THE BILLION-DOLLAR AIRPORT NO ONE USES

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 BILLION-DOLLAR AIRPORT NO ONE USES

In 2008, a massive airport opened in Ciudad Real, Spain. It had a runway long enough for the world's largest planes, a terminal designed by a famous architect, and capacity for 2.5 million passengers per year. By 2012, it was completely abandoned.

Ciudad Real Central Airport cost over 1.1 billion euros to build. Developers believed that cheap flights and a growing economy would bring travelers from across Europe. The airport was designed to serve as an alternative to Madrid's crowded airports, located about 150 miles away.

But almost nothing went right. The global financial crisis hit Spain especially hard, collapsing the real estate market and freezing investment. Budget airlines, which the airport was counting on, never showed much interest. The promised high-speed rail connection to Madrid was never completed.

At its peak, the airport served only 100,000 passengers per year—less than 5% of its capacity. Airlines began canceling routes one by one. By 2012, the last flight departed and the airport went silent. Weeds began growing through cracks in the runway. The terminal stood empty and collecting dust.

Ciudad Real became a symbol of Spain's economic crisis—a 'ghost airport' that represented billions of wasted euros and broken promises. It sat abandoned for years, costing money just to maintain while generating nothing in return.

In 2019, new owners purchased the airport for just 56 million euros—about 5% of what it cost to build. They hoped to revive it as a cargo hub and maintenance center for aircraft. Progress has been slow but steady.

The airport is hardly unique. Around the world, similar ghost airports exist—monuments to overconfidence and poor planning. They remind us that building something doesn't guarantee anyone will use it. The best infrastructure in the world is worthless without the demand to justify it.

Ciudad Real Central Airport stands as an expensive lesson: hope is not a business plan.

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

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 **How much did Ciudad Real Central Airport cost to build?**

○ A) 56 million euros

○ B) 150 million euros

○ C) Over 1.1 billion euros

○ D) 2.5 billion euros

2 **What percentage of the airport's capacity was actually used at its peak?**

○ A) Less than 5%

○ B) About 25%

○ C) About 50%

○ D) Nearly 100%

3 **What major external event contributed to the airport's failure?**

○ A) A volcanic eruption

○ B) The global financial crisis

○ C) A war in Spain

○ D) A disease outbreak

4 **What happened when new owners purchased the airport in 2019?**

○ A) They demolished it immediately

○ B) They paid full price for it

○ C) They bought it for about 5% of the original cost and planned to revive it

○ D) They turned it into housing

5 **What does the phrase 'hope is not a business plan' mean in this context?**

◯ A) Businesses should never be hopeful

◯ B) Wishing for success without realistic analysis and demand leads to failure

◯ C) All airports eventually fail

◯ D) Spain should not build airports

6 **What lessons could future infrastructure planners learn from Ciudad Real's failure?**

◯ A) Never build airports

◯ B) Verify demand exists, secure transportation connections, and plan for economic uncertainties before investing bi

◯ C) Build smaller projects first

◯ D) Only governments should build airports

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ANSWER KEY

The Billion-Dollar Airport No One Uses

1. C) Over 1.1 billion euros

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'Ciudad Real Central Airport cost over 1.1 billion euros to build.'

2. A) Less than 5%

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'the airport served only 100,000 passengers per year—less than 5% of its capacity.'

3. B) The global financial crisis

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'The global financial crisis hit Spain especially hard, collapsing the real estate market and freezing investment.'

4. C) They bought it for about 5% of the original cost and planned to revive it

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'new owners purchased the airport for just 56 million euros—about 5% of what it cost to build. They hoped to revive it as a cargo hub.'

5. B) Wishing for success without realistic analysis and demand leads to failure

DOK 3 — Analysis. The developers hoped for passengers and airlines that never came. The phrase warns that optimism must be backed by realistic assessment of demand and conditions, not just hope.

6. B) Verify demand exists, secure transportation connections, and plan for economic uncertainties before investing billions

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. The airport failed due to multiple planning failures: assumed demand that didn't exist, relied on a rail connection that was never built, and didn't account for economic downturn. Future planners should verify demand and connections before investing.

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TEACHER GUIDE

The Billion-Dollar Airport No One Uses

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
- 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 airport developers assumed demand would come. What's the danger of building infrastructure based on optimism rather than evidence?
- Ciudad Real lost 95% of its value in just over a decade. What other examples can you think of where something valuable became nearly worthless?
- Should governments prevent private companies from building projects that might fail spectacularly? Why or why not?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research another 'ghost infrastructure' project (abandoned malls, empty stadiums, etc.) and create a case study comparing it to Ciudad Real.
- Design a checklist that developers should complete before building major infrastructure to avoid failures like this airport.
- Write a news article announcing the airport's opening in 2008, then write another from 2012 announcing its closure. How does the tone differ?

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- The Guardian / El País