



## Prohibition As A Reform

Curriculum Unit 78.03.03

by Joan Rapczynski Florence Zywockinski

The prohibition movement began in this country not as a movement for complete prohibition of alcohol, but as a “temperance” or reform movement. The temperance movement can be traced all the way from its origins in Colonial days to its culmination in the early 1900’s. At the start temperance work was led primarily by the churches, but gradually a wide range of social service agencies and organizations joined the campaign.

Prohibition was first tried in America to protect colonial settlers from the attacks of Indians who were inflamed by the “strong waters” which the settlers themselves had taught them to drink. Massachusetts and other early colonies enacted stiff prohibition laws to forbid the sale or gift of liquor to the Indians. But the colonial authorities found the Indian prohibition laws almost impossible to enforce.

The colonists themselves, including the stern Puritans, considered alcoholic beverages among the necessities of life when used in moderation. Colonial authorities encouraged the making and selling of beer, wine, and liquor, not only to satisfy their needs but to produce tax revenue to maintain forts and to build schools and churches.

While most colonists approved of moderate drinking, the man or woman who drank too much was a social outcast, and the habitual drunkard faced severe punishment. Normal drinking was as acceptable as eating, but if a drinker could not control his thirst the law was determined to do it for him. In all the colonies drunks were fined, sentenced to the stocks, sent to the whipping stool, or ordered to wear the scarlet letter “D” for drunkard. Laborers, servants, and slaves usually were more severely punished than men of property. For a poor man to get drunk was not only a sin against society but also against his employer, since he was wasting time that might be spent at useful work.

Regulations were intended to control the use of liquor, not to prohibit it. Where regulations were so severe that they began to interfere with the common pleasure of drinking, the first “speakeasies” sprang up, frequented by those who wanted to drink as much as they pleased free of official snooping. As the colonial governments increased import duties and excise taxes on liquor to raise revenues, smuggling, rum-running and moonshining grew.

Rum was an important beverage in the colonies; people drank it at funerals, weddings, christenings, town meetings, and even at work. Nevertheless, the colony of Georgia prohibited its use. The first real attempt at prohibition was made by James Oglethorpe, Georgia’s founding father, considered the father of Prohibition. He was determined to create a sober society that would avoid the excessive use of hard liquor. The new colonists

ignored the law and the prohibition decrees set down by the Trustees. The Trustees finally got the British Parliament and King George II to put the full force of law behind the decree. The King approved an act that flatly prohibited the import or sale of rum in Georgia. It went into effect in 1735 and was almost totally disobeyed. The attempt to enforce it produced on a small scale many of the conditions that were created by the prohibition reform in the 1920's. When in 1742 the Trustees finally realized that the prohibition laws were not enforceable, they permitted imports of rum again and established a system of licensing taverns and public houses.

Rum had been considered the key to colonial prosperity, vital to trade and to the development of commerce, and its manufacture, sale, and use were heartily approved of by most people. But by the early nineteenth century, a temperance movement designed to limit the consumption of alcoholic beverages was emerging. After the War of 1812 poverty, crime, and drunkenness were on the rise. Temperance reforms were pushed by charity organizations and civic authorities, who were faced with an apparent breakdown of public order. The temperance reformers gained the political backing of those who feared an uprising of the common people against the aristocracy of wealth, prestige, and privilege represented by the established churches. The movement coincided with a great national religious revival that began to sweep the country, and temperance became part of the accepted work of the churches, carried on with a zealous missionary spirit by those who considered drink the major obstacle to leading sinners to salvation.

While all the temperance groups agreed that liquor was evil, they disagreed over what should be done about it. State and local societies often worked at cross-purposes. Some shunned habitual drunkards as being beyond salvation and concentrated on getting moderate drinkers to give up liquor. Others argued that the fight should be directed against the manufacturers and sellers of liquor. There were many who still favored moderation rather than a ban against all drinking. In some local societies members were allowed to take pledges which permitted them to drink light wines and beer. Others who took the pledge of total abstinence from all forms of intoxicating drink had the letter "T" for "total" put after their names and were called "Teetotalers," a term that has come to mean any person who completely shuns alcohol.

In 1841 the Washingtonian Movement was founded. The forerunner of Alcoholics Anonymous, it collapsed almost as swiftly as it had risen. Interest in the temperance movement was on the decline; even the older organizations found membership dropping off. Temperance reformers, once so optimistic that success was near, began to admit that moral persuasion was not enough to dry up America.

The whole strength of the early temperance movement had been in its appeal to drinkers to decide for themselves to give up liquor. Leaders publicly declared they would never seek laws to force people to quit drinking and that their campaign was strictly educational and not political. However, political pressure directed not against the habits of the individual drinker, but toward the total destruction of the liquor trade through legal means, had begun to appear even before the Civil War. The first state-wide attacks were aimed at putting grogshops out of business. Massachusetts in 1838 passed a law which in effect forbade retail sales. Reformers then tried to put through local option laws to let towns or counties decide whether to issue licenses. But their victories were temporary. A town that went dry in one election would sometimes vote wet the following November.

In 1847 a decision by the United States Supreme Court held unanimously that the states not only had full power to regulate liquor sales but also to entirely prohibit intoxicating liquors. Maine passed a prohibition law and within the next four years twelve states from New England to the Midwest passed prohibition laws. In half a dozen others, battles were narrowly lost. New Hampshire in 1855 passed a stringent version of the Maine

law. Then one by one, every state that had voted in prohibition either repealed or drastically modified its law, until Maine itself was the only one where full prohibition remained in force.

