

Off-road, off-grid: the modern nomads wandering America's back country

Level: Intermediate – Teacher's notes

Article summary: Homeless people are coming together in the United States to help each other make the best of their alternative way of living.

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing

Language focus: Vocabulary

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

Note: Bob Wells, one of the people in this article, plays himself in the film *Nomadland*, which won a 2021 Golden Globe for Drama Motion Picture.

1. Warmer

Give students five to ten minutes to work with a partner and write their ideas into the table. Then ask them to share their answers with the rest of the class before scanning the article to see what reasons are given there as to why people might lose their home.

2. Key words

- a. Students find words in the text that match the definitions. Tell them to scan the article and underline the words as they find them. This will help them check their answers as well as see how the words are used in context.

Key:

1. *prepared*
2. *nomad*
3. *mission*
4. *spousal maintenance*
5. *insulation*
6. *valuable*
7. *maintain*
8. *dignity*
9. *thriving*
10. *resilient*

- b. Before reading the article carefully, students use some of the key words to fill the gaps in the sentences to ensure that they understand the words and know how they are used in other contexts.

Key:

1. *thriving*
2. *spousal maintenance*
3. *mission*
4. *dignity*
5. *prepared*

3. Comprehension check

- a. In the first part of this two-part comprehension task, students find information in the text to answer the questions.

Key:

1. *She separated from her husband and couldn't afford to pay rent in a safe area, so she had to move into her car.*
2. *She applied to HOWA's programme and signed a three-year contract promising to maintain her vehicle and to save 200 US dollars a month, which will be exchanged for the vehicle title when she has saved enough.*
3. *She camps on public land next to a man called Cliff.*
4. *She feels happier and healthier than before. She says she is thriving now and not just surviving.*

- b. In the second part, they decide whether the statements are true or false according to the information in the article. They correct any statements that are false.

Key:

1. *False. He decided to move into a van to save money on rent after he got divorced.*
2. *False. He spends more time with his children now that he works fewer hours.*
3. *True.*
4. *False. Unfortunately, HOWA's charity is currently unable to help people with PTSD, mental health problems or drug addiction.*

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4. Word pairs

- a. Students first match the words on the left and right to make word pairs from the article. Then they should find and underline them in the article and read them again in context.

Key:

1. c
2. e
3. f
4. g
5. a
6. d
7. b

- b. Students now decide which of the word pairs describe the things a–g, and write the word pairs on the lines.

Key:

- a. vehicle title
- b. outdoor lifestyle
- c. carbon footprint
- d. child support
- e. mobile community
- f. traditional housing
- g. public land

- c. Students now come up with other sentences of their own for each of the word pairs.

5. Discussion

Students discuss the questions that are directly related to the topic of the article.

6. In your own words

Either have all the students watch the complete 21-minute video and make notes for a follow-up discussion, **or** have the students work in pairs and divide the video up between them so that one watches the first 11 minutes of the video and the other watches the second 11 minutes – both making notes on the half of the video they are watching. After this, they should get together, exchange information about what they watched, the notes they made and the questions they still have.

The video can be found in the *Guardian* article (link below), or by typing *Living in a car on \$800 a month* into YouTube.

www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/feb/04/modern-nomads-nomadland-van-life-us-public-lands