

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE TOWN THAT DISAPPEARED UNDERWATER

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 TOWN THAT DISAPPEARED UNDERWATER

In 1941, the United States government began construction on Shasta Dam in Northern California, creating what would become Shasta Lake—and permanently drowning the once-thriving mining town of Kennett beneath 400 feet of water. Today, during severe droughts when the lake level drops dramatically, the ghost town briefly resurfaces from the depths like a haunting reminder of what was sacrificed for progress, before disappearing again when the rains return.

Kennett was a prosperous copper mining town in the early 1900s, home to over 1,000 residents who had built a complete community in the remote northern California wilderness. The town had a bustling main street lined with businesses, several hotels accommodating travelers and workers, a hospital serving the region, and its own railroad connection to the outside world. Families raised children there, built homes, and created lives they expected to continue for generations.

When the federal government decided to dam the Sacramento River for water storage and hydroelectric power, Kennett lay directly in the path of the planned reservoir. Residents were given little meaningful choice in the matter. The government purchased their properties, often at prices significantly below actual market value, and demolished most of the buildings. Some homeowners were permitted to physically move their houses to higher ground elsewhere, but most structures were simply flattened. By 1942, the rising waters had covered everything that remained of the town.

Kennett lay undisturbed on the lake bottom for decades, slowly deteriorating in the murky depths. Then, during California's increasingly frequent and severe droughts, water levels began dropping enough to expose the town's remains. Building foundations, street layouts, and personal artifacts emerged from the mud like an underwater archaeological site. Curious visitors explored what remained of people's lives before the water inevitably returned to cover them again.

Kennett isn't unique. Across the American West, dozens of communities were drowned during the great dam-building era of the twentieth century. St. Thomas in Nevada, Monticello in California, and many others lie beneath artificial lakes that promised water and power but required permanent sacrifice.

Word Count: 340 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: National Human Genome Research Institute

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 When was Kennett flooded?

- A) 1901
- B) 1921
- C) 1941-1942
- D) 1961

2 How deep underwater is Kennett normally?

- A) 40 feet
- B) 100 feet
- C) 400 feet
- D) 1,000 feet

3 When does Kennett become visible?

- A) Every year
- B) During severe droughts
- C) Never
- D) During floods

4 How were residents treated?

- A) Generous compensation
- B) Little choice and often below-market prices
- C) They refused to leave
- D) They were ignored

5

What broader issue do drowned towns represent?

- A) All dams are bad
- B) Progress often benefits many while forcing sacrifices on a few
- C) Mining is dangerous
- D) Drought is good

6

How might we make similar decisions more fairly?

- A) Never build dams
- B) Ensure affected communities have voice and fair compensation
- C) Ignore small towns
- D) Build faster

ANSWER KEY

The Town That Disappeared Underwater

- 1.** C) 1941-1942

DOK 1 — Recall.

- 2.** C) 400 feet

DOK 1 — Recall.

- 3.** B) During severe droughts

DOK 2 — Inference.

- 4.** B) Little choice and often below-market prices

DOK 2 — Inference.

- 5.** B) Progress often benefits many while forcing sacrifices on a few

DOK 3 — Analysis.

- 6.** B) Ensure affected communities have voice and fair compensation

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Town That Disappeared Underwater

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

- If your town had to be flooded for a dam, how would you feel?
- Are there situations where the greater good justifies displacing communities?
- What should be preserved when a place is going to be destroyed?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research other drowned towns and map their locations.
- Interview someone who had to move due to a development project.
- Design a memorial for a drowned town that could be visible even underwater.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- National Human Genome Research Institute