There were many reasons for the reversal of prohibition laws. In some places laws had been put through almost before people realized what was happening. When hastily-enacted laws failed to work, voters became disgusted with the tangle of enforcement problems. Liquor interests recovered from their first defeats and began to match the pressure groups of the reformers. But more than anything else, what really halted the prohibition movement was the growing threat of Civil War, which caused Americans to lose interest in less crucial issues. Many temperance leaders were abolitionists, and as they turned to fighting slavery they had little time for other causes.

The Civil War gave prohibition another blow when the federal government adopted the Internal Revenue Act as an emergency measure to raise the money that was desperately needed to prosecute the war. On July 1, 1862, a federal fee was imposed on every retail liquor establishment in the Union, as well as a direct federal tax by the gallon on the manufacture of liquor, beer, and ale. Opponents charged that this amounted to federal licensing of the liquor trade.

President Lincoln signed the Internal Revenue Act with the implied promise that the liquor tax would be repealed as soon as the Civil War was over. But, like most tax measures, it remained on the books and grew to be the single most important source of funds for financing the entire national government in the years before there were direct income and profit taxes. From 1870 to 1915 the liquor tax provided between one-half and two-thirds of the whole internal revenue of the United States. After the Internal Revenue Act was adopted, the "drys" were put at a disadvantage by the virtual stamp of federal approval, but also by the fact that many people in government favored and encouraged increased sales of liquor to produce more federal funds. The liquor tax was providing some \$200 million a year after the turn of the century, and through the years one of the strongest arguments against prohibition was that it would greatly increase all other taxes by cutting off a good part of government revenues.

Suffering successive attacks from all sides after their first quick victories, the prohibitionists found little to encourage them during the 1860's. But a new force was rising in the temperance movement, the power of women, who were beginning to demand the right to speak out on such issues. In November, 1874, two hundred women from seventeen states met in Cleveland and organized what they called the Women's National Christian Temperance Union. The W.C.T.U. soon declared, "We hold prohibition to be essential to the full triumph of this reform," a position it never abandoned. Its early strength was built almost entirely by Frances Willard, who saw in the Union a chance to help women free themselves from the tragedies liquor brought to many homes. The W.C.T.U. was first led by wealthy and conservative middle-class women who hoped to make it an extension of church and missionary work in reforming the character and conduct of the lower classes.

The W.C.T.U.'s greatest success was in promoting its views among young people, the voters of the future, through temperance teaching in the public schools. The women went to work to organize political strength in the various legislatures, and with lobbies, pressure groups, and petitions gradually won the passage of laws that made "scientific" study of temperance compulsory in the schools.

Waves of immigration, meanwhile, had brought hundreds of thousands of Germans and other Europeans to settle in America, people who by long tradition were strongly committed to the moderate drinking of beer and wine. Within the U.S. itself there was a migration of people from small towns and rural areas to the cities, which swelled city populations and took workers from farms into factories. The new industrial urban society

was strange and frightening to many in a nation that had been largely agricultural. Saloons and the corruption they brought were looked upon by some as an evil that grew out of the other changes that threatened the old small-town ways of life and the established social order. Prohibition grew into a battle of rural against city patterns, of native-born Americans against immigrants, of home government against political machines, of conservatives against liberals, and of religious prejudice that turned many Protestants against Catholics.

In 1896 Dr. Howard Russell, a Protestant clergyman in Ohio, established the Anti-Saloon League, which sought to suppress the saloon. Working through the churches, it formed a mighty political organization that translated its strength into direct action to dry up America step by step. It worked for anti-liquor laws first in towns and villages, then in counties, then in states, and finally nationwide.

In 1880 Kansas had written prohibition into its Constitution, something that no state had ever done before. By 1905 three states had prohibition laws—Kansas, Maine, and North Dakota. The year 1907 saw prohibition enacted in Georgia, Oklahoma, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. All of these states lay south of the Ohio and Potomac Rivers. All of them were primarily agricultural states, scarcely touched by the industrial revolution which had changed the interests and point of view of many Northern states.

The prohibition movement advanced readily toward its goal mainly because of the attitude displayed toward all this agitation by the brewers and distillers. By 1913 they had at stake estimated assets worth a billion dollars or more. Underestimating the strength and determination of the prohibition movement, however, they put up little opposition at first. At any time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the brewers could have tried to reform the saloon, the institution which was the chief point of attack in the campaign against their vested interests made by the prohibition movement. The brewers' power over the saloon was absolute. They controlled it under mortgage bonds and it was in their power to shut off its supply of spirits. The brewers could have changed the saloon or even destroyed it had they wished to act.

