

LEVELED BOOK • T

ROUTE

66



Route 66 Gift Shop

Birthplace of
Historic Route 66



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ROUTE

BARBER

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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
convertible
deteriorate
fiberglass
highway

landmarks
preserving
road trip
transported

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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**. Rock 'n' roll music blasts from the speakers. 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 rest for the night, you park next to your teepee-shaped hotel room. What a spectacular day it was on the road! Who knows what tomorrow will bring?

This was no imaginary **road trip**. You've just taken a real road trip down America's favorite **highway**, Route 66.

America's Main Street

Have you ever seen a road map of the United States? It looks a lot like an enormous spiderweb. Huge highways zigzag from coast to coast. They 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 often broke down, got stuck in mud, or popped tires on jagged rocks.

In the 1920s, the United States government created a new system of numbered highways to make driving cross-country easier. The first highway to be fully paved stretched 2,400 miles (3,862 km) from Chicago, Illinois, to Los Angeles, California. Its name was Route 66, but many fondly called it the "Main Street of America."



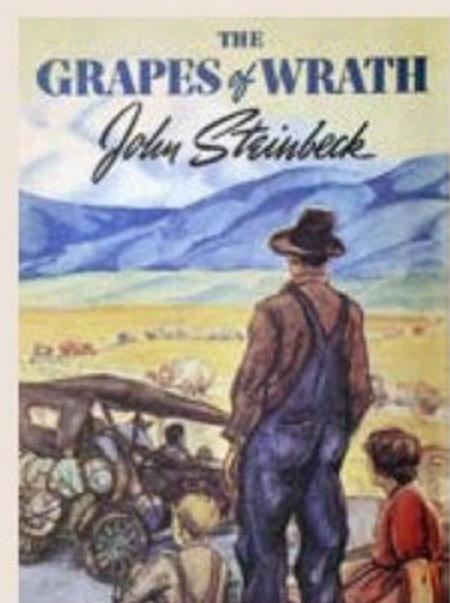
America's Main Street was soon put to the test. In 1929, hard times hit the United States. Many banks failed, causing people to lose their savings. A great number of people lost their jobs and homes as well. The period that followed was known as the Great Depression.

Meanwhile, a series of droughts—long periods without rain—destroyed many farms. The hardest-hit areas were in Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico. This historic time period was known as the Dust Bowl era. Suddenly, many people were forced to leave their homes to seek a better life elsewhere. Many believed paradise could be found in California.

Thousands packed up their belongings and made the long journey west. How did they get there? On a new road named Route 66.

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 8, 1941, the United States entered World War II. Soldiers, workers, and supplies needed to be quickly **transported** from around the country to military bases in the West. How did they get there? On Route 66, of course!

Restaurants, gas stations, and hotels began to spring up along the route to serve these wartime workers.

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

Route 66 in Popular Culture

The years after World War II were great days for Route 66. Shiny new cars and yellow Checker cabs cruised up and down the route.

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.” This song helped make the highway famous.



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

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 adventures on the road.

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



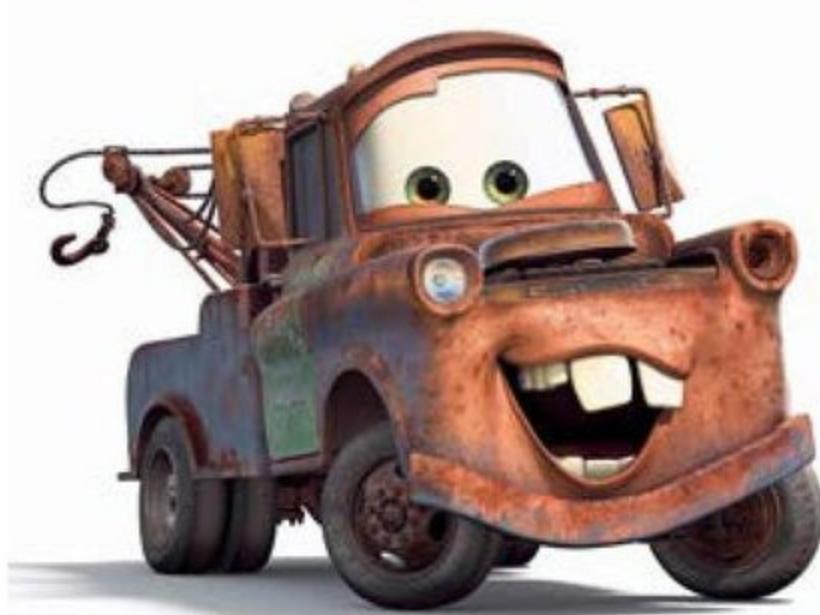
The popular television show *Route 66* aired from 1960 to 1964.

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 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 the movie. For example, the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook, Arizona, became the Cozy Cone Motel.



Cars was so successful that many families who saw it decided to take their own vacations along Route 66. This made the route popular again.



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

Route 66 Attractions



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

Roadside Attractions

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

In addition, travelers can see live shows. For instance, you can see a Native American dance ceremony in New Mexico or a rodeo in Oklahoma. One thing's for sure—you won't be bored on Route 66!



