

LEVELED BOOK • W

ROUTE

66



Route 66 Gift Shop

Birthplace of  
Historic Route 66



ANGEL & VILMA'S

ROUTE

BARBER

MULTI  
LEVEL  
Q.T.W.

Written by Emily Schlesinger

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# Route 66



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## Focus Question

What is the significance of Route 66?

# Words to Know

bypassed  
congestion  
dire  
endangered  
fiberglass  
highway

installations  
mobilized  
phenomenon  
resurgence  
road trip  
stock market

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## Correlation

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Route 66 takes drivers across the entire American West.

## Introduction

It's 1957. You take the top down on your cherry-red convertible. Sun glints off the shiny metal fins of your car, rock 'n' roll music blasts from the speakers, and ahead of you is nothing but open road. Could this drive get any better?

You think not—until you pass a three-story-tall ice cream cone covered in sprinkles. Your mouth waters. Should you stop? Wait, there's a cheeseburger the size of a bus. Time for a quick lunch instead!

When it's time to retire for the night, you park next to your teepee-shaped hotel room—complete with a bed, bathroom, and shower. What a spectacular day it was on the road! Who knows what tomorrow will bring?

If you thought this was an imaginary **road trip**, you're mistaken. You've just taken a real trip down America's favorite **highway**, Route 66.

## America's Main Street

If you've ever seen a road map of the United States, it looks a lot like an intricate spiderweb. Huge highways zigzag from coast to coast, crisscross from Canada to Mexico, and connect nearly every city in between. Getting around is easy: just jump in a car and hit the road!

A hundred years ago, driving across the country wasn't quite so easy. Most "roads" were just small dirt trails. Cars were modern inventions, and they often broke down, got stuck in mud, or popped tires on jagged rocks. If you ran out of gas, you were out of luck; there were just a few gas stations in the wilderness. If you needed to sleep, your only option was to pitch a tent by the side of a road.

In the 1920s, the United States government created a new system of numbered highways to better connect cities and states. The first fully paved highway stretched 2,400 miles (3,862 km) from Chicago to Los Angeles. Its name was Route 66, but many would call it the "Main Street of America."

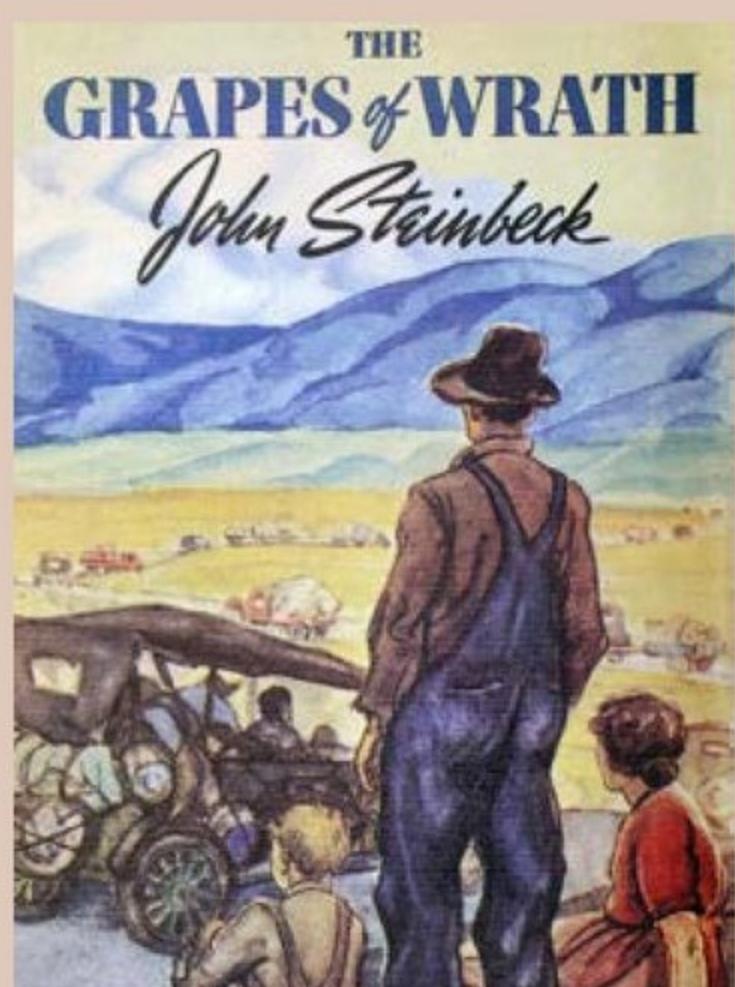


America's Main Street was soon put to the test. In 1929, the **stock market** crashed, causing many people to lose their money, jobs, and homes. The **dire** period that followed was known as the Great Depression. Meanwhile, a series of droughts caused huge dust storms to destroy farms on the Great Plains, especially in Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. This **phenomenon** was known as the Dust Bowl.