Later on, in 1916, when it was too late to profit them, the brewers showed themselves aware of the power which they held and regretted not having made effective use of it. The members of the U. S. Brewer's Association advertised in the press that they were sorry that a "false mental association . . . had coupled the brewers with the worst of the saloons, and that this negative association was largely their fault and offered to show the country, if it would give them time, that they were ready to reform the saloon and to promote temperance—real temperance, which means sobriety and moderation, not prohibition, which has proved a fallacy and a failure." Reformation by the brewers and distillers of their own trade might conceivably have avoided national prohibition. The distillers were convinced that a billion-dollar business was a stronghold in the country and refused all reformation and all compromise. They could have attempted to protect their business by putting it in order but they preferred to argue that there was nothing in their business which needed to be put in order. They chose to spend their efforts in creating an elaborate system of protection. Money and energy was wasted on a system of alliances. The brewers dumped money into various states to win elections for friends who promptly failed them; they financed dummy chambers of commerce which existed largely for the purpose of fighting liquor legislation; they employed experts to investigate the strategy of the prohibition movement when it was not a secret at all. They organized a blacklist system which threatened to withhold trade from a long list of businesses regarded as unfriendly to the brewer's interest. Such a boycott is typical of the tactics employed by an industry which misjudged its power. The brewers and distillers were confronted by a larger problem than they knew how to handle.

By 1913 the Anti-Saloon League was capable of raising large sums of money and spending them to good advantage. Its political objective was to destroy the liquor traffic primarily by destroying the saloon. Its plan

was to endorse dry candidates regardless of party, permitting the voter to vote dry without bolting his own party. The League had the support of the local churches, which had the necessary influence to help elect members of the legislatures favorable to temperance legislation as well as public officials who would enforce the laws. The churches had not easily been won over, since the tradition of separation of church and state raised certain doubts as to the propriety of church intervention in politics. But by 1913 the League had won its fight and a long list of churches supported the League.

The Anti-Saloon League drew up a proposed law which Senator Kenyon and North Carolina's Representative Edwin Webb put before Congress, designed to give states instead of the federal government control over liquor shipped across state boundaries. It became the first national test of the League's political power, and the dries won a far greater victory than they had expected with the overwhelming passage of the Webb-Kenyon Bill. But the real measure of the League's strength in Congress came after President William H. Taft vetoed the act. Taft called it unconstitutional and declared that "it clearly violates the commerce clause of our fundamental law." But Congress stood with the Anti-Saloon League against the President and early in 1913 passed the law over Taft's veto by more than a two-thirds majority in both House and Senate.

After enactment of the Webb-Kenyon Bill the Anti-Saloon League switched from the state law plan which had been its goal for twenty years and demanded a Constitutional amendment. In the 1914 elections the dries had gained many seats in Congress. Although they still lacked enough votes to get a Constitutional two-thirds majority in both houses, they decided to make a trial run to determine how close they would come. On December 22, 1914, Congress began its first debate over whether prohibition should be made part of the Constitution. When the vote was taken, the House was almost evenly divided, 197 in favor of prohibition to 190 against, far less than a two-thirds majority. Even though the amendment had not passed, the Anti-Saloon League had demonstrated its power.

Whether the League could have implemented prohibition if the United States hadn't become involved in the First World War is a question still debated. Wartime hysteria changed the whole atmosphere of public opinion. The League capitalized on the war in every way possible to convince the nation that the emergency demanded prohibition as an act of patriotism, to help speed victory and to create the sort of morally clean country to which its fighting heroes should return.

Wets charged later that prohibition was "put over on the country" while most of its men were away fighting the war. But the fact is that the decisive elections of 1916 came five months before America entered the war and more than a year before soldiers reached the European fighting front. Another charge was that women voted prohibition into law while men were off fighting, but in most of the country women still had no right to vote.

When the war first broke out in Europe in 1914, there was a strong feeling against the Germans, and many brewers were German-Americans. The dries began a campaign of propaganda to ban beer as unAmerican and to picture the entire brewing industry as spies, traitors, and "murderous Huns." After America entered the war in 1917, hatred of everything German became an emotional frenzy. Saloons were suspected of harboring nests of saboteurs or enemy agents, and people were terrified by false rumors that germ warfare was being spread in poisonous beer. League propagandists claimed that it was German troops under the influence of alcohol who committed alleged war atrocities and that beer and German militarism went together. The League helped inspire a Senate investigation that revealed a link between brewing interests and the German-American Alliance, first founded around the turn of the century to promote German culture in the United States. Much was also made of the patriotic argument that grain wasted in the making of alcohol would

provide millions of loaves of bread to feed America and its fighting allies. Another dry argument was that brewers and distillers took thousands of men from home-front jobs vital to war production, used trucks and trains needed for the transportation of war materials, and burdened industry's attempt to gear for war.

During the war debate began over what would become the Eighteenth Amendment. It was to prohibit "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States. . . . Congress and the several states shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." "Concurrent power" became a subject for bitter debate. There were some who believed that the Eighteenth Amendment placed an obligation on the states and those who denied this theory. Many stated that the government was removing from states the right to control their own domestic affairs.

The wets mounted no organized protest when the Amendment was debated by Congress. They felt that prohibition would eventually go away like the war, overlooking the fact that the battle was now to be fought in the state capitals, where the Anti-Saloon League was most effective. The wets had no organization to represent them at the state capitals, no lobby, and no real leaders. The dries, on the other hand, had effective leadership. In addition, they had precedent on their side, since some form of prohibition had been adopted in 26 states before April, 1917. They had devoted followers, and won votes even in many of the wet states.

