

LEVELED BOOK • Q

ROUTE

66



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

advertising  
bypassed  
cabs  
highway  
jagged

military bases  
road trip  
rodeo  
spirit

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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 red sports car. 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 an ice cream cone that's three stories tall. 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 a hotel room shaped like a teepee. What a fun day it was on the road! Who knows what tomorrow will bring?

If you thought this was an imaginary **road trip**, you're wrong. You've just taken a real 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 a 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 new highways to make driving easier. One highway 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."

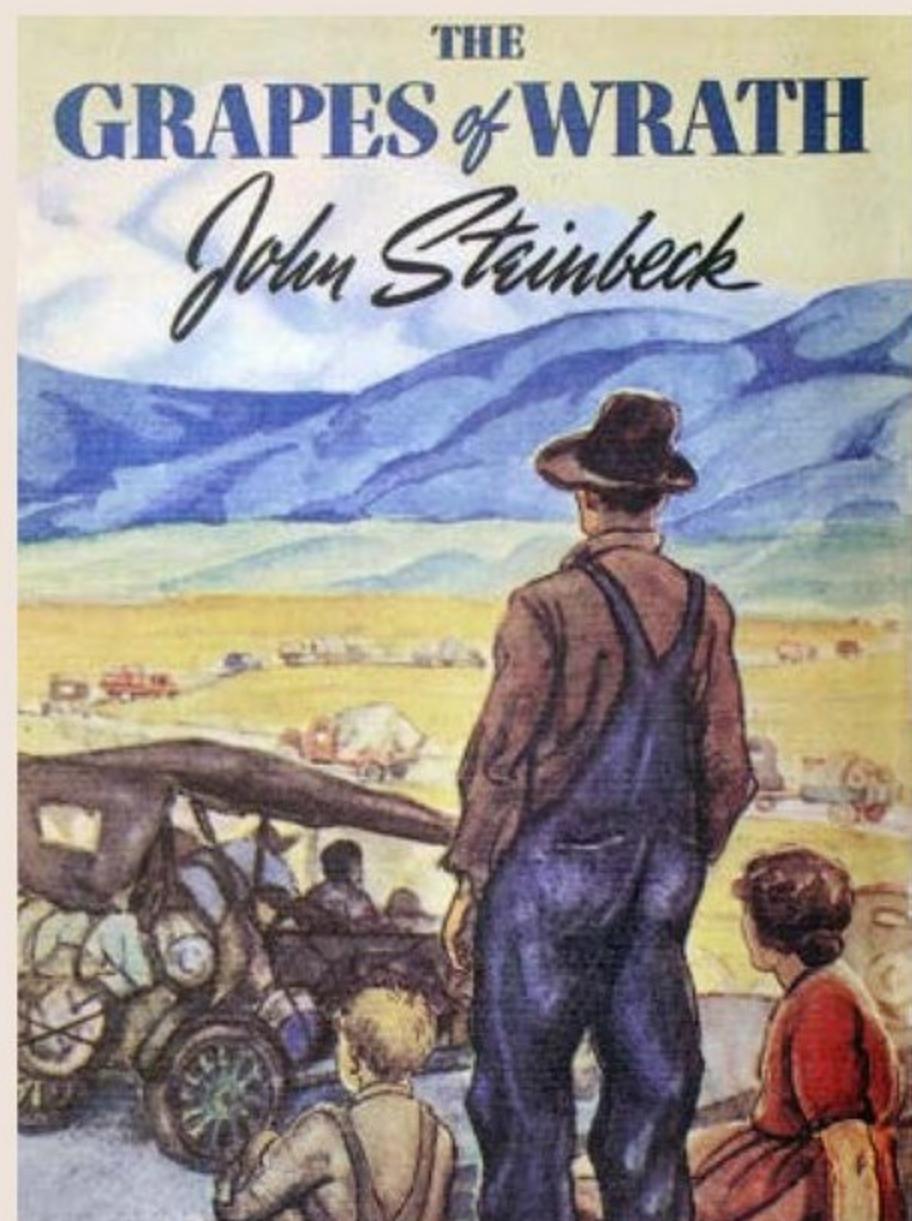


In 1929, hard times hit the United States. Many banks failed, causing people to lose their money, jobs, and homes. The period that followed was known as the Great Depression. Then a series of droughts—long periods without rain—destroyed many farms. This historic time period was known as the Dust Bowl era.

