

# The Milkman

Reading Worksheet — Level F | [tahricteaches.com](http://tahricteaches.com)

The milkman was an essential worker in the era before widespread **refrigeration**. Prior to the 1950s, most households lacked adequate cold storage, making milk a highly **perishable** commodity that required daily delivery. The milkman's service was not just convenient—it was absolutely necessary for public health, as milk could spoil within hours in warm weather.



The **distribution** system was remarkably efficient and personal. Milkmen typically began their **routes** between 3 and 4 AM, using horse-drawn carts in the early decades, then transitioning to specialized refrigerated trucks. Each milkman served entire neighborhoods, sometimes delivering to 200-300 households per route. The job required significant physical stamina, as workers lifted heavy glass bottles and walked miles each day.

Economically, the milk delivery business represented solid working-class employment. Milkmen could support families on their income, and many were **unionized**, providing job security and benefits. Routes were often purchased like taxi medallions, representing valuable business assets. The profession required reliability, early rising, customer service skills, and the ability to handle **perishable** goods safely.

The golden era of milk delivery spanned roughly from the 1920s to the 1960s in English-speaking countries. During this period, milkmen were integral community figures who knew their customers personally, often extending credit during hard times and providing informal neighborhood watch services. The **subscription** model predates modern delivery services by decades.

The profession's decline resulted from multiple technological and social changes. Home **refrigeration** became standard, **pasteurization** extended milk's shelf life, and supermarkets offered competitive pricing with greater variety. Plastic containers replaced glass bottles, reducing the need for daily collection and washing. Today, some **organic** and local dairies have revived milk delivery services, while modern subscription boxes represent the spiritual successor to the milkman's personalized service model.

## A. Vocabulary

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|-------------------------|--|
| 1. refrigeration _____  | a. no longer in use; outdated                            |
| 2. perishable _____     | b. a process that kills bacteria to preserve milk longer |
| 3. distribution _____   | c. established paths for regular deliveries              |
| 4. routes _____         | d. a basic good or raw material                          |
| 5. unionized _____      | e. likely to decay or spoil quickly                      |
| 6. subscription _____   | f. the process of delivering goods to customers          |
| 7. pasteurization _____ | g. organized into labor unions for worker protection     |
| 8. organic _____        | h. a service paid for in advance on a regular basis      |
| 9. obsolete _____       | i. produced without synthetic chemicals or additives     |
| 10. commodity _____     | j. the process of keeping things cold artificially       |

## B. True or False

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1. Milkmen became obsolete because people stopped drinking milk. \_\_\_\_
2. Routes were valuable business assets that could be purchased. \_\_\_\_
3. All milkmen used refrigerated trucks throughout the profession's history. \_\_\_\_
4. The milk delivery business provided solid working-class employment. \_\_\_\_
5. Pasteurization technology helped extend milk's shelf life significantly. \_\_\_\_
6. Modern subscription services are unrelated to historical milk delivery. \_\_\_\_
7. Milkmen typically served 200-300 households per route. \_\_\_\_
8. Glass bottles were replaced by plastic containers in the decline. \_\_\_\_
9. Some organic dairies have revived milk delivery services today. \_\_\_\_

## C. Fill in the Blanks

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**Word Bank:** refrigeration, perishable, unionized, pasteurization, subscription, commodity, organic

1. Before widespread \_\_\_\_\_, milk was highly perishable and required daily delivery.
2. The milkman's job required handling \_\_\_\_\_ goods safely and efficiently.
3. Many milkmen were \_\_\_\_\_, providing them with job security and benefits.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ process helped extend milk's shelf life beyond a few hours.
5. Modern \_\_\_\_\_ boxes represent the spiritual successor to milk delivery.

## D. Comprehension Questions

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1. What technological factors contributed to the milkman profession's decline?
2. How did milkmen acquire their routes, and why were routes valuable?
3. What social role did milkmen play beyond just delivering milk?
4. How do modern delivery services compare to historical milk delivery?
5. Why was the milkman's service essential rather than just convenient?

## E. Discussion Questions

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1. How might the milkman profession have adapted to survive in the modern era?
2. What advantages and disadvantages would daily milk delivery have in today's world?
3. How do modern gig economy jobs compare to the security milkmen once enjoyed?

# Answer Key

*The Milkman — Teacher Reference Only*

**A. Vocabulary:** 1-j, 2-e, 3-f, 4-c, 5-g, 6-h, 7-b, 8-i, 9-a, 10-d

**B. True/False:** 1-F, 2-T, 3-F, 4-T, 5-T, 6-F, 7-T, 8-T, 9-T

**C. Fill Blanks:** 1-refrigeration, 2-perishable, 3-unionized, 4-pasteurization, 5-subscription

**D. Comprehension:**

1. Home refrigeration, pasteurization extending shelf life, supermarkets offering competitive pricing, and plastic containers replacing glass bottles
2. Routes were often purchased like taxi medallions and represented valuable business assets because they guaranteed steady customers
3. They served as informal neighborhood watch, provided credit during hard times, and knew customers personally
4. Modern subscription boxes follow the same personalized, regular delivery model as milkmen, but for various products
5. Without refrigeration, milk spoiled within hours in warm weather, making daily delivery necessary for public health