The wets never accepted the fact that the Eighteenth Amendment was ratified fairly. They stated that ratification was the result of war psychology and the identification of patriotism with prohibition as a means of saving food. War was at all times dominant in the discussion of the amendment. The fight over prohibition was, moreover, a dispute for power by rural districts which had more than their share of representation in the state legislatures. The wets also declared that the amendment had not been legally ratified since neither of the major parties had first declared itself in favor of such action at a national convention and since the question had not been submitted to a popular vote. The dries responded that the amendment had been ratified in strict accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

Some historians argue that Prohibition came about as a middle-class reform movement. At the turn of the century, typical middle-class Americans did not drink liquor, although they sometimes drank wine. Respectable men were careful not to be seen in or about a saloon. The saloon was seen by the middle class as an evil institution involved with prostitution, gambling, police corruption, and crime. The middle class sought through prohibition to change the personal habits of Americans in general in such a way that both the nation and the individual would profit. They believed that a sober, temperate worker was a more productive, a more stable, and a happier worker. Many businessmen favored prohibition because of the increasing use of machinery in industry. The intemperate worker was inefficient and dangerous. For safety reasons many industrial concerns did not employ problem drinkers. Also employers felt that sobriety and industrial safety were inseparable.

Despite the social ills it produced, the saloon did serve the social needs of the working class, especially the first-generation immigrants, who tended to oppose prohibition. Wet voting strength lay mainly in highly concentrated, predominantly working-class urban areas, and was therefore not widespread enough to be effective.

A number of union leaders and social critics pointed out that the Eighteenth Amendment constituted class legislation, and that the political strength of the dries lay among middle-class progressives who wanted, essentially, to remove the saloon from American life. Moreover, it allowed those who had enough money to stockpile all the liquor they wanted while the workingman could not afford to do that.



Congress refused to appropriate enough money to enforce the law. The dries were afraid to ask for more money to spend on prohibition because they feared they would alienate many voters. Congress exempted the enforcement officers from Civil Service and allowed the Prohibition Bureau to become part of the political spoils system. Furthermore, Presidents Wilson and Harding were indifferent to Prohibition enforcement.

There was a lack of cooperation on the part of local authorities and federal authorities complained that they were being asked to shoulder the whole burden of enforcement. There was congestion in the courts, corruption in government, and the failure in the states to vote money for enforcement. Many juries refused to convict individuals engaged in breaking the prohibition law.

Enforcement officers were faced with the problems of uncoordinated efforts. Personnel was meager in relation to the task, and the vast shoreline and boundaries of the U.S. made it difficult to stop smuggling. Large industrial centers on the Eastern seaboard refused to adopt and enforce prohibition laws because they said that their set of moral values, influenced by European immigrants, differed from the moral values in the smaller towns. All these problems moved the wets to launch a press campaign of defeatist propaganda.

Some historians have claimed that Prohibition was a failure because the Eighteenth Amendment caused dangerous criminal behavior, and that in spite of Prohibition more people drank alcohol than before. Those who argue that Prohibition was a success point to a study made in the late 1920's that purported to show that working people drank less than before and that the living conditions among low-income families had been improved. They also stated that the amendment was effective in cutting down drinking among workers, one of the primary aims of prohibition. The Anti-Saloon League did succeed in destroying the old-fashioned saloon.

In 1933, the Twenty-first Amendment repealed Prohibition. Many believe the repeal resulted from the popular belief that Prohibition had been a failure, a belief that had gained strength during the late '20's and early '30's. Most people agreed that the nearly universal disregard for the Eighteenth Amendment had caused a general disrespect for the law and an increase in crime—even though this belief may not have been correct. In the late '20's the liquor interest beat the Anti-Saloon League at its own game, working at the state level to do away with the concurrent enforcement acts. At first it was the object of wets to try for modification rather than complete repeal, but there was an overwhelming surge of public sentiment that called for repeal.

A second reason for the sudden shift in opinion was the Great Depression that began about 1929. It was argued that legalization of liquor manufacture would produce a badly needed additional tax revenue. The general public held that Prohibition was to blame for the depression, just as the dries had claimed that Prohibition was responsible for the prosperity of the '20's.

## Course Outline

---

### Prohibition—The Noble Experiment

- I. Colonial America.
  - A. Indian Prohibition.

- B. Alcohol in the Colonies.
  1. Regulations to control, not prohibit.
  2. Moderate drinking acceptable.
  3. Punishment for drunks.
  4. Importance of Rum.
  5. Colony of Georgia—first attempt at prohibition.
  6. Post-Revolution liquor tax (federal) encourages the sale and manufacture of alcohol.
  
- II. Early 1800's
  - A. Appearance of temperance organizations.
    1. Urge avoidance of alcohol—educational methods, not political.
    2. Disagreement among organizations over methods of controlling the evils of alcohol.
    3. Strengths of these early organizations
    4. Washingtonian Movement 1841.
  
- III. Temperance organizations losing strength.
  - A. Political methods replace educational.
    1. Temperance lobbies.
    2. Temporary victories in towns, cities, and at local level.
    3. Supreme Court decision 1847.
    4. Maine passes prohibition laws 1846.
    5. Reasons for repeal of prohibition laws in states that had previously passed them.
  
- IV. Civil War Era.
  - A. Staggering blow to prohibition.
    1. Internal Revenue Act, July 1, 1862.
    2. Public opinion against prohibition.
    3. Concentration on the war effort.
  - B. Prohibition Party formed 1869.
  
- V. Woman's Crusades 1870's.
  - A. Crusade at its height for six months in 1873.



