
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE TOWN WITH NO LAWS

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 TOWN WITH NO LAWS

In the desert of southern California, there's a place that operates by its own rules—or rather, no rules at all. Slab City is an abandoned military base where about 200 permanent residents live off the grid, paying no rent, no taxes, and following no official laws.

The 'slabs' refer to the concrete foundations left behind when Camp Dunlap, a Marine training facility, was dismantled after World War II. In the decades since, squatters have transformed this barren landscape into an unofficial town. Residents live in trailers, RVs, and improvised shelters built from whatever materials they can find.

Slab City has no running water, no electricity grid, and no sewage system. Residents collect rainwater, rely on solar panels, and dig their own septic systems. In summer, temperatures regularly exceed 110 degrees Fahrenheit. It's definitely not a place for the faint of heart.

So why do people live here? For some, it's financial necessity—after losing jobs or homes during economic hardships, Slab City offers a place to survive. For others, it's philosophical—a rejection of modern society's rules and regulations. Artists, veterans, drifters, and retirees mix together in this unlikely community.

The unofficial mayor is a woman who helps newcomers find spots to settle and resolve disputes. There's a church made of painted adobe called Salvation Mountain, covered in religious messages and bright colors. There's even a nightclub called The Range, where residents gather for live music on Saturday nights.

But Slab City isn't paradise. Without laws, disputes can turn dangerous quickly. Medical emergencies require a long drive to the nearest hospital. The state of California officially owns the land and could evict everyone at any time without warning.

Despite these challenges, Slab City persists—the last free place in America, its residents proudly call it. Whether it's a utopia of freedom or a cautionary tale about life without structure depends entirely on who you ask.

Word Count: 307 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: The Guardian

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 What were 'the slabs' originally part of?

- ☐ A) A prison
- ☐ B) A Marine training facility
- ☐ C) A shopping mall
- ☐ D) A school

2 How do Slab City residents get electricity?

- ☐ A) From the city power grid
- ☐ B) From generators run by the government
- ☐ C) From solar panels
- ☐ D) They don't have any electricity

3 According to the passage, what are two different reasons people move to Slab City?

- ☐ A) High-paying jobs and good schools
- ☐ B) Financial necessity and rejection of mainstream society
- ☐ C) Religious requirements and family connections
- ☐ D) Government programs and free housing

4 What evidence does the passage provide that Slab City has developed its own community structure despite having no official laws?

- ☐ A) The government sends police regularly
- ☐ B) They have an unofficial mayor, a church, and social gatherings
- ☐ C) Everyone lives completely alone
- ☐ D) They follow California state laws

5

What does the author mean by saying whether Slab City is 'a utopia of freedom or a cautionary tale... depends entirely on who you ask'?

- ☐ A) No one has an opinion about Slab City
- ☐ B) The same place can represent freedom or danger depending on perspective
- ☐ C) Utopias are always dangerous
- ☐ D) The author thinks Slab City is perfect

6

Based on the passage, what does Slab City's existence reveal about the relationship between freedom and security?

- ☐ A) Freedom and security always go together
- ☐ B) Maximum freedom may require sacrificing certain securities like laws, infrastructure, and stability
- ☐ C) Security is unimportant to everyone
- ☐ D) The government always provides both

ANSWER KEY

The Town With No Laws

1. B) A Marine training facility

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'the concrete foundations left behind when Camp Dunlap, a Marine training facility, was dismantled after World War II.'

2. C) From solar panels

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states: 'Residents... rely on solar panels.'

3. B) Financial necessity and rejection of mainstream society

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage explains: 'For some, it's financial necessity—after losing jobs or homes... For others, it's philosophical—a rejection of modern society's rules and regulations.'

4. B) They have an unofficial mayor, a church, and social gatherings

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage mentions an 'unofficial mayor,' 'a church made of painted adobe called Salvation Mountain,' and a nightclub 'where residents gather for live music.'

5. B) The same place can represent freedom or danger depending on perspective

DOK 3 — Analysis. The author presents both positive aspects (freedom, community, artistic expression) and negative aspects (no medical care, potential danger, possible eviction), acknowledging that people interpret this lifestyle very differently.

6. B) Maximum freedom may require sacrificing certain securities like laws, infrastructure, and stability

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. Slab City offers maximum freedom (no laws, no rent, no regulations) but residents give up security (no police, no hospitals nearby, land could be reclaimed). This trade-off is central to understanding the community.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Town With No Laws

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

- Slab City has no official laws, but residents have created informal rules and leaders. Does this suggest humans naturally create structure even without government?
- Some people move to Slab City to escape society's rules; others move because they have no other choice. How might their experiences of the same place differ?
- The author asks whether Slab City is 'a utopia of freedom or a cautionary tale.' Which do you think it is, and why?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Research another 'intentional community' (like Christiania in Denmark or various communes) and compare it to Slab City.
- Design the rules for your own ideal community. What would you regulate, and what would you leave unregulated?
- Create a survival guide for someone considering moving to Slab City, including what they'd need to bring and what challenges they'd face.

DIFFERENTIATION

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

SOURCE

- The Guardian / Vice