

Route 66 and Population Patterns

By: June E. Satak

Overview and Purpose: Because geography integrates several disciplines, this lesson includes a math skill (graphing), as well as the language arts and social studies skills of writing, synthesis, and analysis. By graphing population patterns and researching the evolution of Route 66 from unpaved, local roads to a US Interstate, students will become proficient in the themes of location and spatial relationships.

In groups of 3-5, students will examine the physical geography of Route 66, as well as discover how population patterns changed in selected cities over the 64-year official history of this major highway. This is designed as a culminating activity that incorporates US history from 1921-1980. Although the focus is on the significance of Route 66, students will be expected to draw upon their knowledge of US history during this era.

Geographic Question: How and why did the development of Route 66 impact population patterns in selected cities between Chicago and Los Angeles?

Grade Level: Ideally suited for tenth grade (Modern American Studies); however, this lesson could be adapted for 8th or 5th Grade US History during a discussion of westward migration, since this has been a dominant American theme.

Objectives:

- 1) Students will use a variety of sources and tools to demonstrate their geographic knowledge of the importance of Route 66.
- 2) Students will develop several hypotheses to explain why population patterns along Route 66 changed over time.
- 3) Students will collect, organize, and analyze data to support or refute their hypotheses regarding population pattern changes.

Connections with the Curriculum

- ◆ *Oregon Benchmarks*
 1. "Use, interpret, and construct geographic representations (maps, globes, charts, graphs, diagrams, models, photographs, databases) to analyze information, explain spatial relationships, and compare places."
 2. "Locate and identify places, regions, and geographic features that have played prominent roles in historical or contemporary issues and events."

3. "Analyze changes in the physical and human characteristics of places and regions, and the effects of technology, migration, and urbanization on them."

◆ *National Geographic Standards*

Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

Standard 3: How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on Earth's surface.

Standard 12: The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement.

Standard 17: How to apply Geography to interpret the past.

◆ Music: The following songs could be used.

1. "Get Your Kicks on Route 66" by Bobby Troupe (1946)
2. "The Ballad of Tom Joad" by Woody Guthrie (1940)
3. "The Songs of Route 66: Music from the All-American Highway", compiled by David Sanger, 1988

◆ Literature: Excerpts could be used to enhance this lesson, or as a supplement for students who want to take their understanding of migration patterns in this era of US history to a higher level.

1. "Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck, 1939
2. "Romancing the Road", National Geographic, September 1997, pp. 34-51
3. "Okies: Beyond the Dust Bowl", National Geographic, September 1984, pp. 322-349

◆ Movies/Documentaries:

1. "The Grapes of Wrath", directed by John Ford (1940)
2. "Easy Rider", directed by Dennis Hopper, 1969.

Time necessary to complete: Adapted to just the graphing and mapping components, this lesson can take as little as one 90-minute period. However, by including the worksheet and at least one video and/or other background information such as music and literature, this lesson could stretch to 3-5 periods.

Vocabulary: Dust Bowl, exodus, CCC, WPA, "The Mother Road", migration, motel, "Okie", spatial perspective, urbanization, location

Materials:

- ◆ At least one copy of a map of Route 66 for classroom use or an overhead displaying the exact route
- ◆ US highway maps (one for each group – one for the wall is helpful, too)
- ◆ Outline map of the US (**4 for each group**)
- ◆ Classroom set of US atlases that include vegetation, precipitation, and climate charts or maps
- ◆ Census information for each city (included). Each group receives information for one city.
- ◆ Overhead sheets with grids for graphing (one for each group)
- ◆ A variety of reference tools related to Route 66 (see bibliography)
- ◆ Worksheet
- ◆ Student/group evaluation sheet
- ◆ Butcher paper for timeline
- ◆ Butcher paper for wall map (class project – optional)

Procedure:

1. Divide class into groups of 4-5 students each. This figure can be adapted based on the skill level of students and their ability to work in groups.
2. Distribute census information and overhead sheets. **Each group receives the information for only one city.** Do not yet explain that these cities are along Route 66.
3. Have groups look at population figures for their city (between 1910 and 1960). Have them graph the population and speculate on what could cause such an increase/decrease in population over time. (Students can also calculate the percentage of increase/decrease each census year, if they choose.)

Each group will briefly display their graph on the overhead for the group and propose possibilities for specific population patterns. Any prior knowledge about US history should be used to support these tentative assumptions. **Groups need to keep their graphs for later use in Step 7.** *The teacher can model population information if students are unfamiliar with this type of data or with graphing information. The teacher should not use a city along Route 66 as an example. I suggest using your hometown. (This strategy is aligned with an Oregon benchmark for 10th grade: Teaching Local History.)*

4. While students are graphing census data, the teacher writes on the board the names of all the cities being examined. The teacher should ask what these cities have in common
5. After students graph the census data through the year 1960, the teacher divulges that these cities are along Route 66. Give brief history of Route 66: why it was necessary, how it became so well traveled, and the role it has played in modern US history.