- B. Women’s Christian Temperance Union 1874; Frances Willard.
  - C. Temperance revival grew out of the women’s crusade.
  - D. Demands for national prohibition.
- VI. 1880’s.
- A. Kansas adopts prohibition in its constitution.
  - B. Effects of immigration on prohibition.
  - C. Migration of people from small towns to big cities.
    1. Prohibition becomes a battle of rural vs. city interests.
  - D. Liquor interests organize—United States Brewers Association.
- VII. 1890’s.
- A. Anti-Saloon League led by Dr. Howard Russell.
    1. Main objective of the League.
    2. Use of the church.
    3. Use of political means, elections.
    4. Eventual push for national prohibition.
  - B. Battle—Anti-Saloon League vs. Brewers and Distillers.
    1. Methods used by brewers and distillers.
    2. Methods used by the Anti-Saloon League.
- VIII. 1900-1917.
- A. Statewide prohibition (by World War I 26 dry states).
  - B. Dry strength in agricultural and rural America.
  - C. Wet strength in big cities and industrial areas of North and East.
  - D. Dry states not totally dry.
  - E. Webb-Kenyon Bill 1913.
  - F. Strong demand for national prohibition through an amendment.
- IX. 1917-1920.
- A. War time hysteria—World War I.
  - B. Public opinion swayed.
  - C. Anti-Saloon League capitalizes on the war.

- D. Eighteenth Amendment approved by Congress Dec. 1917.
- E. Ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment.
- F. Volstead Act.
- X. The Noble Experiment 1920-1933.
  - A. Arguments of the wets against passage of the Eighteenth Amendment.
  - B. Drys answer complaints of the wets.
  - C. Major troubles surrounding prohibition:
    - 1. Smuggling
    - 2. Moonshiners
    - 3. Rum Row
    - 4. Bootleggers
    - 5. Medicinal liquor
    - 6. Stills
    - 7. Court dockets overloaded with prohibition cases
    - 8. Reluctance of judges and juries to impose harsh sentences
    - 9. Bribery
    - 10. Irresponsible prohibition agents
  - D. Prohibition Bureau.
    - 1. Insufficient budget.
  - E. The Association Against the Prohibition Amendment.
    - 1. Central group for the wets.
    - 2. New crusaders and reformers.
  - F. 1928 Presidential Election.
    - 1. Herbert Hoover vs. Alfred Smith.
    - 2. Prohibition became an issue.
  - G. Depression years.
    - 1. Depression helped to kill prohibition.
    - 2. Public hysteria.
    - 3. Prohibition blamed for the market crash.
  - H. Wickersham Commission.
    - 1. Studied failures of prohibition.
    - 2. Conclusions were confusing and contradictory.
  - I. National Conventions 1931.

	1.	Prohibition became an issue at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions.
J.		Legal sale of beer; 3.2% alcohol March 1933.
K.		Repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment—the Twenty-First Amendment.

## Sample Lesson

---

### “Detroit Sets a Bad Example”

Have the students carefully read the following selection and then answer the following questions:

1. What is a “blind pig?”
2. Discuss the profits made by the owners of the “blind pigs”
3. What disguises may you find at a “blind pig?”
4. What was a “Tip-Over Order?”
5. What does the author mean when he says; “the law is ninety percent controlled?”
6. Describe the relationship between the police and bootleggers.

The following extract is from the article “Detroit Sets a Bad Example” by Ernest W. Mandeville ( *The Outlook* , August, 22, 1925, p. 612). It examines the retailing of illegal liquor in Detroit with particular reference to the corruption of the local police.

Detroit, Michigan, is an excellent example of a wide open booze town. The time limits of my stay in that town prevented me from visiting all of the twenty thousand “blind pigs.” I think I did my duty as an investigator by going to a dozen or more of these places.

The “blind pig” conditions are worse in every way than in any other town I visited and the liquor sold is of a terrible quality. The profits here on needle beer are one thousand percent. Moonshine profits are slightly over that. “Moon” as it is called can be bought for \$2.50 a gallon and redistilled denatured alcohol for about \$3.00 a gallon. Both of these are sold in the “blind pigs” for about 25 cents an ounce, which would bring in \$32.00 a gallon. “Blind pig” owners have no scruples and you can be sure you will be served liquor that will bring in the most profit.

“Blind pigs” are scattered all over the town. A good many of these places are run by women, and in many you may be entertained by these women. The fact is that they are centers of immorality as well as illegal liquor. Most of the vices of Detroit are said to center around these “blind pigs.” Narcotics are said to be distributed around them, crime plots are hatched there, and criminals mingle among respected families.

In the downtown section every manner of store front is used to disguise these “blind pigs.” I went to a radio shop which seemed very well equipped and had several salesmen and clerks in attendance. A very respectable-looking gentleman nodded recognition to my friend and we walked through the railing gate, back through the stockroom, into a fully furnished barroom with easy chairs, a white-coated bartender, and several people sitting nonchalantly around the bar sipping their drinks. This same experience was repeated in a trunk store and a laundry. I was even told of an undertaker’s parlor that stored its liquor in caskets.

I talked to one saloon owner who complained of the very high grafts he had to pay. I was later told, however, that this man had become extremely wealthy running a “blind pig.”

Detroit a while ago enacted a “tip over” order which allowed policemen to enter a saloon or “blind pig” without a warrant and tip over or rip out anything he wished. He could use an axe on the furnishings and confiscate the liquor. Since my trip to Detroit this order is no longer used.

