
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE WOMAN WHOSE HICCUPS LASTED FIVE 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

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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 WHOSE HICCUPS LASTED FIVE YEARS

In 2007, a Florida teenager named Jennifer Mee developed a case of hiccups that would eventually make medical history. She began hiccupping approximately 50 times per minute—once every 1.2 seconds—and despite treatments from dozens of doctors and specialists across the country, the hiccups continued relentlessly for nearly five years before finally stopping as mysteriously as they had begun.

Mee's ordeal started suddenly when she was just 15 years old. One ordinary day, she began hiccupping and simply could not stop. Each day brought thousands of involuntary diaphragm spasms. She couldn't eat normally because the constant hiccups interrupted every bite. Sleep became nearly impossible since the spasms continued even while she tried to rest. Speaking clearly was a constant struggle. The condition affected every aspect of her daily life.

Her unusual case quickly attracted national media attention. Television news programs featured her story, and people from around the world sent letters and emails with suggestions for cures. She tried everything that was recommended: holding her breath, drinking water upside down, being startled, acupuncture, hypnosis, chiropractic adjustments, and numerous prescription medications. Some treatments provided brief relief lasting hours or even days, but the hiccups invariably returned.

Doctors diagnosed her with a rare condition called persistent or intractable hiccups, where the normal hiccup reflex somehow becomes stuck in a repeating loop. The diaphragm—the large muscle beneath the lungs that controls breathing—spasms repeatedly without the usual triggering causes. In most cases, doctors cannot identify why the condition develops, though stress, nerve damage, and certain underlying medical conditions sometimes contribute.

After approximately five years, Mee's hiccups finally stopped on their own, as mysteriously as they had started. Doctors couldn't explain why they ended any more than they could explain why they had begun in the first place.

The longest recorded case of hiccups in medical literature lasted an astonishing 68 years. Charles Osborne, a farmer from Iowa, hiccupped continuously from 1922 until 1990—an estimated 430 million hiccups over nearly seven decades. He managed to live a relatively normal life despite the constant interruption, proving that humans can adapt to almost anything.

Word Count: 352 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: ABC News

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How often did Jennifer Mee hiccup at her worst?

- ☐ A) 10 times per minute
- ☐ B) 25 times per minute
- ☐ C) 50 times per minute
- ☐ D) 100 times per minute

2 How long did the longest recorded hiccup case last?

- ☐ A) 5 years
- ☐ B) 20 years
- ☐ C) 68 years
- ☐ D) 100 years

3 What muscle is involved in hiccups?

- ☐ A) The heart
- ☐ B) The diaphragm
- ☐ C) The bicep
- ☐ D) The stomach

4 Why couldn't doctors stop the hiccups?

- ☐ A) They didn't try
- ☐ B) The cause is usually unknown and treatments are unpredictable
- ☐ C) She refused treatment
- ☐ D) Insurance wouldn't cover it

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What did Mee's and Osborne's cases have in common?

- ☐ A) Same doctor
- ☐ B) Both ended mysteriously without medical explanation
- ☐ C) They were related
- ☐ D) Both lived in Florida

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What does this reveal about modern medicine?

- ☐ A) Medicine can cure everything
- ☐ B) Some conditions remain poorly understood despite advanced knowledge
- ☐ C) Doctors aren't necessary
- ☐ D) Hiccups don't matter

ANSWER KEY

The Woman Whose Hiccups Lasted Five Years

1. C) 50 times per minute

DOK 1 — Recall.

2. C) 68 years

DOK 1 — Recall.

3. B) The diaphragm

DOK 2 — Inference.

4. B) The cause is usually unknown and treatments are unpredictable

DOK 2 — Inference.

5. B) Both ended mysteriously without medical explanation

DOK 3 — Analysis.

6. B) Some conditions remain poorly understood despite advanced knowledge

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Woman Whose Hiccups Lasted Five 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
- 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

- What would be hardest about hiccupping 50 times per minute for years?
- People sent Mee thousands of cure suggestions. Why do humans want to help solve others' strange problems?
- If doctors can't explain why something stops, is it really 'cured'?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research what causes normal hiccups and why they usually stop quickly.
- Create a timeline of treatments Mee tried and their effects.
- Interview a doctor or nurse about cases they've seen that couldn't be explained.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- ABC News / NBC News