Cadillac Ranch sits in a pasture where cows graze.

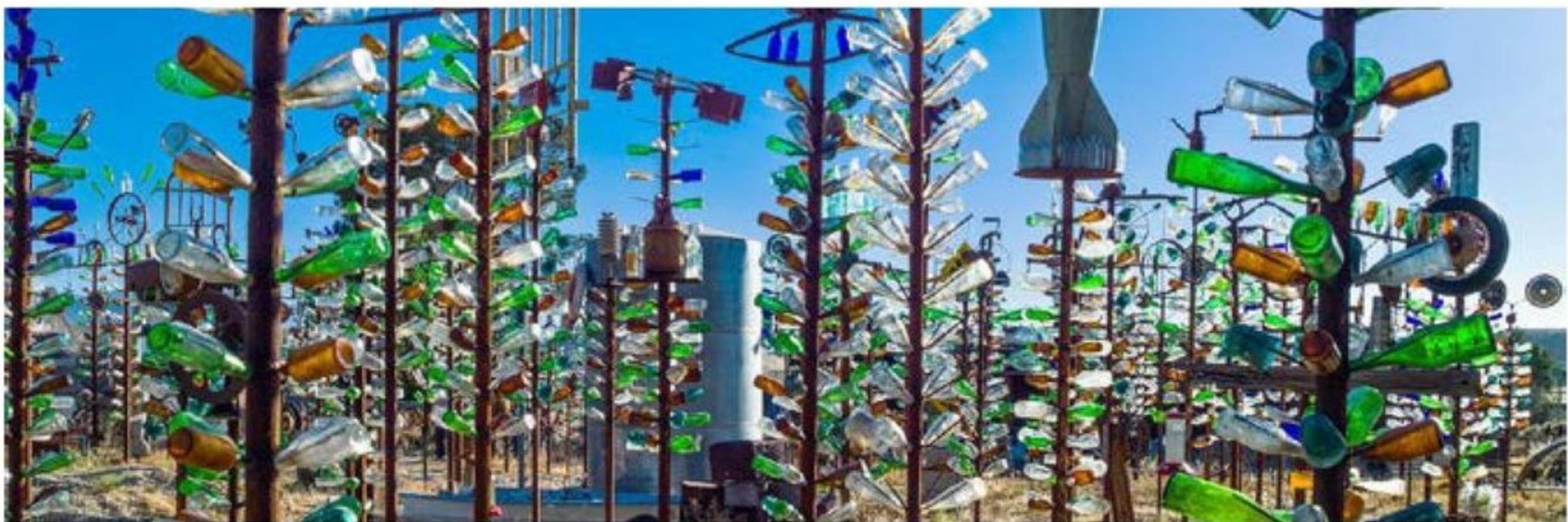
Cadillac Ranch

In 1974, some artists buried ten Cadillacs nose down in a field, rear bumpers sticking straight up toward the sky.

Now the cars are every color of the rainbow because visitors have covered them with spray paint.



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



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

Elmer's Bottle Tree Ranch

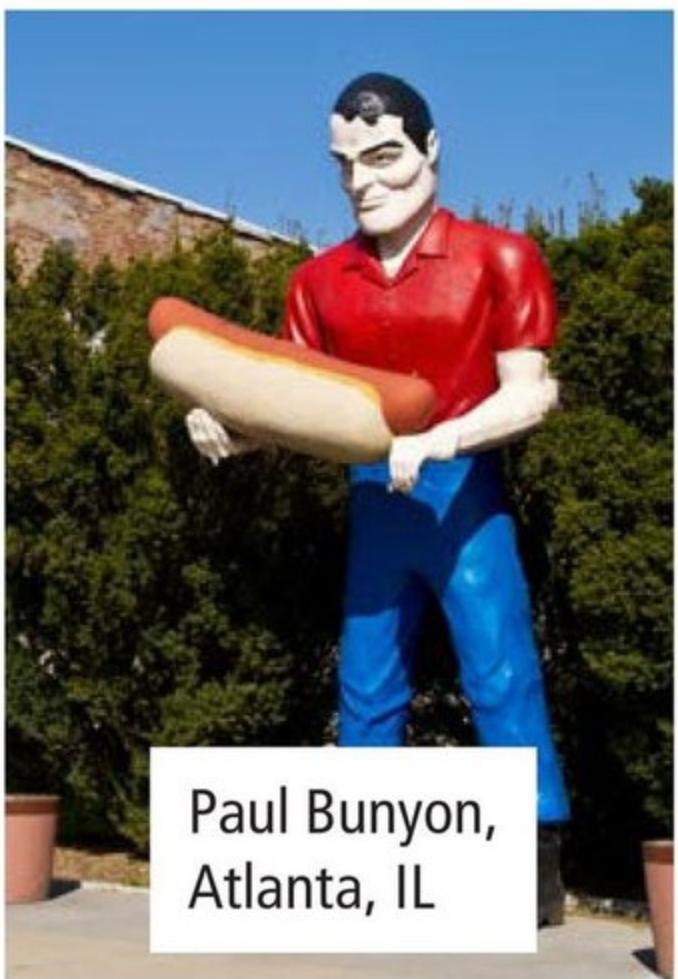
Folk artist Elmer Long built Bottle Tree Ranch out of recycled bottles, car parts, and other objects—including buffalo jawbones. When the desert wind blows through the open bottles, the air fills with music.

