NOT BORING MEDIA

THE WOMAN WHO WOKE SPEAKING A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE

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!

THE WOMAN WHO WOKE SPEAKING A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE

In 2010, a Croatian woman named Sandra Ralic suffered a stroke and fell into a coma. When she woke up 24 hours later, she could no longer speak her native Croatian. Instead, she spoke fluent German—a language she had studied briefly in school but had never been able to speak well before.

Ralic's case is an example of a rare phenomenon that has fascinated doctors for over a century. Occasionally, people with brain injuries wake up speaking with different accents or, in extremely rare cases, speaking languages they barely knew before their injury.

The condition is related to something called Foreign Accent Syndrome, where brain damage changes how a person pronounces words. But Ralic's case went even further—she didn't just sound German, she actually spoke the language fluently, using vocabulary and complex grammar she couldn't access before her stroke.

How is this possible? Scientists aren't entirely sure, but they have theories. One suggests Ralic's brain had stored German knowledge from her school days, but the normal pathways to access that knowledge were blocked. The stroke may have damaged the blocking mechanism, suddenly releasing the stored language.

Another theory proposes that the brain reorganized itself after the injury, creating new connections that prioritized German over Croatian. The brain is remarkably adaptable, and damage to one area sometimes leads to unexpected changes in others.

Ralic eventually regained her Croatian through months of intensive therapy. Interestingly, her German became less fluent as her Croatian returned, as if her brain could only fully support one language at a time.

Cases like Ralic's remind us how mysterious the brain remains. We carry knowledge and abilities we may not even know we have, locked away in neural pathways we can't consciously access. Sometimes it takes a dramatic event to reveal what was hidden inside us all along.

Word Count: 278 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: The Telegraph

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 **What language did Ralic speak when she woke from her coma?**

- ◯ A) Croatian
- ◯ B) English
- ◯ C) German
- ◯ D) French

2 **What is Foreign Accent Syndrome?**

- ◯ A) A desire to visit foreign countries
- ◯ B) A condition where brain damage changes pronunciation
- ◯ C) A language learning technique
- ◯ D) A type of stroke

3 **How might the stroke have released Ralic's German?**

- ◯ A) She learned German during the coma
- ◯ B) It damaged pathways blocking access to stored knowledge
- ◯ C) German is easier than Croatian
- ◯ D) She was pretending

4 **What happened as Ralic's Croatian returned?**

- ◯ A) Her German improved
- ◯ B) She spoke both perfectly
- ◯ C) Her German became less fluent
- ◯ D) She forgot both languages

5 **What does Ralic's case suggest about how the brain stores knowledge?**

- ◯ A) The brain only stores daily information
- ◯ B) The brain may store knowledge we can't normally access
- ◯ C) Brain injuries always improve language
- ◯ D) People can only know one language

6 **How might this case help doctors treat language difficulties?**

- ◯ A) By encouraging strokes
- ◯ B) By finding ways to access lost abilities without injury
- ◯ C) By teaching everyone German
- ◯ D) It has no medical value

ANSWER KEY

The Woman Who Woke Speaking a Different Language

1. C) German

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'she spoke fluent German.'

2. B) A condition where brain damage changes pronunciation

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage explains: 'Foreign Accent Syndrome, where brain damage changes how a person pronounces words.'

3. B) It damaged pathways blocking access to stored knowledge

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'The stroke may have damaged the blocking mechanism, releasing the stored language.'

4. C) Her German became less fluent

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'her German became less fluent as her Croatian returned.'

5. B) The brain may store knowledge we can't normally access

DOK 3 — Analysis. The passage concludes: 'We carry knowledge and abilities we may not even know we have, locked away.'

6. B) By finding ways to access lost abilities without injury

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. If lost knowledge can emerge after injury, doctors might develop safe methods to help people access abilities they've 'lost.'

TEACHER GUIDE

The Woman Who Woke Speaking a Different Language

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

- Ralic's brain may have stored German knowledge she couldn't normally access. What abilities or knowledge might be 'locked' in your brain that you don't know about?
- As Ralic's Croatian returned, her German faded. What might this suggest about how the brain prioritizes languages?
- If we could unlock hidden knowledge without injury, should we? What might be the risks?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Interview someone who speaks multiple languages about how switching between languages feels. Do they think in different languages?
- Research neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to reorganize) and create a presentation explaining how the brain adapts to injury.
- Write a short story about someone who wakes up with an unexpected ability after a medical event.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- The Telegraph / Medical Daily