Suddenly, many people were forced to leave their homes to seek a better life elsewhere. Many believed paradise lay out west—especially in California. Thousands packed up their belongings and made the long journey. How did they get there? On a new road named Route 66. Many believed Route 66 would take them away from their troubles and lead them toward opportunity and riches elsewhere.

## The Dust Bowl in Literature

*The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck, is a classic novel published in 1939. It is about a family fleeing Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl era and making the long journey down Route 66 to seek work in California. Steinbeck described Route 66 as "the mother road" and "the road of flight."





In the 1930s, 1.2 million people moved to California. About 16,000 of them went because of difficult conditions during the Dust Bowl era.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese military bombed United States naval boats in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The United States entered World War II the following day. Thousands of soldiers, workers, and supplies needed to be quickly **mobilized** and transported from around the country to military bases in the West. How did they get there? On Route 66, of course.

On the long journey, wartime workers needed food, gasoline, and shelter. Restaurants, gas stations, and hotels began to spring up along the route to accommodate them. Times were tough in America, but business on Route 66 was booming.

When the war ended in 1945, Americans celebrated. Soldiers came home, started families, constructed houses, and purchased cars. Many wanted to drive their new cars west to see sights like the Grand Canyon and the Pacific Ocean—by way of Route 66!

## Route 66 in Popular Culture

The years after World War II were glory days for Route 66. Shiny blue roadsters, cherry-red convertibles, bubble gum–pink coupes, and yellow Checker cabs cruised up and down the route. Route 66 was no longer just a way to get somewhere else; it was the new place to be.



The original version of the song "Route 66" was performed by the Nat King Cole Trio in 1946.

In 1946, a song called "Route 66" became a top hit. Its most famous line urged listeners to "get your kicks on Route Sixty-Six," which helped define the highway's place in popular culture.

In 1960, a new TV show called *Route 66* followed two friends who drove across the country in a Corvette. They weren't going anywhere in particular; instead, they were looking for adventure on the road.



The popular television show *Route 66* aired from 1960 to 1964.

By 1970, most of the original Route 66 was **bypassed** by a new highway. However, references to Route 66 continued in American popular culture through the end of the century.

Fast forward to the year 2000. John Lasseter, the director of Pixar Animation Studios, was driving along Route 66 with his family. He fell in love with the imaginative buildings and colorful art **installations** he saw. He decided to turn his experiences into a Disney-Pixar movie called *Cars*, which was released in 2006.

Lasseter sent a team down Route 66 to do research for the movie. Some of the roadside art they found inspired characters in *Cars*. They used Route 66 landmarks in *Cars*, too; for example, the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook, Arizona, became the Cozy Cone Motel.



This rusty tow truck (top) in Galena, Kansas, became the inspiration for the *Cars* movie character Tow Mater (bottom).

*Cars* was so successful that many families who saw it took their own vacations along Route 66. This helped create a **resurgence** of the popular route.

## Route 66 Attractions



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>① Gemini Giant, Wilmington, IL<br/>② Paul Bunyon, Atlanta, IL<br/>③ Brooks Catsup Bottle Water Tower, Collinsville, IL<br/>④ Red Rocker, Fanning, MO<br/>⑤ Blue Whale, Catoosa, OK<br/>⑥ Slug Bug Ranch, Conway, TX</p> | <p>⑦ Cadillac Ranch, Amarillo, TX<br/>⑧ Wigwam Motel, Holbrook, AZ<br/>⑨ Elmer's Bottle Tree Ranch, Oro Grande, CA<br/>⑩ Cabazon Dinosaurs, Cabazon, CA<br/>⑪ Chicken Boy, Los Angeles, CA</p> |
|--|--|

## Roadside Attractions

Unique museums, motels, and shops are found along Route 66 in every state the route passes through. Route 66 is also full of unusual art, historic gas stations, and vibrant theaters.

In addition, travelers can see live shows. For instance, you can experience a real Native American dance ceremony in Lookout Point, New Mexico. Or how about the Will Rogers Memorial Rodeo in Vinita, Oklahoma? One thing's for sure—you won't be bored on Route 66!



Cadillac Ranch sits in a pasture where cows graze.

### *Cadillac Ranch*

In 1974, a group of alternative artists from San Francisco buried ten Cadillacs nose down in a field, rear bumpers sticking up toward the sky. The cars have had many colorful paint jobs over the years, but one of the most visible was in 1990, when all the cars were painted pink. Now they appear in every color of the rainbow because visitors have covered them with graffiti.



At the nearby VW Slug Bug Ranch in Conway, Texas, five colorful Volkswagen Beetles stick out of the ground.

