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# NOT BORING MEDIA

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## THE HERMIT WHO DIDN'T SPEAK FOR 27 YEARS

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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 HERMIT WHO DIDN'T SPEAK FOR 27 YEARS

In 1986, a man named Christopher Knight walked into the Maine woods and didn't come out for 27 years. He never called anyone, never had a conversation, and barely spoke a word to another human being until he was finally caught in 2013.

Knight was 20 years old when he abandoned his car and disappeared into the forest near North Pond, Maine. He had no survival training, no plan, and no particular reason—he simply felt he didn't belong in human society. 'I found a place where I was content,' he later explained.

For nearly three decades, Knight lived in a hidden camp deep in the woods. He never built a fire, fearing the smoke would give away his location. Instead, he survived brutal Maine winters with careful preparation—stockpiling sleeping bags and waiting out the coldest nights in multiple layers. Temperatures dropped to minus 20 degrees, but he endured.

Here's the catch: Knight couldn't grow food or hunt effectively. So he survived by burglarizing nearby cabins and summer camps—over 1,000 break-ins over 27 years. He stole food, propane, batteries, and books. He never took cash or valuable items, and he never vandalized. He called himself 'a simple thief' who took only what he needed to survive.

Local residents knew someone was stealing from them, but Knight was a ghost. They called him the 'North Pond Hermit' and wondered if he even existed. Some thought it was multiple people or teenagers playing pranks.

When police finally caught Knight raiding a summer camp, he was 47 years old. He had spent more than half his life alone. After his arrest, he struggled to make eye contact and spoke in short, careful sentences. Relearning human interaction was harder than surviving in the wilderness.

Knight served seven months in jail. When asked if his decades of solitude were worth it, he paused for a long time before answering: 'I found something most people never find—complete peace.'

Word Count: 330 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: Atlas Obscura

## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1

**How long did Christopher Knight live in the Maine woods?**

- ☐ A) 10 years
- ☐ B) 20 years
- ☐ C) 27 years
- ☐ D) 35 years

2

**Why did Knight never build a fire during his time in the woods?**

- ☐ A) He didn't know how
- ☐ B) Fire was too dangerous in dry conditions
- ☐ C) Smoke would reveal his hiding spot
- ☐ D) He preferred the cold

3

**Based on the passage, how did Knight's stealing differ from typical burglaries?**

- ☐ A) He stole more valuable items
- ☐ B) He only took survival necessities, never cash or valuables
- ☐ C) He always broke windows
- ☐ D) He worked with other criminals

4

**What challenge did Knight face after his arrest?**

- ☐ A) He couldn't remember English
- ☐ B) He had trouble with basic human interaction
- ☐ C) He tried to escape immediately
- ☐ D) He refused to eat normal food

5

**What does Knight's story suggest about human social needs?**

- ☐ A) All humans need constant social interaction
- ☐ B) Some people genuinely prefer solitude to society
- ☐ C) Living alone always leads to mental illness
- ☐ D) Social skills cannot be lost

6

**Knight's story raises ethical questions. Which statement best captures the moral complexity of his situation?**

- ☐ A) He was simply a criminal who deserved maximum punishment
- ☐ B) His need for survival doesn't excuse theft, but his case challenges simple judgments about right and wrong
- ☐ C) Stealing is always acceptable if you're hungry
- ☐ D) He should have been praised for his survival skills

## ANSWER KEY

### The Hermit Who Didn't Speak for 27 Years

**1. C) 27 years**

*DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states he 'didn't come out for 27 years.'*

**2. C) Smoke would reveal his hiding spot**

*DOK 1 — Recall. The passage explains: 'He never built a fire, fearing the smoke would give away his location.'*

**3. B) He only took survival necessities, never cash or valuables**

*DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states: 'He never took cash or valuable items, and he never vandalized. He called himself a simple thief who took only what he needed to survive.'*

**4. B) He had trouble with basic human interaction**

*DOK 2 — Inference. The passage describes how 'he struggled to make eye contact and spoke in short, careful sentences. Relearning human interaction was harder than surviving in the wilderness.'*

**5. B) Some people genuinely prefer solitude to society**

*DOK 3 — Analysis. Knight survived for decades alone and described finding 'complete peace.' While unusual, his story shows that social needs vary greatly between individuals.*

**6. B) His need for survival doesn't excuse theft, but his case challenges simple judgments about right and wrong**

*DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. Knight committed crimes, but his story is complicated—he hurt others through theft, yet took only necessities and harmed no one physically. This complexity makes simple moral judgments difficult.*

## **TEACHER GUIDE**

The Hermit Who Didn't Speak for 27 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
- 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**

- Christopher Knight said he found 'complete peace' living alone. Do you think humans need other people to be happy, or is it different for everyone?
- Knight survived by stealing from others. Does his situation make his crimes more understandable, less forgivable, or somewhere in between?
- After 27 years alone, Knight had to relearn how to interact with people. What social skills do you think would be hardest to regain?

### **EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

- Keep a 'solitude journal' for one day, noting every moment you're alone versus with others. Reflect on which you preferred and why.
- Research the psychological effects of long-term isolation and create an infographic showing what happens to people who spend extended time alone.
- Write two versions of Knight's story: one as the hermit himself would tell it, and one as a cabin owner whose property was repeatedly burglarized.

### **DIFFERENTIATION**

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

### **SOURCE**

- Atlas Obscura / New Mexico tourism archives