This “tip over” ruling elevated the position of the bartender. Saloon owners had to hire bartenders they could trust with money payments. If the saloon was entered and about to be “tipped over” by the police then the bartender had to act quickly and supply cash from the register for the police who were bribable. Therefore, on the checkup of receipts with the owner, the bartender’s word had to be taken if hundreds of dollars were missing from the cash register accounting. The bartender also took the risk of being arrested. Bartenders would be paid \$75 a week and \$50 extra each time he was arrested.

Ten years ago a dishonest policeman was a rarity and was pointed out and put on the tape. Now the honest ones are pointed out as rarities. The result is that the law is ninety percent controlled. The policeman who is honest is shifted around from job to job, making his work very unpleasant.

The relationship between the police and the bootleggers is very friendly. They have to pinch two out of every five once in a while, but they choose the ones who are least agreeable about paying graft. Jails are full of bootleggers, but they are almost all foreigners who have been making booze in their kitchens.

The booze pay-off doesn’t go very high up. The Police Commissioner makes a persistent and conscientious effort to enforce the law.

But the lower officers make a business of dealing with the bootleggers. As soon as any saloon or “blind pig” opens the owner is propositioned, then they handle him, then everything is all set. These are the terms they use.

Seven policemen have just been dismissed for ignoring the recent order “not to frequent ‘blind pigs’ while on duty.” There might have been many times that number dismissed. These seven policemen say they were framed by the rum interests, who have a grip on the police officials and wanted to get rid of them. Think of it! Having to issue an order to policemen not to commit an illegal act while on duty.

## Sample Lesson

---

### Prohibition: The Noble Experiment That Failed

**Objective: Discussion—Does the failure of one experiment (Prohibition) mean that all experiments like it will fail? Have the students read the selection below and decide for themselves.**

“It’s a free country. Shouldn’t I be free to hurt myself?” That question was asked in the 1920’s. And it’s asked today.

The same message is printed on every pack of cigarettes: Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined that Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

But I am free to say: “So what? I can still buy cigarettes if I want them. This is a free country. If I want to ruin my health, that’s my problem. Now let me enjoy my cigarette in peace.”

It seems like a good argument—and maybe it is. But there is also another argument. “I don’t live on a desert island; my life is tangled up with the lives of other people. What if I get lung cancer from smoking too heavily? Other people are going to have to take care of me. They will put me in a hospital. They could go into debt trying to keep me alive. And if I die, there’s the agony that I have caused them—and even worse the waste of destroying my own life. Why does the government allow this? If they know what cigarettes can do to people, why don’t they just ban them?”

Of course it would take a law of Congress—or of your state legislature—to take a dangerous product off the market. Thousands of laws like this have been already written. Thousands of products have been banned because government officials judged them to be dangerous to your health. Because of these protective laws you can’t buy certain drugs, foods, chemicals, and insecticides.

The question is: Do we need laws that prevent us from running risks with our lives? If so, then perhaps laws are necessary to prohibit the sale of cigarettes and alcoholic drinks. Both products have been known to kill people. The hazards of drinking too much alcohol are as bad as or worse than the hazards of smoking too many cigarettes. All right then, let’s pass a law closing the liquor stores, the bars, and the breweries in this country. Let’s put an end once and for all to the ruinous disease from which as many as ten million Americans suffer—alcoholism.

But wait! We have already tried that. For thirteen years, from 1920 to 1933, there were no liquor stores anywhere in the United States. They were shut down—abolished by the Eighteenth Amendment. After January 20, 1920, there was supposed to be no more manufacturing, selling, or transporting of “intoxicating liquors.” Without any more liquor, people could not drink it. And if they did not drink it, how could they get drunk? There would be no more dangers to the public welfare from drunkenness and alcoholism. It was all very logical. And yet prohibition of liquor, beer, and wine did not work. Why?

Because law or no law, millions of people still liked to drink alcohol. And they were willing to take risks to get it. They were not about to change their tastes and habits because of a change in the law. It was easy to obtain bootleg alcohol. Smuggling was constant over the Canadian and the Mexican borders. Speakeasies sprang up in all the large and small cities. The government tried to put a stop to all the bootlegging. Between 1920 and 1930 it hired 17,816 special agents, “dry agents” as they were called, to enforce the prohibition law. But few

of the agents took their jobs too seriously. City police officers were often no more reliable than the U.S. agents.

President Herbert Hoover once spoke of Prohibition as a “noble experiment.” The experiment may have been noble in purpose, but in practice it was a dismal failure. Crime and drunkenness were supposed to decline as a result of Prohibition. Instead people drank more alcohol than ever—often poisoned alcohol. And instead of people controlling gangsters, it was common in many cities for gangsters to control the police. By 1933, most people thought the noble experiment had lasted long enough. On December 5, 1933, they repealed Prohibition by ratifying the Twenty-first Amendment.

For Discussion—Prohibition was an experiment that was tried a long time ago. Does the failure of one experiment mean that all experiments like it will fail? In a democratic society, citizens decide what kinds of laws they want and need. If a law does not work, they are free to change or repeal it.

Here is a list of products that are potentially dangerous to the consumer. Should people under 18 be free to buy them? Should an adult be free to buy them? Do you think a prohibition on these products should be enforced? Would it be a successful prohibition? What problems would result from a prohibition on these products?

