



LESSON PLAN

# Highways and Change



RELATED PHOTO ESSAY

## **La Carretera: Life and Change Along Peru's Interoceanic Highway**

BY ROBERTO (BEAR) GUERRA



**Class:** 60 minutes

### Key Idea

Highways are powerful symbols for expansion and discovery. While the construction of highways creates new opportunities for the exchange of human and natural resources, it often facilitates destruction and exploitation, especially for remote communities previously protected from the impacts of modernization.

### Background

After decades of planning and construction, a 1,600 mile-long trans-continental highway connecting Peru’s Pacific ports with Brazil’s Atlantic coast was completed in 2012. According to *The New York Times*, the Interoceanic Highway cost approximately 2.8 billion dollars, was supported by leaders of 12 South American countries, and was funded primarily by Brazil to facilitate trade with Asia.\* This feat of engineering included the construction of over 20 bridges and traverses some of the most beautiful and remote areas in the world including the Andes Mountains and the Amazon basin in Peru. But highways are change-makers for better and worse. While highways create opportunities for expansion and development, they can destroy ecosystems, displace communities, and disrupt cultures.

The Interoceanic Highway is the first paved route that will connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans across South America. The benefits to the highway include access to goods and employment opportunities to remote communities in Peru and Brazil, and a boost in trade within, between, and beyond these countries—particularly with Asia. The negative consequences include immigration and unplanned migration, drug trafficking, the devastation of indigenous cultures, and ecological destruction in the Andes Mountains and Amazon jungle.

In this photo essay, “La Carretera: Life and Change Along Peru’s Interoceanic Highway,” Roberto “Bear” Guerra documents life along the highway starting in 2010. Guerra’s photographs show the haunting beauty of the road’s expanse and the human and natural landscapes it traverses, as well as the destructive impacts on people and place.

\*Monte Reel, “[Traveling from Ocean to Ocean Across South America.](#)” *The New York Times Magazine*, February 19, 2014.

### SUBJECT AREAS

#### HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- English Language Arts
- Environmental Science
- Geography
- Modern World Studies

#### COLLEGE

- Cultural Anthropology
- English
- Environmental Studies
- Geography
- History

### THEMES

- Sustainability
- Indigenous cultures
- Consequences of development
- Cultural displacement

### MATERIALS

- World map
- Access to the photo essay online (or printed copies of it)

### PREPARATION

- None



### Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. W.9-10.2 and W.11-12.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.11-12.1.c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

Connections to National Standards Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.5 and SL.11-12.5. Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understandings of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.6.9-12. Evaluate the impact of human settlement activities on the environmental and cultural characteristics of specific places and regions.

Next Generation Science Standards. HS-LS2-7. Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.

### Lesson

#### SETTING THE STAGE

Ask students to think about the symbol of “the road.” What does a road mean to them? Remind students of some of the most well-known roads in popular culture, literature, and poetry including the “yellow brick road” in *The Wizard of Oz*, the highways of Steinbeck’s *Travels with Charley*, Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, and Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken.” What does the idea of the “open road” evoke for students? Does the road symbolize and evoke a sense of adventure and potential possibility? Or does it bring out an appreciation for one’s home?



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Show students a map of the region where your school/community is located, clearly indicating the major highway that transects that area. Do students and their families use this highway? If so, what are some of the main reasons and purposes? Do students travel on this highway to go to school, visit relatives, or run errands, like grocery shopping? What if this highway did not exist? What could be lost? What could be gained?

### ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Introduce the photo essay by telling students they will be looking at a series of photographs documenting life along a new 1,600-mile highway. Show students a map of South America indicating how the highway connects Peru's Pacific coast to the Atlantic coast in Brazil. Ask students to consider how such a highway could impact everyone along its trajectory.

Identify the Andean mountains of Peru and the Amazon Basin, explaining that the Amazon jungle is home to the largest tract of tropical rainforest in the world and numerous indigenous communities, some of which have never had contact with anyone outside their tribe. The Andean mountains and Amazon Basin are also considered the most bio-diverse in the world, containing staggering numbers of plant and animal species.

