

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE ALLIGATOR THAT LIVED IN A SWIMMING POOL

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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THE ALLIGATOR THAT LIVED IN A SWIMMING POOL

For nearly 12 years, an American alligator named Gary lived in a backyard swimming pool at a house in Van Nuys, a neighborhood in Los Angeles, California. His owner had purchased him as a tiny baby in the 1990s from an exotic animal dealer, and Gary eventually grew to over six feet long while living in the modified pool, which had been adapted to serve as his habitat.

Gary's owner was a dedicated reptile enthusiast who had obtained the proper permits required to keep an alligator in California. He heated the pool water to maintain appropriate temperatures year-round, provided Gary with a diet of raw chicken and fish, and constructed basking platforms where the alligator could climb out of the water to warm himself under the California sun. Neighbors knew about the unusual resident but kept his existence quiet for years.

Authorities finally discovered Gary's presence in 2017 during an investigation related to other matters at the property. While the owner had permits, officials determined that the backyard enclosure didn't meet current safety standards for housing dangerous reptiles in a residential area. Gary needed to be relocated for both his own wellbeing and the safety of the surrounding community.

Gary was transported to a reptile sanctuary called the Colorado Gators Reptile Park, where he now lives with dozens of other rescued alligators in a more natural environment. His new home includes proper ponds, adequate basking areas, appropriate vegetation, and something he had never experienced before: the company of other alligators.

The case highlighted growing concerns about exotic pet ownership in America. Alligators can live 50 years or more and grow to 14 feet in length. Many people who purchase baby alligators—often sold when they're just inches long—don't fully realize the decades-long commitment they're making. Animal sanctuaries across the country are increasingly filled with surrendered reptiles whose owners couldn't handle them as they matured.

Gary adapted surprisingly well to sanctuary life, though staff noted he seemed genuinely confused by the presence of other alligators at first. Having never encountered another member of his own species, he had to learn alligator social behaviors from scratch. Over time, he integrated successfully and now appears to thrive among his own kind.

Word Count: 365 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: Orlando Sentinel

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How long did Gary live in the swimming pool?

- A) 2 years
- B) 6 years
- C) Nearly 12 years
- D) 20 years

2 Where does Gary live now?

- A) Still in the pool
- B) A reptile sanctuary in Colorado
- C) A zoo in California
- D) The wild

3 Why was Gary confused at the sanctuary?

- A) The food was different
- B) He had never seen another alligator before
- C) The water was cold
- D) There were no humans

4 Why are sanctuaries filled with surrendered reptiles?

- A) People breed too many
- B) Many owners don't realize how large exotic pets grow
- C) Sanctuaries buy reptiles
- D) Reptiles escape from zoos

5

What does 'a swimming pool isn't a swamp' suggest?

- A) Pools are better than swamps
- B) Even good care can't fully replicate natural habitat
- C) Alligators prefer pools
- D) Swamps should be illegal

6

What policies might prevent cases like Gary's?

- A) Ban all pets
- B) Require owners to demonstrate long-term resources
- C) Make alligators smaller
- D) Build more pools

ANSWER KEY

The Alligator That Lived in a Swimming Pool

- 1. C) Nearly 12 years**

DOK 1 — Recall.

- 2. B) A reptile sanctuary in Colorado**

DOK 1 — Recall.

- 3. B) He had never seen another alligator before**

DOK 2 — Inference.

- 4. B) Many owners don't realize how large exotic pets grow**

DOK 2 — Inference.

- 5. B) Even good care can't fully replicate natural habitat**

DOK 3 — Analysis.

- 6. B) Require owners to demonstrate long-term resources**

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Alligator That Lived in a Swimming Pool

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

- Is it ever ethical to keep wild animals as pets, even with proper permits and care?
- Gary had never seen another alligator. What might be lost when animals are raised in isolation?
- Should exotic pet ownership be more strictly regulated? What would be fair rules?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research the requirements for keeping exotic animals in your state and create an infographic.
- Compare Gary's pool life to what a wild alligator experiences.
- Design an ideal enclosure for an alligator that balances animal welfare and safety.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- Orlando Sentinel / ABC News