



PARTNERSHIP FOR
21ST CENTURY SKILLS

Case Study Description
May 2004

Case Study #12: Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) -
Schools and Libraries Division

Area of focus: content areas (geography), high school

Location: Normal, IL (near Bloomington, IL)

Basic information: Grades 9-12, 1600 students, 150 faculty

Website: <http://www.unit5.org/nchs/>

Contact person: Fred Walk

The Story: (written by Mr. Walk; edits and emphasis by Rodi)

I recently engaged my students in a project that restored an abandoned two-and-a-half-mile stretch of Route 66 near my school.

-The students created a linear park that they called Historic Route 66: A Geographic Journey, and filled it with historical placards, pamphlets, maps, and murals depicting the physical and cultural features of the eight states that Route 66 traverses. They incorporated numerous geographic skills into this involved undertaking.

-Using oral histories: They learned how to acquire geographic information by contacting individuals who had made their living off of old 66' and conducted extensive interviews. This knowledge was then organized and analyzed as students used computers and software programs to create pamphlets, maps, murals, and placards. **Interpersonal skills** were learned and utilized as students **collaborated** to meet deadlines and complete the project.

- The students engaged in **real-world problem solving** as they determined how to bring this piece of the "Mother Road" back to life for those visiting the site. The Illinois State Department of Transportation (IDOT) had deemed a bridge along a portion of the abandoned roadway unsafe for vehicular traffic and planned to demolish it. Removal of this stately structure would have made pedestrian traffic through our proposed park impossible. This obstacle proved to be a learning opportunity to expose and involve the students in community activism. They wrote letters to the local newspaper, contacted local TV stations and developed a petition to save the bridge. "Save the Bridge" became the rallying cry that secured more than a thousand signatures on the petition that the students presented to their local senator and representative. Both elected officials expressed much interest and concern over the bridge removal and discussed the issue with IDOT officials. The

heightened public awareness resulted in public pressure, which prompted IDOT to spare the bridge as a walkway for future generations.

-“Doing” geography and history enabled the students to develop and implement skills they will utilize throughout their lives. They also learned valuable first-hand lessons about how representative government works, and their sense of **empowerment** instilled a real sense of **civic** activism.