



[On the Road](#), by Jack Kerouac

In A Nutshell

On the Road is Jack Kerouac's poster-novel for the Beat Generation, a group of writers in the 1950s and 60s who began as a counter-culture artistic movement. The Beat Generation is known for its artistic freedom, drug use, alcohol abuse, and sex. *On the Road* features characters that mirror Kerouac and his friends in the Beat movement – Allen Ginsberg as Carlo Marx, Neal Cassady as the infamous Dean Moriarty, and William Burroughs as Old Bull Lee, among many others. The book is a whirlwind tour through beat American nights of jazz and drinking, in a novel that, written in a frenzy of a few weeks, defied classic plot and narrative traditions. After Kerouac's writing extravaganza in 1951, the book took the form of a long scroll without chapter or paragraph breaks. (The book was recently published in 2007 in this original form by Viking to celebrate its 50th anniversary.) Needless to say, editors had their way with it before the first publication in 1957.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 We counted at least five different times where Remi says, "you can 't teach the old maestro a new tune." Does *On the Road* make an argument for or against this statement?

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- 2 You may have noticed that the book is in five parts. How do you think Kerouac's editors choose to divide the story (i.e., what are the starts and ends in each section), and how do these divisions create narrative flow?
- 3 There 's a great moment in the book when a guy Sal thinks is a cop asks Sal and Eddie, "You boys going to get somewhere, or just going?" Which do you think Sal is doing?

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