
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE MONKEY THAT TOOK A SELFIE

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 MONKEY THAT TOOK A SELFIE

In 2011, a monkey in Indonesia stole a photographer's camera and accidentally took a selfie. The resulting photograph—a grinning black macaque staring directly into the lens—sparked a years-long legal battle over a simple question: Who owns a photo taken by an animal?

British photographer David Slater was in the jungles of Sulawesi photographing crested macaques when one curious monkey grabbed his camera. The monkey pressed the shutter button several times, producing hundreds of images. Most were blurry or poorly framed, but one was remarkable: a crystal-clear self-portrait of the monkey, later identified as a female named Naruto.

Slater published the photograph, and it quickly went viral. The image appeared everywhere—on news sites, in magazines, across social media. Then Wikipedia uploaded it to their free-use image database, claiming no one owned the copyright. Their reasoning: animals cannot hold copyrights, so the image belongs to no one.

Slater disagreed. He had traveled to Indonesia, set up the equipment, and created the conditions for the photo. Without his work, the image wouldn't exist. He sued to protect his copyright.

The case grew stranger when PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) filed a lawsuit on behalf of Naruto the monkey, arguing the macaque should own the copyright to her own selfie. A federal judge eventually ruled that animals cannot hold copyrights under U.S. law—but didn't fully resolve whether Slater owned the image either.

The legal battle cost Slater thousands of dollars. He reported nearly going bankrupt fighting for rights to a photograph everyone seemed happy to use for free. Eventually, he and PETA reached a settlement: Slater would donate 25% of future revenue from the image to organizations protecting crested macaques.

The monkey selfie case forced courts to answer questions no one had considered before. As cameras become more automated and AI creates increasingly complex content, the question of who—or what—can own creative work will only become more urgent.

Naruto, for her part, remains unaware of her fame. She's still in the jungle, presumably not taking selfies.

Word Count: 343 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: Smithsonian Magazine

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How did the monkey get possession of the camera?

- ☐ A) The photographer gave it to her
- ☐ B) She stole it while the photographer was working nearby
- ☐ C) She found it abandoned in the jungle
- ☐ D) A researcher trained her to use it

2 Why did Wikipedia claim no one owned the copyright?

- ☐ A) The photo was too old
- ☐ B) They argued animals cannot hold copyrights
- ☐ C) Slater had not registered it
- ☐ D) The photo was taken in a public place

3 What does 'went viral' mean in this passage?

- ☐ A) Caused a disease outbreak
- ☐ B) Spread rapidly across the internet
- ☐ C) Was deleted from websites
- ☐ D) Won a photography award

4 What was unusual about PETA's lawsuit?

- ☐ A) They sued on behalf of the monkey, arguing she should own the copyright
- ☐ B) They sued the monkey for damages
- ☐ C) They tried to destroy the photograph
- ☐ D) They supported Slater's copyright claim

5

David Slater argued he should own the copyright because he 'created the conditions for the photo.' Do you find this argument convincing? What role does human effort play in ownership when the final creative act is accidental or performed by another being?

6

The passage says questions about who 'can own creative work will only become more urgent' as AI creates content. If an AI program generates a painting or writes a song, who should own it—the AI, the programmer, the user, or no one? How is this similar to or different from the monkey selfie case?

ANSWER KEY

The Monkey That Took a Selfie

1. B) She stole it while the photographer was working nearby

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'one curious monkey grabbed his camera.'

2. B) They argued animals cannot hold copyrights

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'Their reasoning: animals cannot hold copyrights, so the image belongs to no one.'

3. B) Spread rapidly across the internet

DOK 2 — Vocabulary in context. The passage says the image 'appeared everywhere—on news sites, in magazines, across social media' after it 'went viral.'

4. A) They sued on behalf of the monkey, arguing she should own the copyright

DOK 2 — Text evidence. The passage states: 'PETA filed a lawsuit on behalf of Naruto the monkey, arguing the macaque should own the copyright to her own selfie.'

5. Sample Response:

The argument has merit—Slater traveled to Indonesia, set up equipment, and put himself where the photo could happen. Without his investment, there's no image. However, he didn't frame the shot, choose the timing, or press the button. Ownership typically follows from creative choices, not just enabling conditions. The case shows how copyright law wasn't designed for these situations.

6. Sample Response:

Answers will vary. Similarities: both involve non-human creators and questions about whether enabling creative conditions equals ownership. Differences: AI is designed by humans for creative purposes, while the monkey acted randomly; programmers might have stronger ownership claims than Slater did. Options: programmer (created the tool), user (prompted it), public domain (no human creativity), or new legal categories for AI-generated work. Strong responses will consider multiple perspectives.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Monkey That Took a Selfie

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

- Courts ruled the monkey can't own the copyright because animals can't hold legal rights. Should this change as we learn more about animal intelligence?
- The photographer set up the camera, but the monkey pressed the button. Who 'created' the image?
- This case cost the photographer his livelihood fighting lawsuits. When do animal rights arguments go too far?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Debate: Research the actual court case. Do you agree with the ruling? Write a persuasive argument.
- Law: Research how copyright law defines 'authorship.' Should this definition change as AI creates art?
- Creative: Take a series of photos using an unusual method (timer, pet, random). Who 'owns' the creative vision?

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- Smithsonian Magazine / NYC Municipal Archives