
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE MAN WHO LIVED IN AN AIRPORT FOR 18 YEARS

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

Thank you for your purchase! By purchasing this resource, you agree to the following terms:

- **FOR YOUR CLASSROOM:** You may use this resource with your own students, print copies for your classroom, and save to your personal computer.
- **PLEASE DO NOT:** Share this resource with other teachers (please direct them to purchase their own copy), post this resource online where it can be publicly accessed, or claim this resource as your own.
- **NEED MULTIPLE COPIES?** Additional licenses are available at a discount. Please contact us or check our store for site license options.

CREDITS & COPYRIGHT

© Not Boring Media. All rights reserved. This resource was created for single-classroom use only.

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 MAN WHO LIVED IN AN AIRPORT FOR 18 YEARS

In 1988, an Iranian refugee named Mehran Karimi Nasseri became trapped in the departure lounge of Paris's Charles de Gaulle Airport. He would remain there for the next 18 years, living among travelers who came and went while he stayed behind permanently.

Nasseri's troubles began when he lost his refugee papers while traveling through Europe. Without documentation, no country would accept him. France wouldn't let him leave the airport legally, and no other nation would let him enter. He was stuck in legal limbo—physically in France but legally nowhere at all.

The airport became his home. Nasseri slept on a red plastic bench in Terminal 1. He washed in public restrooms and read by fluorescent lights. Airport workers brought him meals, and travelers sometimes gave him money or magazines. He spent his days reading, writing in his diary, and studying economics from discarded textbooks.

Airport staff came to know him as 'Sir Alfred,' a name he gave himself. They looked out for him, making sure he had food and keeping his corner relatively private. Some considered him a friend; others saw him as a strange but harmless fixture of the airport landscape.

Nasseri's story inspired the 2004 film 'The Terminal,' starring Tom Hanks, though the movie took significant liberties with his actual experience. The real Nasseri lived a much lonelier and more difficult existence than Hollywood portrayed.

In 2006, Nasseri was hospitalized for a serious illness. French authorities finally granted him permission to remain in the country legally. After 18 years in the airport, he was free to leave—but he struggled to adjust to normal life. The outside world had changed dramatically while he remained frozen in time.

Nasseri's story raises uncomfortable questions about borders, bureaucracy, and belonging. In a world organized by nations and official papers, what happens to someone who falls through the cracks?

Word Count: 284 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: The Guardian

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How long did Nasser live in the airport?

- ☐ A) 8 years
- ☐ B) 12 years
- ☐ C) 18 years
- ☐ D) 25 years

2 What caused Nasser to become trapped?

- ☐ A) He missed his flight
- ☐ B) He lost his refugee papers
- ☐ C) He was arrested
- ☐ D) He chose to live there

3 What does 'legal limbo' mean in this passage?

- ☐ A) A type of dance
- ☐ B) Being recognized by multiple countries
- ☐ C) Having no legal status in any country
- ☐ D) A French legal term

4 How did airport staff treat Nasser?

- ☐ A) They ignored him
- ☐ B) They tried to arrest him
- ☐ C) They looked out for him and some considered him a friend
- ☐ D) They charged him rent

5

Why might Nasseri have struggled after leaving the airport?

- ☐ A) He didn't speak French
- ☐ B) The world had changed dramatically during his 18 years of isolation
- ☐ C) He preferred airports
- ☐ D) He became wealthy

6

What does Nasseri's story reveal about international systems?

- ☐ A) Airports should be larger
- ☐ B) Bureaucratic systems can fail individuals who don't fit categories
- ☐ C) Everyone should carry extra papers
- ☐ D) Movies are always accurate

ANSWER KEY

The Man Who Lived in an Airport for 18 Years

1. C) 18 years

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'He would remain there for the next 18 years.'

2. B) He lost his refugee papers

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage explains: 'Nasseri's troubles began when he lost his refugee papers.'

3. C) Having no legal status in any country

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'physically in France but legally nowhere.'

4. C) They looked out for him and some considered him a friend

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'They looked out for him... Some considered him a friend.'

5. B) The world had changed dramatically during his 18 years of isolation

DOK 3 — Analysis. The passage notes 'the outside world had changed dramatically while he remained frozen in time.'

6. B) Bureaucratic systems can fail individuals who don't fit categories

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. The passage raises questions about what happens when people 'fall through the cracks' of systems organized by 'nations and papers.'

TEACHER GUIDE

The Man Who Lived in an Airport for 18 Years

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
- 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

- Nasserri was 'physically in France but legally nowhere.' What does it mean to belong to a place, and what happens when bureaucracy says you don't belong anywhere?
- Airport staff cared for Nasserri for years. What does their kindness suggest about human nature?
- The movie 'The Terminal' made Nasserri's story seem more romantic than it was. Why do you think filmmakers changed his story?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research refugee and asylum laws in your country. What documents does someone need to legally enter and stay?
- Write a diary entry from Nasserri's perspective after 10 years in the airport. What would you think about? What would you miss most?
- Create a map of Charles de Gaulle Airport's Terminal 1 and mark where Nasserri lived, ate, slept, and spent his days.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- The Guardian / BBC