1. Cigarettes
2. Liquor
3. Beer and Wine
4. Marijuana
5. Handguns
6. Cars without seatbelts
7. Saccharine
8. Laetrile

## Sample Lesson

---

### You Don't Say (Game)

*Review of famous people involved in the Prohibition Movement*

**Objective:** To guess correctly the name being sought by means of clues.

**How to Play:** Divide the class into two teams. Each team selects its most able representative to come to the front of the room to give clues.

Give the two clue-givers a card with the same name written on it (Frances Willard, for example). Choose one clue-giver to begin the game (the opportunity to rotate for first start will be with each new name).



The first clue-giver might give a clue such as this: "When people die a \_\_\_\_\_ is usually read giving valuables to certain survivors." The clue-giver's team discusses the clue and decides the missing word is "will." They have a short specified amount of time to come up with the correct answer of Frances Willard. If they do not give the correct answer then the other clue-giver has an opportunity to give his clue. "The semisolid fat of a hog after rendering is called \_\_\_\_\_." The second team has the same amount of time as the first to combine the two clues and to guess the name. Putting the clues "will" and "lard" together they will come up with Frances Willard. If they do not guess the correct first name then the first team gives clues for the first name.

The team that guesses the correct name is awarded a point, and the team that scores the most points is declared the winner. *After each name is guessed, discuss with the class the importance of that person .*

At no time may the clue-giver use any form of the word to be guessed in presenting the clue. If a team fails to comply, it loses a turn.

*People that may be used in this game:*

1. Frances Willard
2. Izzy Einstein
3. Moe Smith
4. James Oglethorpe
5. Dr. Howard Russell
6. Woodrow Wilson
7. Calvin Coolidge
8. Warren Harding
9. Andrew Volstead
10. Alfred E. Smith
11. Carry Nation
12. General Lincoln C. Andrews
13. Franklin Roosevelt
14. William Jennings Bryan
15. Billy Sunday
16. Herbert Hoover

## Sample Lesson

---

### Izzy and Moe

Have the students read the following selection and answer the questions listed below:

1. Why was it difficult to enforce Prohibition?

2. Why were Izzy and Moe so successful as Prohibition agents?
3. How difficult was it for an ordinary citizen to find someone or someplace to buy liquor?
4. Why were Izzy and Moe so popular with the public despite the fact that they were Prohibition agents?
5. Izzy and Moe were successful Prohibition agents; why were they fired?

When the nation went dry in 1920, all that stood between millions of thirsty Americans and alcohol, besides their consciences, was a thin line of enforcement agents, only fifteen hundred strong. And since the dry agents were paid the noble sum of \$2,500 a year, it is not surprising that many soon lost their sense of dedication and could be induced for a sum to look elsewhere when beer or liquor was being moved or served in their vicinity.

But there were exceptions, and none more outstanding than a pair of agents whose appearance and names seemed better fitted for a vaudeville team than for a couple of gumshoes: Isadore Einstein and Moe Smith—Izzy and Moe. If all agents had shown as much energy and initiative as they did even the small band of fifteen hundred might have done much toward drying up the country. Izzy demonstrated his unusual ability on his first assignment, a suspected speakeasy in Brooklyn, which other agents had been unable to enter. He knocked boldly on the door, and when the peephole was opened, he loudly demanded a drink, identifying himself as a newly appointed prohibition agent sent by his boss. The door swung open and the doorman laughed and slapped Izzy on the back in appreciation of his sense of humor. But then the new agent made a mistake. When the bartender poured him a drink, he downed it before trying to make an arrest. The bartender grabbed the bottle and escaped out a back way, and Izzy was left without evidence. Thereafter, he carried a small funnel in a vest pocket, from which a rubber tube ran to a flask inside his clothing. On future raids most of his drink would go there, to be used as evidence.

Both Izzy and Moe were fat men. Izzy was not quite five and a half feet tall and weighed more than two hundred and twenty-five pounds. He was forty years old and was almost bald when he became a liquor snooper. Moe outweighed his partner by about ten pounds, but did not look as fat because he was a few inches taller. Izzy was the more talented of the two. He could speak Yiddish, Polish, German, and Hungarian fluently, French, Russian, and Italian well enough to get along, and even a bit of Chinese. And he played the violin and trombone.

Izzy had entered the Prohibition service first. He talked his old friend Moe Smith into joining the service and becoming an agent. They received a salary of forty dollars a week. The men usually worked as a team, although Izzy often made raids alone. Their ingenuity was endless. To get into a speakeasy whose suspicious owner refused to open to anyone he did not know personally, they waited until a cold night. Then after Izzy had stood outside in light clothing until he was blue and his teeth were rattling, Moe pounded on the door and shouted, "Give this man a drink! He's been frostbitten." The owner, caught off guard, let Moe drag his partner inside and came forward with a bottle of reviving whiskey, which Moe grabbed and then made the arrest.

The stories about the pair multiplied, especially the tales about Izzy, who became a master of disguises. More often than not, his principal concealment was that he looked too friendly to be a dry agent. On more than one occasion he repeated the same act that had worked on his first assignment. Once he gained admittance to several bars carrying a large pail of dill pickles. Who would ever think a fat man with pickles was an agent? At Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, he was admitted without question to several speakeasies because he carried a string of fish. And more than once he entered a place with the musicians carrying his trombone or violin.

