
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE ISLAND MADE ENTIRELY OF TRASH

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 MADE ENTIRELY OF TRASH

Somewhere between Hawaii and California, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, there exists a massive concentration of garbage that has been called an 'island' of trash. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch isn't actually a solid island you could walk across—the debris is mostly suspended just below the water's surface—but it's enormous nonetheless. Current estimates suggest it covers an area approximately twice the size of Texas, making it one of the largest accumulations of human waste on Earth.

The Garbage Patch formed in a region where multiple ocean currents converge, trapping floating debris in a slow-moving circular pattern called a gyre. Plastic bottles, abandoned fishing nets, packaging materials, and countless fragments of degrading plastic all accumulate in this zone, unable to escape the rotating currents that hold them in place.

Most of the debris isn't composed of large, easily visible pieces of trash. Approximately 94% of the material consists of microplastics—tiny fragments smaller than a grain of rice that form when larger plastic items break down under sunlight, wave action, and salt water exposure. These particles are so small that fish and other marine animals frequently mistake them for food.

The ecological damage from this plastic accumulation is severe and growing. Sea turtles consume plastic bags that resemble their natural prey, jellyfish. Seabirds feed plastic fragments to their chicks, who slowly starve with stomachs full of indigestible material. Fish absorb toxins from microplastics into their tissues, and these chemicals then enter the human food chain when we eat seafood.

Cleanup efforts face enormous practical challenges. The Garbage Patch sits in international waters far from any coastline, meaning no single country bears responsibility for addressing it. The debris is spread across millions of square miles of open ocean. Traditional collection methods using nets can't effectively capture microplastics without also trapping marine life.

Organizations like The Ocean Cleanup have developed innovative floating barrier systems that use natural currents to concentrate debris for removal. These efforts have collected thousands of tons of plastic, but this represents only a tiny fraction of what enters the ocean each year. The Garbage Patch is a visible symptom of a much larger problem: humanity produces over 350 million tons of plastic annually.

Word Count: 362 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: CNN

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How large is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch?

- ☐ A) The size of California
- ☐ B) Twice the size of Texas
- ☐ C) The size of Hawaii
- ☐ D) The size of the entire Pacific

2 What percentage of the debris is microplastics?

- ☐ A) 24%
- ☐ B) 54%
- ☐ C) 74%
- ☐ D) 94%

3 Why do sea turtles eat plastic bags?

- ☐ A) They're hungry
- ☐ B) They mistake them for jellyfish
- ☐ C) Bags taste good
- ☐ D) They have poor vision

4 Why is cleanup in international waters difficult?

- ☐ A) The water is too deep
- ☐ B) No single country is responsible
- ☐ C) Ships aren't allowed
- ☐ D) The trash keeps moving

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Why are microplastics particularly dangerous?

- ☐ A) They're too small to see
- ☐ B) Animals eat them thinking they're food and toxins enter the food chain
- ☐ C) They're radioactive
- ☐ D) They attract sharks

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Why does the passage say cleanup alone isn't enough?

- ☐ A) Cleanup is too expensive
- ☐ B) More plastic enters the ocean than can be removed, so reducing production is essential
- ☐ C) Plastic isn't really a problem
- ☐ D) The ocean cleans itself

ANSWER KEY

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1. B) Twice the size of Texas

DOK 1 — Recall.

2. D) 94%

DOK 1 — Recall.

3. B) They mistake them for jellyfish

DOK 2 — Inference.

4. B) No single country is responsible

DOK 2 — Inference.

5. B) Animals eat them thinking they're food and toxins enter the food chain

DOK 3 — Analysis.

6. B) More plastic enters the ocean than can be removed, so reducing production is essential

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Island Made Entirely of Trash

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

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 Garbage Patch is in international waters with no country responsible. How should we handle global problems?
- Is it fair that countries far from the patch suffer from plastic produced elsewhere?
- Should companies that make plastic be responsible for where it ends up?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Calculate how much plastic your household uses in a week and identify ways to reduce it.
- Research The Ocean Cleanup's technology and create a presentation about it.
- Design a product or system that could help reduce plastic waste.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- CNN / Utah Highway Patrol