A map of Route 66 should be distributed to each group at this time and/or displayed so that it can be viewed by the entire class. This is important to Step 7.

The documentary or a section of one of the videos suggested in the bibliography could be shown at this time.

6. The teacher and class should create a timeline (suggested events relevant to Route 66 are included) at this point. This will be useful to mesh events critical to Route 66 with more broad American events between 1920-1980. While the teacher places important events in the history of Route 66 on the timeline, the teacher can also ask students to volunteer events in US history as an informal review.
7. Using road maps (such as those supplied by AAA or other US highway maps) as a guide, each group will map (Map 1) the course of Route 66, from Chicago to Los Angeles on an outline map of the US (outline included). They will label states, locate all selected cities along the route, label their city with a star, and also include important geographical features such as rivers, mountains, deserts, etc. The instructions for this map exercise are included.

Students will also map the route of the modern interstate, I-40.

8. Each group will use the classroom atlases or wall maps to complete three additional outline maps that depict the vegetation/crops (Map 2), the precipitation (Map 3), and the climate (Map 4) along Route 66.

***For assessment purposes, mapping and graphing responsibilities in Steps 3, 7 and 8 should be divided equally among the group.*

9. For the next step, the teacher should have readily available in the classroom several reference materials such as books, articles, maps, videos, websites, etc., that relate to Route 66. In the same original groups, students will use these materials to explore what their city was like before the highway was constructed and more importantly, **what happened to their city (some of which were fairly obscure before the arrival of the highway) when Route 66 came through town.** Each student should answer the questions on Part 1 of their worksheet (included).
10. Next, the groups will examine the same reference materials and describe what happens to this same city from 1970-1990. Students will graph this information (this completes graphing portion). Students will record their responses on Part 2 of the worksheet.
11. Each student should record any additional observations on Part 3 of the worksheet.
12. Each group will present their completed graph to the class on the overhead. They should use the answers from their worksheet to explain the population history of their city so that the class understands why the population increased and/or decreased between 1920-1990.

Assessment

1. Each student will receive a score based on the completeness of their answers to the questions posed in Steps 9-11.
2. Each group will be scored on completeness and neatness of the maps in Steps 7 and 8, as well as the neatness of their population graph (Steps 3 and 10).
3. Additionally, each student will complete the worksheet titled "Individual Evaluation".

Class Project (Optional):

For public display, the class will create a wall-sized map of the United States that features Route 66 and its history. Using images from various sources (including internet, books, articles, brochures, postcards, etc.) students will create a collage that visually represents the look of Route 66 as it moves across the US.

Significant events in the history of Route 66

- ◆ 1910 - 180,000 registered automobiles (1 per 5,000 people in US)
- ◆ Federal Highway Act (1921) mandates the creation of a highway network. Federal money is provided.
- ◆ 1920's - more than 17 millions cars and trucks
- ◆ Route 66 commissioned in 1926
- ◆ 1926 - 800 miles paved. 1937 - all 2,448 miles paved, due primarily to the efforts of the CCC and WPA
- ◆ Federal Highway Act of 1956 - The demise of Route 66 is planned! Interstate 40, a new "superhighway" will replace this historic road.
- ◆ 1985 - Officially decommissioned

Mapping Instructions

On the following outline maps do the following:

Map 1 - Label this map "Route 66"

1. Draw the actual route of Route 66 by tracing a line from Chicago to Los Angeles.
2. Draw the actual route of modern-day I-40.
3. Include the following:
 - ◆ Each state which the route passes through
 - ◆ Locate each city listed on the board and place it on the map
 - ◆ Label your city with a star
 - ◆ Locate the Mississippi River
 - ◆ Locate and label other rivers Route 66 crosses
 - ◆ Locate, draw, and label other geographic features such as mountains and deserts

Map 2 - Label this map "Vegetation"

1. Use the classroom atlas or a wall map to identify and label the vegetation and/or crops that grow near your city.
2. Include a key on this map.

Map 3 - Label this map "Precipitation"

1. Use the classroom atlas or a wall map to identify and label the precipitation patterns of your city. Include both winter and summer patterns.
2. Include a key on this map.

Map 4 - Label this map "Climate"

1. Use the classroom atlas or a wall map to identify and label the climate patterns of your city. Include both winter and summer patterns.
2. Include a key on this map.

Route 66 Worksheet

Name of your city (include state): _____

Based on the population graph and maps you and your group have completed, please answer the following questions in complete sentences.

Part 1 - What happened when Route 66 was constructed?