Suddenly, many people were forced to leave their homes. Many believed they could find jobs 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 from all over the country had to move to **military bases** in the West. How did they get there? On Route 66, of course! Restaurants, gas stations, and hotels opened up along the route to serve them.

When the war ended in 1945, Americans celebrated. Many bought new cars. They drove 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 cabs traveled up and down the route.

In 1946, a song called “Route 66” became a top hit. Its most famous line told 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.

Then, in 1960, a TV show called *Route 66* followed two friends who drove across the country. 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.



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

Fast forward to the year 2000. John Lasseter, director of Pixar Animation Studios, was driving down Route 66 with his family. He fell in love with the colorful art and buildings. 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 ended up as characters in *Cars*. They used Route 66 sights in the movie. For

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

Many families who saw *Cars* took their own vacations along Route 66. This helped the route become popular again.



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

## Route 66 Attractions



- 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
- 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

## 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 such as a Native American dance or a **rodeo**. One thing's for sure—you won't be bored on Route 66!



Cadillac Ranch sits in a pasture where cows graze.

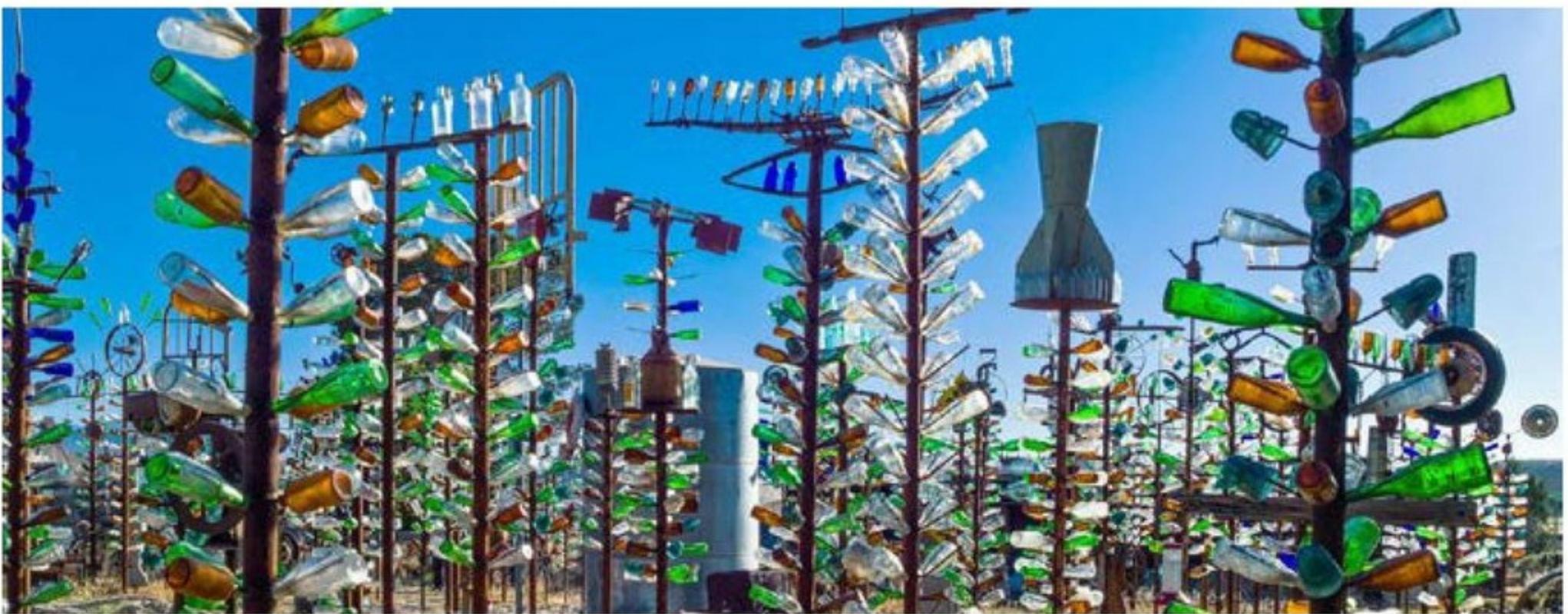
### *Cadillac Ranch*

In 1974, some artists buried ten cars nose down in a field.

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*

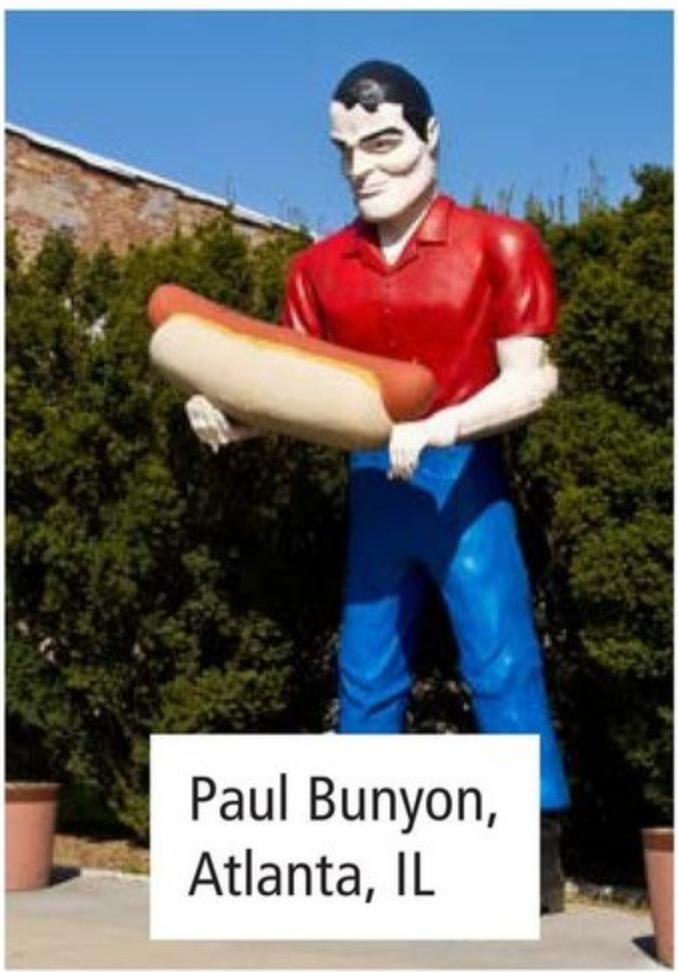
Folk artist Elmer Long built Bottle Tree Ranch out of recycled bottles, car parts, and other found objects. When wind blows through the open bottles, the air fills with music.

### *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!



The Blue  
Whale of  
Catoosa,  
Oklahoma



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 sold thousands of huge statues to businesses to use for **advertising**. The factory added costumes to turn the giants into cowboys, astronauts, and even chickens.

Many of the biggest statues on Route 66 are food statues. Huge oranges, donuts, cheeseburgers, and ice cream cones might make your mouth water. Look out the window in Illinois to see the largest catsup bottle in the world!



