
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE 335-YEAR WAR THAT NOBODY FOUGHT

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 335-YEAR WAR THAT NOBODY FOUGHT

In 1651, the Netherlands and a tiny group of islands off the coast of England went to war. The conflict lasted 335 years—and not a single shot was ever fired.

The strange story begins during the English Civil War. The Isles of Scilly, located off the southwestern tip of England, were held by Royalist forces loyal to King Charles I. Dutch ships had been helping the Parliamentary side, and Royalist ships based in Scilly began attacking Dutch vessels in revenge.

The Dutch were furious. In 1651, they sent an admiral to demand compensation for their losses. When the Royalists refused, the admiral declared war—not on England, but specifically on the Isles of Scilly. Shortly after, the Royalists surrendered to Parliamentary forces, and everyone simply forgot about the Dutch declaration.

For over three centuries, the 'war' technically remained in effect. There was no peace treaty, no formal ending. The Netherlands and the Isles of Scilly were technically still at war, though neither side remembered or cared.

The situation was rediscovered in 1985 by a historian named Roy Duncan. He contacted the Dutch Embassy and pointed out the unusual situation. The Dutch thought it was hilarious. They agreed that something should be done about this ancient conflict.

On April 17, 1986, the Dutch ambassador to the United Kingdom traveled to the Isles of Scilly to sign a peace treaty. After 335 years, the 'war' was finally over. The ambassador joked that it must have been terrifying for the islanders to know that the Dutch could have attacked at any moment.

The 335-year conflict holds the record for the longest war in history—and the most peaceful. It reminds us that bureaucracy can outlast common sense, and that sometimes the most dangerous-sounding situations turn out to be the silliest.

As the Dutch ambassador said while signing the peace treaty: 'It must be a relief to know you can sleep safely at night.'

Word Count: 320 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: The Guardian

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How long did the 'war' between the Netherlands and the Isles of Scilly last?

- ☐ A) 35 years
- ☐ B) 135 years
- ☐ C) 335 years
- ☐ D) 500 years

2 How many shots were fired during this war?

- ☐ A) Thousands
- ☐ B) Hundreds
- ☐ C) A few
- ☐ D) None

3 Why did the Dutch originally declare war on the Isles of Scilly?

- ☐ A) The islands had valuable treasure
- ☐ B) Royalist ships based there were attacking Dutch vessels
- ☐ C) The Dutch wanted to conquer England
- ☐ D) It was a training exercise

4 Why did the war last so long without anyone fighting?

- ☐ A) Both sides were too scared to attack
- ☐ B) Everyone forgot about the declaration of war, and there was no peace treaty
- ☐ C) The war was interrupted by other wars
- ☐ D) The islands sank into the ocean

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What does the author mean by saying 'bureaucracy can outlast common sense'?

- ☐ A) Governments are always wise
- ☐ B) Official paperwork and formalities can persist long after they make any practical sense
- ☐ C) Common sense always wins
- ☐ D) Bureaucracy should be eliminated

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What broader lesson about conflict and resolution does this story illustrate?

- ☐ A) All wars last hundreds of years
- ☐ B) Formal endings matter, and unresolved situations—even forgotten ones—can technically persist indefinitely
- ☐ C) The Netherlands is always at war
- ☐ D) Small islands should never declare independence

ANSWER KEY

The 335-Year War That Nobody Fought

1. C) 335 years

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'The conflict lasted 335 years.'

2. D) None

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'not a single shot was ever fired.'

3. B) Royalist ships based there were attacking Dutch vessels

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'Royalist ships based in Scilly began attacking Dutch vessels' and when they 'refused' compensation, 'the admiral declared war.'

4. B) Everyone forgot about the declaration of war, and there was no peace treaty

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'everyone simply forgot about the Dutch declaration' and 'There was no peace treaty, no formal ending.'

5. B) Official paperwork and formalities can persist long after they make any practical sense

DOK 3 — Analysis. The 'war' continued for 335 years only because no one filed the proper paperwork to end it, even though the actual conflict was irrelevant. The formality outlasted any real purpose.

6. B) Formal endings matter, and unresolved situations—even forgotten ones—can technically persist indefinitely

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. The war persisted because no one formally ended it. This suggests that proper closure—whether in conflicts, relationships, or agreements—matters, even when the original dispute seems irrelevant.

TEACHER GUIDE

The 335-Year War That Nobody Fought

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

- The 'war' continued for 335 years because no one filed paperwork to end it. What other examples can you think of where bureaucracy outlasts common sense?
- The Dutch ambassador joked about the situation when signing the peace treaty. Why is humor sometimes the best way to handle absurd situations?
- Should historians spend time researching obscure facts like this forgotten war? What value does this kind of knowledge have?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research the English Civil War and create a timeline showing how the Isles of Scilly ended up in the middle of the conflict.
- Write a satirical news report announcing the 'end' of the 335-year war as if it were a major international peace agreement.
- Find another example of an old law, treaty, or agreement that technically remains in effect even though it's outdated and no one follows it.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- The Guardian / Mental Floss