1. Why do you think the planners of Route 66 chose to include your city? In other words, based on your maps, what does your city have to offer? Is it an industrial or farming community? Is it located near a major metropolitan area?
2. Did weather patterns (such as climate and precipitation) influence the selection of your city?
3. Once the route was established, which businesses became necessary and began to flourish?
4. How did this affect the population of your city?
5. What local attractions became tourist sites?
7. Did tourism encourage the development of other services? If so, please list those services.

Part 2 - What happened when Route 66 was decommissioned?

1. What happened to the population of your city between 1970 and 1990?
2. Was your city devastated or enhanced by the development of I-40?
3. Are the features that made this city desirable to the planners of Route 66 still desirable to some?
4. Why did some cities continue to flourish after the "official" death of Route 66, yet others were forgotten?

Part 3 - Additional observations and comments about the population history of your city and the history of Route 66

Individual Evaluation

1. What was your role in the map and graphing projects?
2. Rate your performance on a scale of 1 (not involved) to 5 (highly involved)
3. How could you have improved your performance?

Suggested Bibliography

Books

Wallis, Michael. *Route 66: the Mother Road*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Articles

Cobb, Nathan. "Searching for Route 66." *The Boston Globe*, 3 May 1992.

Dean, Paul. "Still Getting Kicks on Route 66." *Los Angeles Times*, 27 September 1992.

De Voto, Bernard. "The Easy Chair." *Harpers Magazine*, October 1955.

Hinton, Harold. "The Family-Less Car." *New York Times Magazine*, 20 August 1950.

Parks, Clara. "Horizon Hunters," *Ladies Home Journal*, August 1947.

Smyth, Mitchell, "You Can Still Get Your Kicks on Route 66."

Toronto Star, 24 October 1992.

US Department of the Interior. "Special Resource Study: Route 66," National Park Service, NPS D-4, July 1995.

Websites

www.national66@national66.com (includes many photos of old motels, gas stations, diners, and other landmarks along the route)

www.clta.on.ca/what99 (includes an online story and quiz about Route 66)

www.synaptic.bc.ca/gallery/rt66toc.htm (more photos of many places along the route)

www.bekkoame.ne.jp/~toisa/card.html (images of postcards featuring Route 66 landmarks)

Films

The teacher could show brief selections from each movie to give students a better feel for the historical impact of Route 66.

The Grapes of Wrath. Directed by John Ford, 1940.

Easy Rider. Directed by Dennis Hopper, 1969.

Songs

"The Songs of Route 66: Music from the All-American Highway", compiled by David Sanger, 1988

The Ballad of Tom Joad, by Woody Guthrie, 1940

Lyrics can be found on www.geocities.com/Nashville/3448/tomjoad

Get Your Kicks on Route 66, by Bobby Troupe, 1946

"If you ever plan to motor west

Travel my way, take the highway that's the best

Get your kicks on Route 66.

It winds from Chicago to L.A.
More than 2,000 miles all the way
Get your kicks on Route 66.
You go through St. Louie, Joplin, Missouri
You'll see Amarillo, Gallup, New Mexico
Flagstaff, Arizona, don't forget Winona
Kingman, Barstow, San Bernadino.
Won't you get hip to this timely tip
When you make the at California trip
Get your kicks on Route 66.

Census Data

Give data for ONE city to EACH group. Students should look for rising/declining population, as well as big increases/decreases. Also, they should pay careful attention to what happens to the population of cities that remain along the interstate that replaces Route 66 (I-40) and that of the cities which are bypassed by the interstate.

Galena, Kansas

1900	10,155
1910	6,096
1920	4,712
1930	4,736
1940	4,375
1950	4,029
1960	3,827
1970	3,712
1980	3,587
1990	3,358

Flagstaff, Arizona

1890	963
1900	1,271
1910	1,633
1920	3,186
1930	3,891
1940	5,080
1950	7,663
1960	18,214 (+137.7%)
1970	26,117
1980	34,743
1990	46,080

Winslow, Arizona

1900	1,305
1910	2,318
1920	3,730
1930	3,773
1940	4,577
1950	6,518
1960	8,862
1970	8,066
1980	4,667

Gallup, New Mexico

1900	2,946
1910	2,204
1920	3,920
1930	5,992
1940	7,041
1950	9,133
1960	14,089
1970	14,596
1980	18,161

Tucumcari, New Mexico

1910	2,526
1920	3,117
1930	4,143
1940	6,194
1950	8,419
1960	8,143
1970	7,189
1980	6,765
1990	6,859

Claremore, Oklahoma

1900	2,064
1910	2,866
1920	3,435
1930	3,720
1940	4,134
1950	5,494
1960	6,639
1970	9,084
1980	12,085
1990	13,836