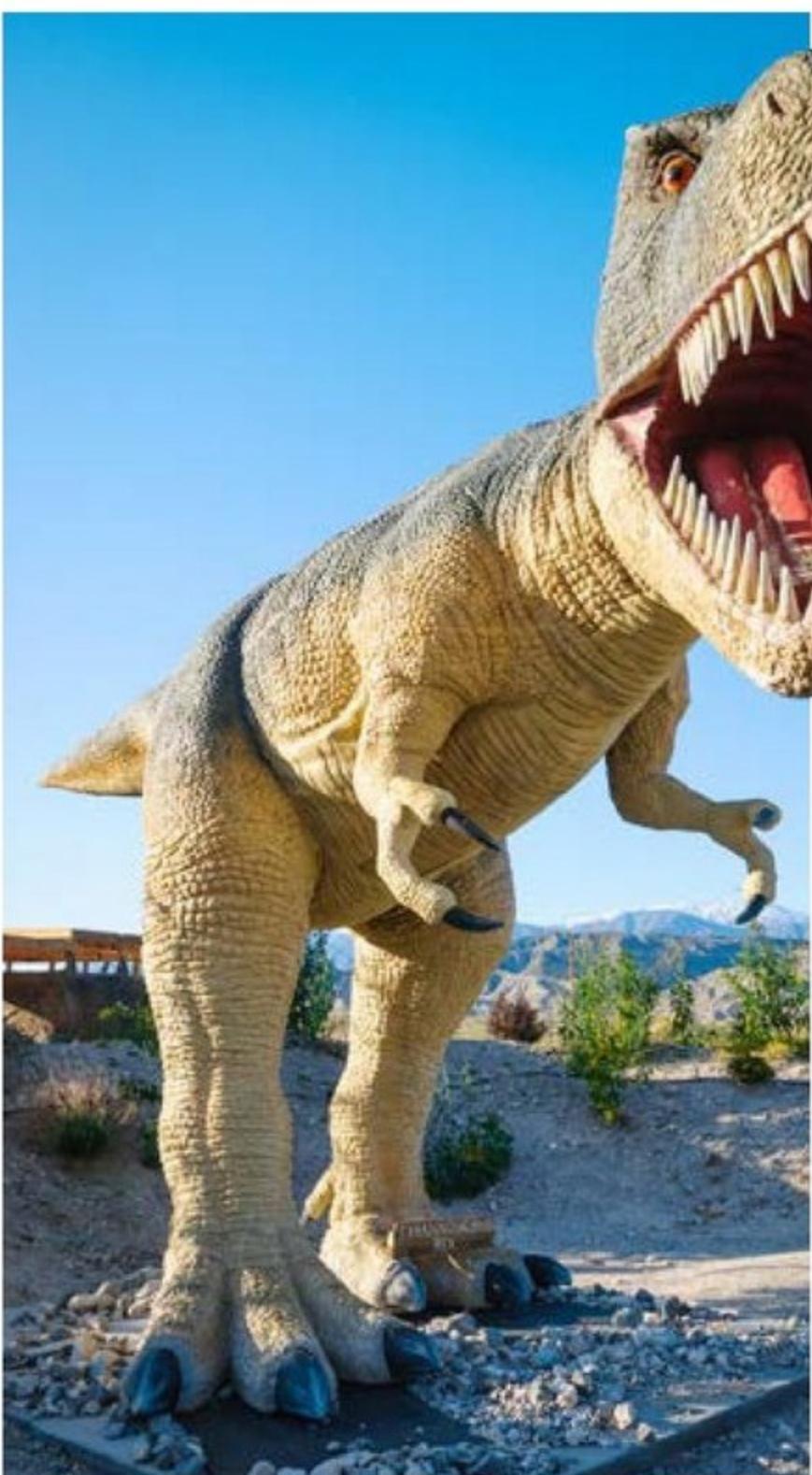
Brooks Catsup Bottle Water Tower,  
Collinsville, IL



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

### *Dinosaurs by the Dozen*

Route 66 is home to prehistoric creatures of all shapes and sizes. One of these giants might be the largest concrete dinosaur in America. He is 150 feet (45.7 m) long and lives at a dinosaur park in California.



Claude Bell built the park to draw visitors to his nearby restaurant, the Wheel Inn.

Mr. Rex, a three-story *Tyrannosaurus rex*, is a popular feature at the dinosaur park.