Have students work in pairs or small groups to view the photo essay. Ask students to view the photos and read the captions while jotting down the activities taking place in the photos along the Inter-oceanic Highway. They should also note their observations while viewing the photographs and ask themselves: Does the highway seem to have positive or negative impacts on the people and the environment?

## Delving Deeper

After viewing the photo essay, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- What are the activities taking place in the towns and villages depicted in the photo essay? What are the main professions of the people photographed in this essay?
- Using the photographs as evidence, what are some of the positive and negative effects of the highway? (Some answers include: car accidents, tourism, increase in jobs, gold mining, trade and commerce, immigration, new businesses, etc.)



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- What are some of the qualities of the mining camps depicted in the photo essay? Who lives in the camps? What materials make up the housing structures in the mining camps?
- Photograph number 23 of the essay shows an indigenous couple shopping in a new grocery and department store in Juliaca, Peru—a business venture afforded by the new highway. One advantage to bringing in new, bigger businesses is that the local people will have more access to goods and services, such as the groceries shown here. On the other hand, a negative impact is the loss of small businesses owned by local people themselves. Which impact seems more important? Do you think it is worth sacrificing one for the other? Why or why not?
- Photographer Roberto (Bear) Guerra explains, “I am trying to create an intimate portrait of human life in communities along the Interoceanic Highway at this critical point in time.” Which two photographs do you think are the best examples of “an intimate portrait of human life” along the highway? Why?
- The photo essay challenges the notion of progress. Guerra hopes that his work “will challenge the notion that ‘progress’ is always best.” Do you think he has achieved this goal? Why or why not?

### Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the photo essay to justify their reasoning.)

1. In his book, *The Routes of Man: Travels in the Paved World*, author Ted Conover wrote, “Highways, of course, alter everything. They change patterns of human settlement, hasten the destruction of natural habitat, transmit disease, set the stage for clashes of cultures.” In response to Conover’s statement, write a paragraph describing how the photo essay documents the following impacts: How might the Interoceanic Highway be changing patterns of human settlement? Hastening the destruction of natural habitat? Transmitting disease? Setting the stage for clashes of cultures? (CCSS.W.9-10.2 and W.11-12.2)



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2. In this short essay, [“A trip, a lesson: Interoceanic Highway, its development and the environment,”](#) a high school student in Peru describes her experience traveling on the highway. She explains some of the positive and negative consequences that she encountered. Read the short essay and write a paragraph, answering the following questions. Do you think the student would agree with Bear Guerra? What does she write which addresses Guerra’s statement that “some of the planet’s most biodiverse ecosystems and traditional cultures are under threat”? Does she offer as a solution? If so, what? (NGSS.HS-LS2-7)
3. A number of images in the photo essay depict illegal mining camps, miners, or the impacts of mining on the environment or people of the Madre de Dios area of Peru. Illegal mining has skyrocketed due to the Interoceanic Highway, which allows access to otherwise remote areas. Based on these photographs, write a two-sentence slogan for a TV commercial, discouraging consumers from buying gold. Use images in the photo essay to support your point of view, highlighting, for example: degradation of natural resources in mined areas (clean water, fish, vegetation); lack of regulations and/or services in mining camps; civic unrest due to protests against government regulations. (C3.D2.Geo.6.9-12)

### Resources

Monte Reel, [“Traveling from Ocean to Ocean Across South America.”](#) *The New York Times Magazine*, February 19, 2014.

Ted Conover, *The Routes of Man: Travels in the Paved World* (New York: First Vintage Books, 2011).

[“Zayed Prize Finalist: Colegio Franklin Delano Roosevelt.”](#) The Green Schools Alliance.

Lourdes Garcia-Navarro, [“The Amazon Road: Paving Paradise for Progress?”](#) NPR, September 14, 2009.

Carlos Eduardo Huertas, [“The Jungle Highway.”](#) The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), September 11, 2012.

Mhairi Roberts, [“Interoceanic Highway – Road to Ruin?”](#) The Argentina Independent, August 3, 2011.