Rolla, Missouri

1900	1,600
1910	2,261
1920	2,077
1930	3,670
1940	5,141
1950	9,354
1960	11,132
1970	13,245
1980	13,303
1990	14,358

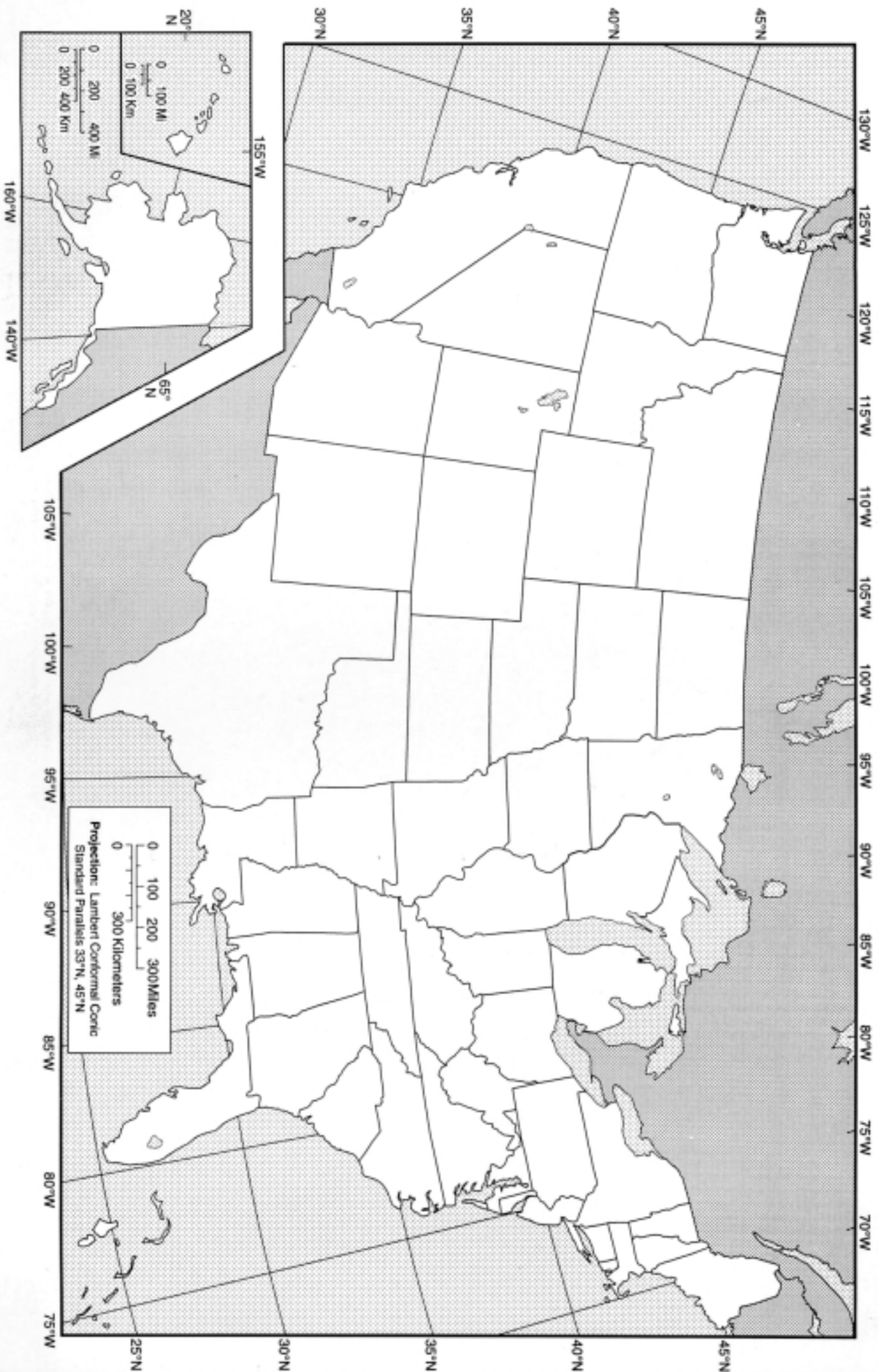
Joplin, Missouri

1900	26,023
1910	32,073
1920	29,902
1930	33,454
1940	37,144
1950	38,711
1960	38,958
1970	39,256
1980	38,893
1990	41,547

Amarillo, Texas

1900	1,142
1910	9,957
1920	15,494
1930	43,132
1940	51,686
1950	74,246
1960	149,493
1970	144,396
1980	149,230
1990	157,840

The United States



National Council for Geographic Education
16A Leonard Hall
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705-1087
ph. (724) 357-6290 email ncge-org@grove.iup.edu