## *Elmer's Bottle Tree Ranch*

When folk artist Elmer Long looks at garbage, he sees a forest. He built Bottle Tree Ranch out of recycled bottles, car parts, and objects of all kinds—including buffalo jawbones. As if feasting your eyes on this forest wasn't enough, it's also filled with music: the desert wind blows through all the open bottles, creating a medley of different tones.



Growing up, Elmer Long collected bottles and other items people had thrown away.

## *Blue Whale*

What do you give the woman who has everything? If you are Hugh Davis, you build your wife an 80-foot (24.4 m) blue whale for your anniversary. For many years, kids loved to slide and dive from the Blue Whale's body into the swimming hole below. Now visitors can climb inside to get a view from tiny windows in the whale's head.

The Blue Whale of Catoosa, Oklahoma, has a boardwalk along its spine.





Paul Bunyon,  
Atlanta, IL



Chicken Boy,  
Los Angeles, CA



Gemini Giant,  
Wilmington, IL

## *A Land of Giants*

Route 66 is truly a land of giants. A California factory called International Fiberglass built thousands of colossal fiberglass statues and sold them to businesses along Route 66 for advertising. The factory created unusual costumes to transform the giants into cowboys, Native Americans, astronauts, and even chickens.

Many of the biggest statues on Route 66 are food statues. Humongous oranges, donuts, cheeseburgers, and ice cream cones make for a mouthwatering ride. Look out the window near Collinsville, Illinois, and you may even catch a glimpse of the largest catsup bottle in the world!

Brooks Catsup Bottle Water Tower,  
Collinsville, IL





Dinny cost \$300,000 and was made from roadside construction materials.

### *Dinosaurs by the Dozen*

Dinosaurs may be extinct everywhere else on Planet Earth, but not on Route 66—where you can be greeted by towering prehistoric creatures of all shapes and sizes.



Mr. Rex, a three-story *Tyrannosaurus rex*, is a popular feature at Cabazon Dinosaurs.

At 150 feet (45.7 m) long, Dinny is likely the largest concrete dinosaur in America. He lives at a dinosaur park in Cabazon, California. Claude Bell built the park to lure visitors to his nearby restaurant, the Wheel Inn. The dinosaur park became famous and was even featured in the 1985 movie *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*.

## Saving Route 66

With Route 66's popularity came traffic—lots of it. Heavy traffic **congestion** caused the highway to deteriorate. From 1956 through the 1980s, the United States government began building new interstates—high-speed highways with many lanes—around Route 66. As more and more travelers chose to take interstates, businesses on Route 66 suffered. Peeling paint, faded signs, and boarded-up windows became common sights.

In 1999, the United States Congress passed a law to protect Route 66. The government started offering money to help businesses and towns pay the cost of preserving important landmarks. In 2008, the World Monuments Fund declared Route 66 “**endangered**” and put together plans to help attract tourists, such as a virtual reality map.

Now Route 66 is resurging in popularity as many return to seek its amusing artwork and creative spirit. The best way to catch the spirit of Route 66 is to drive it—and have your own classic American experience!

Route 66 Red Rocker,  
Fanning, MO



## Glossary

<b>bypassed</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	passed by or avoided, often to make a process quicker or easier (p. 9)
<b>congestion</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the state of being crowded, clogged, or too full of something (p. 15)
<b>dire</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	terribly bad (p. 6)
<b>endangered</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	in danger of dying out completely (p. 15)
<b>fiberglass</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a light, strong material made of thin threads of glass, sometimes embedded in a material similar to plastic (p. 13)
<b>highway</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a main road that connects towns or cities (p. 4)
<b>installations</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	works of art that are often large, untraditional, and made of mixed media and can sometimes be entire rooms or buildings (p. 9)
<b>mobilized</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	made troops and supplies ready for war or action (p. 7)
<b>phenomenon</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a remarkable event or occurrence; someone or something that is very impressive or popular because of an unusual ability or quality (p. 6)
<b>resurgence</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an increase in growth or popularity after a period of decline or inactivity (p. 9)
<b>road trip</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a trip taken in a car, usually a long distance (p. 4)
<b>stock market</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a system or place where stocks are bought, sold, and traded (p. 6)

# Route 66

**A Reading A-Z Level W Leveled Book**

**Word Count: 1,464**

## Connections

### Writing

Imagine you took a road trip down Route 66. Write at least three journal entries describing your trip. Use information from the book and outside resources.

### Social Studies and Art

Create a timeline of Route 66's history with at least six events. Include a picture and a description of each event.

The logo for Reading A-Z features the word "Reading" in a large, bold, red sans-serif font. The letter "R" has a small sun-like icon above it with rays extending to the right. To the right of "Reading" is the letters "A-Z" in a smaller, bold, red sans-serif font.

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