



Old Route 66 Printable Reading Comprehension

Word Count:404 | Lexile 1060

Route 66: The Road That Defined America

Few roads in America have captured the imagination like Route 66, the legendary highway that once connected Chicago to Los Angeles. Stretching more than two thousand miles, it crossed eight states and countless small towns, earning nicknames such as “Main Street of America” and “The Mother Road.” For travelers heading west during the twentieth century, Route 66 represented freedom, adventure, and the promise of a new life.

When it was officially established in 1926, the United States had only begun building a national network of paved roads. Route 66 quickly became one of the most important. It passed through farmland, prairies, mountains, and deserts, linking communities that had been isolated by geography. Gas stations, diners, and motor courts sprang up to serve motorists, and many of those businesses shaped the roadside culture that still defines American travel today. Neon signs, cheerful waitresses, and souvenir stands made each stop memorable.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Route 66 carried thousands of families fleeing the Dust Bowl—a series of droughts that devastated farms in Oklahoma and neighboring states. With their belongings piled high, these “Okies,” as they were called, followed the highway west toward California, hoping to find work in the fertile valleys. The journey was difficult, but Route 66 became a path of survival and resilience.

After World War II, Americans took to the road again, this time for leisure. Soldiers returning home bought automobiles, and families explored the country on vacation. Route 66 led them through red-rock canyons, desert ghost towns, and the glittering lights of new western cities like Albuquerque and Los Angeles. By the 1950s, the highway had become a symbol of postwar optimism and wanderlust, celebrated in songs, novels, and movies.

However, progress brought change. In the 1960s, the creation of the modern Interstate Highway System began to replace the old route with faster four-lane roads. Businesses that had thrived on Route 66 declined, and many towns faded into memory. In 1985, the road was officially removed from the U.S. Highway System. Yet its spirit never disappeared. Today, preservation groups and travelers from around the world follow its surviving sections to experience a piece of American history. Along the desert stretches of Arizona and New Mexico, the faded motels, rusted signs, and endless sky remind visitors that Route 66 remains more than a highway—it is a journey through time.

1. Which idea best captures what Route 66 symbolized for Americans throughout the twentieth century?

- A. A reminder of the dangers of cross-country travel
 - B. A link between rural hardship and industrial progress
 - C. A symbol of mobility, independence, and the American dream
 - D. A boundary separating eastern and western cultures
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2. Based on the passage, what does the growth of businesses along Route 66 suggest about life in early automobile America?

- A. Local economies quickly adapted to serve a new kind of traveler
 - B. Rural towns resisted modernization and discouraged tourists
 - C. Roadside services were controlled entirely by the government
 - D. Long-distance travel was limited mainly to freight trucks
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3. During the Great Depression, how did Route 66's role reflect the larger struggles of the era?

- A. It became a government project to create jobs for unemployed workers
 - B. It offered families an escape route from economic and environmental disaster
 - C. It symbolized the failure of America's transportation system
 - D. It served as a border that separated wealthy from poor regions
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4. How did Americans' relationship with Route 66 change after World War II?

- A. It transformed from a route of necessity to one of exploration and enjoyment
 - B. It became restricted to commercial vehicles only
 - C. It was abandoned as cities grew too large for highway travel
 - D. It turned into a military route connecting western bases
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5. What does the passage imply was the *irony* of Route 66's decline?

- A. The very progress that once made travel possible eventually replaced the road itself
 - B. Drivers stopped traveling west once faster planes were invented
 - C. The government banned long-distance driving to reduce pollution
 - D. Route 66 became too crowded to remain popular with tourists
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6. Which combination of details best illustrates the creation of Route 66's unique roadside culture?

- A. The rise of neon-lit diners, souvenir stands, and motor courts along small-town highways
 - B. The spread of high-speed toll roads and industrial gas stations
 - C. The replacement of farms with shopping malls and theme parks
 - D. The expansion of city airports and four-lane interstates
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7. Which statement best expresses the *central idea* of the passage?

- A. Route 66's history mirrors America's changing relationship with travel, progress, and nostalgia.
- B. Route 66 was the most efficient road ever built in the United States.
- C. Route 66 failed to adapt to the economic challenges of the Great Depression.
- D. Route 66's closure marked the end of all small towns in America.

#	Correct Answer	Skill Focus
1	C	Inference / Theme
2	A	Cause and Effect / Economic Inference
3	B	Historical Context / Analysis
4	A	Compare & Contrast / Perspective Shift
5	A	Irony / Inference
6	A	Text Evidence / Cultural Impact
7	A	Central Idea / Synthesis