
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE TOWN THAT BANNED DANCING FOR 36 YEARS

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 TOWN THAT BANNED DANCING FOR 36 YEARS

From 1980 to 2016, the small town of Elmore City, Oklahoma maintained a law that banned all public dancing within city limits. The rule dated back to the town's founding by deeply religious settlers in the late 1800s, and it was so strictly enforced that even school dances were completely forbidden. The unusual situation eventually inspired the 1984 hit movie *Footloose*—and years later, that same movie would help inspire the town to finally change its ways.

Elmore City was founded by settlers who believed dancing was sinful and would lead young people astray from righteous living. They passed an ordinance prohibiting any public dancing anywhere within the town's boundaries. For generation after generation, teenagers graduated from Elmore City High School without ever experiencing a school prom or homecoming dance. Students who wanted to dance had to travel to neighboring towns, where different values prevailed.

In 1980, a group of determined students at Elmore City High School decided that enough was finally enough. They organized a petition and formally requested that the school board allow them to hold a senior prom. The request sparked fierce and emotional debate throughout the small community. Local ministers preached sermons against the proposal. Town council meetings grew heated with passionate arguments on both sides. The controversy attracted attention from news organizations across the country.

Against most expectations, the school board ultimately voted to allow the prom—making it the first legal public dance in the town's entire history. Over 500 curious people attended the event. The evening passed peacefully, and the moral collapse that opponents had predicted simply never happened.

Hollywood screenwriter Dean Pitchford happened to read about the Elmore City controversy in a newspaper article and was immediately inspired. He wrote the screenplay for *Footloose*, a film starring Kevin Bacon as a teenager who moves to a small town and fights against a dance ban. The movie became a massive hit and brought worldwide attention to the real town that had inspired the story.

Even after the successful prom, the official dance ban remained on the books for decades. It wasn't formally repealed until 2016, when town officials decided the outdated law had become an embarrassment.

Word Count: 362 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: Guinness World Records

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 When was the dance ban finally repealed?

- ☐ A) 1980
- ☐ B) 1984
- ☐ C) 2000
- ☐ D) 2016

2 What movie did Elmore City inspire?

- ☐ A) Dirty Dancing
- ☐ B) Footloose
- ☐ C) Saturday Night Fever
- ☐ D) Grease

3 Why did the town originally ban dancing?

- ☐ A) It was too loud
- ☐ B) Founding settlers believed dancing was sinful
- ☐ C) There was no room
- ☐ D) Music was expensive

4 What happened after the first legal prom?

- ☐ A) The town banned it again
- ☐ B) The event was peaceful and no moral collapse occurred
- ☐ C) Everyone moved away
- ☐ D) The school closed

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Why might outdated laws stay on books even when not enforced?

- ☐ A) Politicians love old laws
- ☐ B) Removing laws requires effort and unenforced laws seem harmless
- ☐ C) All old laws are good
- ☐ D) Courts prevent removal

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What does this story suggest about social change?

- ☐ A) Change is impossible
- ☐ B) Young people often push communities to question traditions
- ☐ C) Movies always cause change
- ☐ D) Dancing is sinful

ANSWER KEY

The Town That Banned Dancing for 36 Years

1. D) 2016

DOK 1 — Recall.

2. B) Footloose

DOK 1 — Recall.

3. B) Founding settlers believed dancing was sinful

DOK 2 — Inference.

4. B) The event was peaceful and no moral collapse occurred

DOK 2 — Inference.

5. B) Removing laws requires effort and unenforced laws seem harmless

DOK 3 — Analysis.

6. B) Young people often push communities to question traditions

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Town That Banned Dancing for 36 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
- NGSS — Connections to scientific practices

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

- Are there laws in your community that seem outdated? How should communities decide when to change them?
- The students who fought for the prom faced community opposition. When is it worth challenging traditions?
- Why do you think the movie Footloose resonated with audiences?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research other unusual laws still on the books in various towns.
- Write a persuasive speech either supporting or opposing the dance ban from the perspective of a 1980 resident.
- Compare the real Elmore City story to the Footloose movie plot.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- Guinness World Records