
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE LAST SPEAKERS OF A DYING 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.

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 LAST SPEAKERS OF A DYING LANGUAGE

In the remote jungles of Mexico, a language called Ayapaneco is about to disappear forever. Only two people in the world still speak it fluently—and for years, they refused to talk to each other.

Manuel Segovia and Isidro Velazquez are the last native speakers of Ayapaneco, a language that existed for centuries in the Tabasco region. The problem? They live in the same village but had a falling out and stopped speaking. For years, this personal feud meant the language had no living conversation, no way to stay vibrant and alive.

The situation highlighted a global crisis. Languages are dying at an alarming rate—about one every two weeks. When the last speaker of a language dies, an entire way of understanding the world disappears. Languages contain unique words for concepts that don't exist in other tongues, stories passed down for generations, and cultural knowledge that can never be recovered.

Ayapaneco once had thousands of speakers. But as Spanish became dominant in Mexico, parents stopped teaching it to children. The village school taught only Spanish. Television brought Spanish into every home. Within a few generations, an ancient language was reduced to two elderly men who wouldn't speak to each other.

Finally, outside pressure helped. Linguists, journalists, and cultural organizations urged Segovia and Velazquez to reconcile—or at least to work separately with researchers to document the language. Both men eventually agreed to participate in preservation efforts, recording vocabulary and phrases so that some knowledge could survive.

Ayapaneco will likely never be a living language again. But thanks to these recordings, future generations will know it existed. They'll be able to study its unique structures and understand a little of how its speakers once saw the world.

'When I die, part of history dies with me,' Segovia told a reporter. 'I want something to remain.'

Word Count: 310 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: The Guardian

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How many fluent speakers of Ayapaneco remain?

- ☐ A) None
- ☐ B) Two
- ☐ C) About twenty
- ☐ D) Over one hundred

2 According to the passage, how often does a language die?

- ☐ A) About one per year
- ☐ B) About one per month
- ☐ C) About one every two weeks
- ☐ D) About one per day

3 What factors caused Ayapaneco to nearly disappear?

- ☐ A) A natural disaster killed most speakers
- ☐ B) The government banned the language
- ☐ C) Spanish became dominant through schools and media
- ☐ D) The two speakers invented a new language instead

4 Why is the loss of a language compared to the loss of 'a way of understanding the world'?

- ☐ A) Languages are expensive to maintain
- ☐ B) Languages contain unique concepts, stories, and cultural knowledge
- ☐ C) All languages are basically the same
- ☐ D) Only scientists understand languages

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What does the personal feud between the two speakers symbolize about language preservation?

- ☐ A) Old people are always stubborn
- ☐ B) Languages need active use and communication to survive
- ☐ C) Feuds are common in small villages
- ☐ D) Linguists cause problems between speakers

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Based on the passage, what strategies might help prevent other languages from becoming endangered?

- ☐ A) Banning dominant languages like Spanish
- ☐ B) Teaching endangered languages in schools and supporting their use in daily life and media
- ☐ C) Waiting until only two speakers remain
- ☐ D) Recording languages only after speakers die

ANSWER KEY

The Last Speakers of a Dying Language

1. B) Two

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'Only two people in the world still speak it fluently.'

2. C) About one every two weeks

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'Languages are dying at an alarming rate—about one every two weeks.'

3. C) Spanish became dominant through schools and media

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'as Spanish became dominant in Mexico, parents stopped teaching it to children. The village school taught only Spanish. Television brought Spanish into every home.'

4. B) Languages contain unique concepts, stories, and cultural knowledge

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains that languages 'contain unique words for concepts that don't exist in other tongues, stories passed down for generations, and cultural knowledge that can never be recovered.'

5. B) Languages need active use and communication to survive

DOK 3 — Analysis. The feud showed that even having living speakers isn't enough—language requires actual conversation and interaction to remain 'vibrant and alive.' Without use, it fades.

6. B) Teaching endangered languages in schools and supporting their use in daily life and media

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. The passage shows Ayapaneco declined because schools and media used only Spanish. Prevention would mean supporting endangered languages in these same spaces before they decline.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Last Speakers of a Dying 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
- 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 two last speakers of Ayapaneco wouldn't talk to each other because of a personal feud. How do personal conflicts sometimes affect things much bigger than ourselves?
- When a language dies, unique concepts and stories are lost forever. What would be lost if your language disappeared?
- Should governments require schools to teach endangered local languages, even if students won't use them for jobs? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research an endangered language from your region or ancestry and create a mini-dictionary of 10 words with their meanings.
- Interview an older family member about words or phrases they know that younger people don't use anymore. Document what you learn.
- Design a campaign to save an endangered language—what strategies would you use to get young people interested in learning it?

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- The Guardian / UNESCO