Blue Whale

What do you give the woman who has everything? Hugh Davis built his wife an 80-foot (24.4 m) blue whale for their anniversary. For many years, kids loved to slide and dive from the Blue Whale's body into the swimming hole below.



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 built thousands of huge **fiberglass** statues. Businesses along Route 66 used them for advertising. The factory added costumes to turn them into cowboys, Native Americans, astronauts, and even chickens.

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

Brooks Catsup Bottle Water Tower,
Collinsville, IL



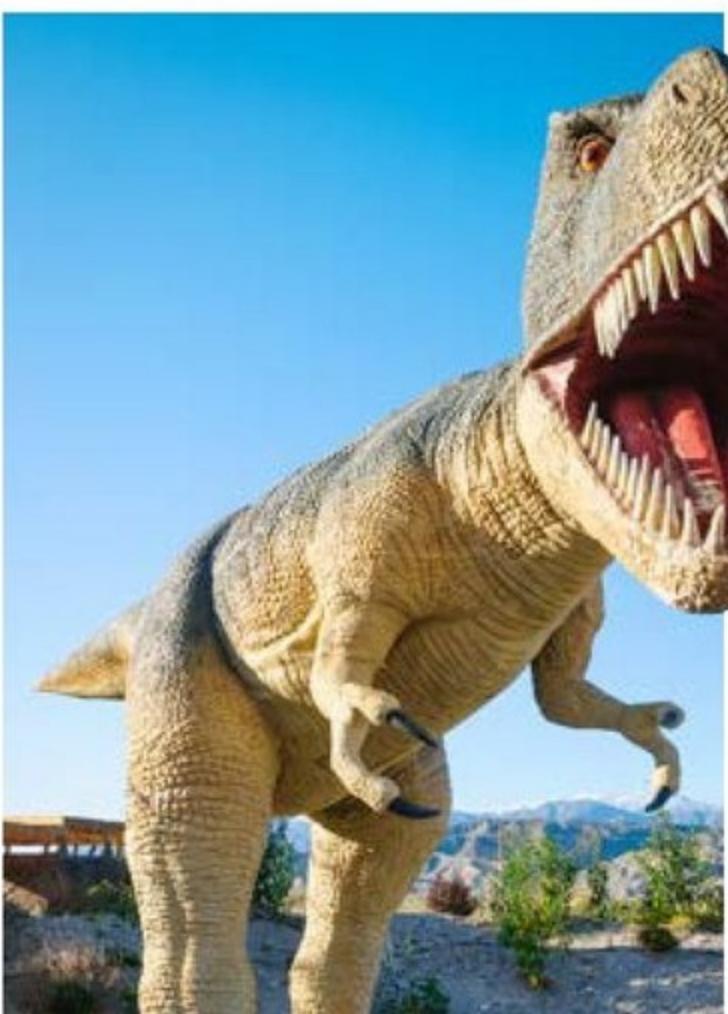


Dinny cost \$300,000 and was made from roadside materials.

Dinosaurs by the Dozen

On Route 66, you can be greeted by prehistoric creatures of all shapes and sizes.

Dinny is likely the largest concrete dinosaur in America. He is 150 feet (45.7 m) long and lives at a dinosaur park in Cabazon, California. Claude Bell built the park to attract visitors to his nearby restaurant, the Wheel Inn.



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

The dinosaur park became famous. It 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 caused the highway to **deteriorate**. From 1956 through the 1980s, new interstates—high-speed highways with many lanes—were built around Route 66. As more travelers took interstates, businesses on Route 66 suffered, and many closed. 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 offered money to help businesses and towns pay the cost of **preserving** important landmarks.

Now Route 66 is growing popular again 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. You're sure to have an unforgettable American experience of your own!

Route 66 Red Rocker,
Fanning, MO



Glossary

bypassed (<i>v.</i>)	passed by or avoided, often to make a process quicker or easier (p. 8)
convertible (<i>n.</i>)	a car with a roof that can be folded back or removed (p. 4)
deteriorate (<i>v.</i>)	to become worse over time (p. 15)
fiberglass (<i>n.</i>)	a light, strong material made of thin threads of glass, sometimes embedded in a material similar to plastic (p. 13)
highway (<i>n.</i>)	a main road that connects towns or cities (p. 4)
landmarks (<i>n.</i>)	important historical buildings or sites; objects on land that mark a place (p. 9)
preserving (<i>v.</i>)	preventing decay or keeping something in its original state (p. 15)
road trip (<i>n.</i>)	a trip taken in a car or other vehicle to visit places away from home (p. 4)
transported (<i>v.</i>)	carried from one place to another (p. 7)

Route 66

A *Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Book*

Word Count: 1,178

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 with rays above it. To the right of "Reading" is a large, stylized red letter "A-Z".

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