
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE MAN WHO TRADED A PAPERCLIP FOR A HOUSE

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 MAN WHO TRADED A PAPERCLIP FOR A HOUSE

In 2005, a Canadian blogger named Kyle MacDonald began one of the most creative experiments in bartering history. He started with a single red paperclip and set himself a seemingly impossible goal: trade up, item by item, until he owned a house. One year and fourteen increasingly improbable trades later, he accomplished exactly that—turning something worth a fraction of a cent into a two-story farmhouse in Saskatchewan, Canada.

MacDonald documented every step of his journey on a blog that quickly attracted millions of fascinated readers around the world. His first trade exchanged the red paperclip for a fish-shaped pen offered by two women in Vancouver. The pen was traded for a hand-sculpted ceramic doorknob. The doorknob became a camping stove. Each successive trade was slightly more valuable than the last, building momentum toward his ultimate goal.

As the blog gained widespread media attention, the trades became increasingly unusual and publicity-driven. MacDonald traded for a snow globe featuring the rock band KISS. Then for an afternoon hanging out with rock star Alice Cooper. Then for a speaking role in an actual Hollywood movie. Each high-profile trade generated enormous publicity, which attracted people with even more valuable items eager to participate in the now-famous experiment.

The final trade proved the most unexpected of all. An aspiring actor who had been given the movie role decided he would rather own a house in a small Canadian town than appear briefly in a Hollywood film. MacDonald traded the movie role for a house in Kipling, Saskatchewan. Against all odds, he had achieved his goal.

The project demonstrated fascinating principles about value and perception. Nothing has absolute, fixed value—everything is ultimately worth only what someone else is willing to trade for it. Publicity and storytelling can create their own momentum, attracting bigger opportunities. And creative persistence, sustained over time, can transform almost nothing into something remarkably significant.

MacDonald's journey became a bestselling book and launched a speaking career. The town of Kipling installed a giant red paperclip monument in his honor.

Word Count: 330 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: New York Times

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 How many trades did it take?

- ☐ A) 4
- ☐ B) 14
- ☐ C) 40
- ☐ D) 140

2 What was the first trade?

- ☐ A) Paperclip for house
- ☐ B) Paperclip for fish-shaped pen
- ☐ C) Paperclip for car
- ☐ D) Paperclip for money

3 Why did trades get more valuable?

- ☐ A) MacDonald got luckier
- ☐ B) Publicity attracted people with bigger offers
- ☐ C) He cheated
- ☐ D) Economy improved

4 What was the final trade?

- ☐ A) Money for house
- ☐ B) A movie role for the house
- ☐ C) A car for house
- ☐ D) Nothing was traded

5

What does this demonstrate about value?

- ☐ A) Value is fixed
- ☐ B) Value depends on what someone will trade
- ☐ C) Paperclips are valuable
- ☐ D) Houses are cheap

6

What made MacDonald succeed?

- ☐ A) He was wealthy
- ☐ B) Creativity, persistence, and strategic publicity
- ☐ C) He got lucky once
- ☐ D) Houses are easy to get

ANSWER KEY

The Man Who Traded a Paperclip for a House

1. B) 14

DOK 1 — Recall.

2. B) Paperclip for fish-shaped pen

DOK 1 — Recall.

3. B) Publicity attracted people with bigger offers

DOK 2 — Inference.

4. B) A movie role for the house

DOK 2 — Inference.

5. B) Value depends on what someone will trade

DOK 3 — Analysis.

6. B) Creativity, persistence, and strategic publicity

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Man Who Traded a Paperclip for a House

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

- MacDonald's trades worked partly because of publicity. Can anything succeed purely on merit without marketing?
- Each trade was 'slightly better' than the last. How do small improvements compound over time?
- Would MacDonald's project work in today's internet environment?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Attempt a mini trading-up project, starting with something small.
- Calculate the percentage increase in value at each of MacDonald's trades.
- Design a publicity strategy for a creative project.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- New York Times / Eater