☐ B) It will likely erode away within a few years to decades
- ☐ C) It will grow larger over time
- ☐ D) It will trigger more earthquakes

ANSWER KEY

The Island That Appeared and Vanished

1. B) An earthquake

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states the island was 'pushed up from the ocean floor by a powerful earthquake.'

2. C) 'Earthquake mountain'

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage directly states: 'Locals called it Zalzala Koh, meaning earthquake mountain in Urdu.'

3. B) A mixture of mud, sand, and rock pushed up by gas pressure

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'a mud volcano—a mixture of mud, sand, and rock pushed up by gas pressure released during the earthquake.'

4. B) They dispute territory in the region

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'Both Pakistan and India, who dispute territory in the region, seemed interested.'

5. C) Land formations are constantly changing, not permanent

DOK 3 — Analysis. The conclusion states: 'Solid ground isn't as permanent as we assume' and the Earth is 'constantly changing.'

6. B) It will likely erode away within a few years to decades

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. The passage documents a pattern: these islands 'last anywhere from a few months to a few decades before the ocean reclaims them.' Past examples (1945, 1999, 2013) confirm this cycle.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Island That Appeared and Vanished

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

- People rushed to claim land on an island that scientists knew would disappear. Why do you think people wanted to own something temporary?
- The passage says 'solid ground isn't as permanent as we assume.' How does this idea apply to other things in life we think of as permanent?
- If a new island appeared off your country's coast, who should own it? The country? The person who gets there first? No one?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Create a timeline showing the appearances and disappearances of mud volcano islands in this region (1945, 1999, 2013).
- Design a research station that could be quickly deployed to study a temporary island before it erodes away.
- Write a news article from the perspective of a journalist visiting Zalzala Koh in the weeks after it appeared.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- BBC / School of Oceanographic Studies, Jadavpur University