

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

**Level:** Elementary / Pre-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

To introduce the topic of homelessness and alternative ways of living, ask students to decide where they would most and least like to live and to write the places on the lines in order from 1 (the place where they would least like to live) to 5 (the place where they would most like to live).

### 2. Key words

- a. Students read the words in the box and match them to the definitions below. 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. *afford*
2. *rent*
3. *divorce*
4. *nomad*
5. *charity*
6. *mission*
7. *spousal maintenance*
8. *maintain*
9. *independence*
10. *community*

- 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. *rent*
2. *spousal maintenance*
3. *divorce*
4. *charity*
5. *afford*

### 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.*
3. *She camps on public land next to a man called Cliff.*
4. *She feels happier and healthier than before.*

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

**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.*
3. *True.*
4. *True.*

### 4. Vocabulary

- a. Students find seven types of vehicles in the article and write them into the box. Check the answers.

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**Key:**

SUV

minivan

van

car

RV

trailer

school bus

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](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/feb/04/modern-nomads-nomadland-van-life-us-public-lands)

- b. Students write at least three additional types of vehicles to increase the word field, e.g. *truck*, *caravan*, *coach*, *motorbike*.
- c. Finally, students write at least four personalized sentences, one for each type of vehicle that they would like to integrate into their active vocabulary. Ask them to make the sentences relevant to their own lives if possible as this will make it easier for them to remember the new language and use it correctly in the future.

### 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.

Note: At this level, allow the students to make notes and even hold (some of) the follow-up discussion in their own language. It's not necessary for the students to completely understand the speakers on the video as the pictures speak for themselves.