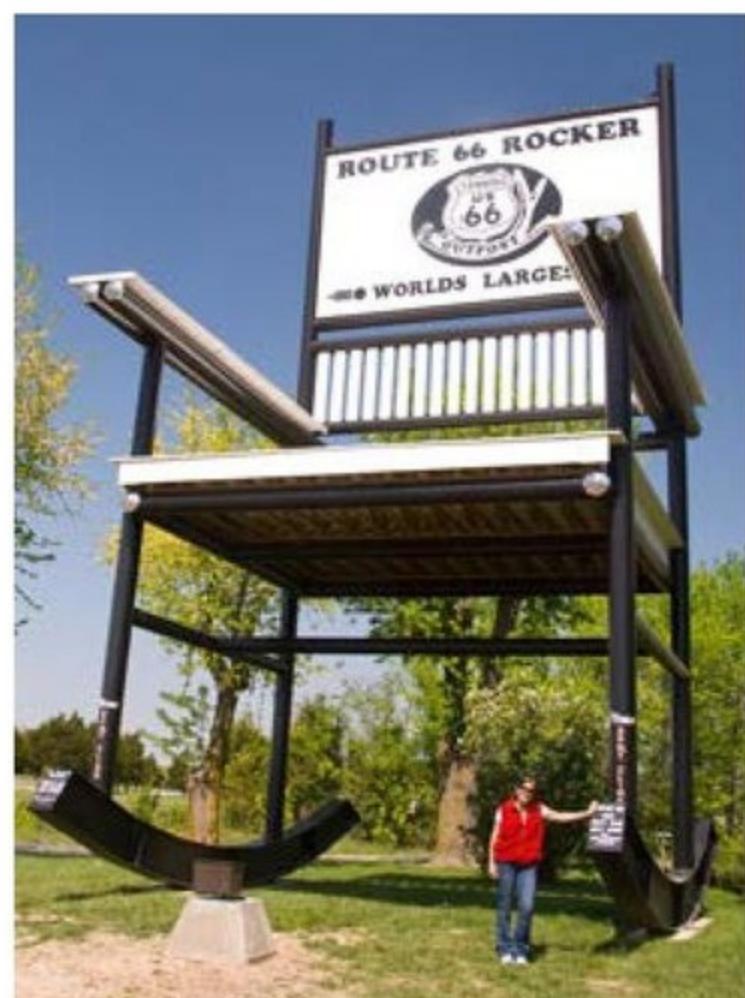
## Saving Route 66

As more people visited Route 66, heavy traffic caused damage to the highway. From 1956 through the 1980s, new interstates—high-speed highways with many lanes—were built around Route 66.

But as more travelers took interstates, businesses on Route 66 lost customers, and many closed. Peeling paint and boarded-up windows became common sights.

In 1999, the United States Congress passed a law to protect Route 66. It gave money to help businesses and towns keep important sights open.

Now Route 66 is growing popular again. 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

<b>advertising</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the public announcement of products, services, or events to draw interest and promote sales (p. 13)
<b>bypassed</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	passed by or avoided, often to make a process quicker or easier (p. 8)
<b>cabs</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	motor vehicles whose drivers take people places for money (p. 8)
<b>highway</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a main road that connects towns or cities (p. 4)
<b>jagged</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having a sharp, irregular shape or edge (p. 5)
<b>military bases</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	places owned by the military that house soldiers and equipment (p. 7)
<b>road trip</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a trip taken in a car or other vehicle to visit places away from home (p. 4)
<b>rodeo</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a competition in which people show skills related to handling cattle and horses (p. 10)
<b>spirit</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the mood or attitude of a person, group, or place (p. 15)

# Route 66

*A Reading A-Z Level Q Leveled Book*

*Word Count: 1,010*

## 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 "A" is stylized with a small sun-like icon above it, showing rays of light. To the right of "Reading" is the letters "A-Z" in a smaller, red, bold, sans-serif font.

Reading A-Z

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