The pair was sometimes borrowed for difficult raids in other cities. During his travels Izzy made a survey of the difficulty of getting a drink in various cities. It took only thirty-five seconds in New Orleans; he got into a taxi at the railroad station, asked the driver where he could buy a drink, and the driver at once produced a bottle. In Pittsburgh he had to wait eleven minutes; in Atlanta he found hard liquor in a candy store seventeen minutes after he got off the train. In other cities theater ushers, streetcar conductors, and other helpful souls saw that he did not have to wait more than half an hour to find a drink. Washington was more difficult. There he could not find a speakeasy or anyone to direct him to one. As a last resort he asked a policeman, who gave him directions. Exact time—one hour.

Izzy and Moe served a little more than five years and in that time they made 4,392 arrests of which more than 95% resulted in conviction. They seized fifteen million dollars worth of hard liquor and beer, and a tremendous quantity of stills and fixtures. It would seem that they would have been valuable men to retain in the Prohibition service. But Izzy and Moe had a failing in the eyes of their bosses. They were not only effective, but were interesting and funny. Their exploits made good newspaper stories. They delighted the public, but this did not charm Prohibition officials. They were warned not to be so conspicuous, but this was no longer possible. On November 13, 1925, they were fired “for the good of the service.” “The service must be dignified,” an official said in explaining the firing. “Izzy and Moe belong on the vaudeville stage.”

Izzy and Moe probably would have been a fair success in vaudeville; as dry agents they were super and no other pair of agents equaled their record of arrests, convictions, and seizures of bootleg booze.

Both men went into the insurance business and did well. Izzy wrote a book about some of his episodes that had so caught the fancy of the public and had kept the reporters on their toes. It was published as an autobiography and was called *Prohibition Agent Number 1*. The public which had once hung on his every exploit had turned to new interests, and the book sold only five hundred and seventy-five copies.

## Sample Lesson

---

### Review on Prohibition

*Baseball (Game)*

**Objective: To score more runs than the opposing team.**

**How to play: This game is played like regular baseball, except that the batter is the student, the ball is the question, the hit or home run is the correct answer, the out is the incorrect answer, and the pitcher is the teacher.**

Divide the class into two teams of similar ability. Seat one team on one side of the room, the other team on the other side. Draw the following diagram on the chalkboard:

*(figure available in print form)*

The visiting team (boys) goes to bat first. The first student on that team asks the pitcher (teacher) for a single, double, triple, or home run question. The better the hit requested the harder will be the question.

Let's suppose a single hit question is requested. If the student answers it correctly, draw an X on first base and the next batter (student) steps up to the plate. An incorrect answer equals one out. After three outs, the other team goes to bat.

To score a run a team must answer four single questions or any other appropriate combination, before recording three outs in one inning. Runs may be scored in one inning until the three outs have been recorded. Play a nine-inning game, or play until the period ends. Record the score inning by inning on the chalkboard. The team with the most runs is the winner.

The following are sample questions that may be used:

*For a Single :*

1. What year did Prohibition take effect?
2. What year was Prohibition repealed?
3. What amendment put Prohibition into effect?
4. Which amendment repealed Prohibition?
5. Explain the term "bootlegger."
6. What was a speakeasy?
7. What was a wet?
8. What was a dry?
9. What was a Prohibition agent?
10. Explain the term "repeal."

*For a Double:*

1. Name the first state to pass a prohibition law.
2. What war halted drastically the prohibition movement?
3. What was the WCTU?
4. What was the most effective of all the prohibition organizations?
5. Who were Izzy Einstein and Moe Smith?
6. Why were Izzy Einstein and Moe Smith so popular with the public despite the fact they were Prohibition agents?
7. Explain the term "prohibition."
8. Why were prohibitionists more successful in the country than in the city?

*For a Triple:*

1. Why was prohibition first tried in America?
2. Explain the three types of punishments given to drunks during colonial times.
3. Why were laborers, servants, and slaves more severely punished for drunkenness during colonial times?
4. Explain the wording of the Eighteenth Amendment.
5. What was the first state to write prohibition into the constitution?
6. Why did colonial authorities encourage the making and selling of beer, wine, and liquor?
7. Who was James Oglethorpe and why did he wish to enforce prohibition?
8. How could the brewers have reformed the saloon?
9. How did the brewers attempt to fight the dries?
10. What was the Webb-Kenyon Bill?

*For a Home Run:*

1. Explain how World War I changed the atmosphere of public opinion toward Prohibition.
2. What were the arguments of the wets concerning the passage of Prohibition?
3. How did the dries answer the arguments of the wets?
4. What were the reasons for the repeal of Prohibition?

## Sample Lesson

---

### Interpreting the Cartoon *The Last Drop*

- Study the cartoon entitled "The Last Drop." Then
1. discuss the following questions with the class.
    - a. How would you interpret this cartoon?
    - b. Is such a situation truly believable or is this an exaggeration for effect?
    - c. What group would sponsor a cartoon such as this?
    - d. Would this be an effective means of swaying public opinion or is it just an attention-getter?
    - e. Can you draw a cartoon showing the evils of drink?

## Sample Lesson

---

### An Object Lesson from the Anti-Saloon League

Have the students read carefully the verses

1. written by Julia Johnson. Discuss the following questions:

- a. What major theme is Julia Johnson trying to establish?
- b. Take each stanza separately—discuss the meaning or interpretation of each.
- c. Do you believe that this was a successful way of getting an idea across to the people?
- d. Is this a form of propaganda? Where do you think such a picture and poem would be printed?

Have the students carefully study the

2. drawing, entitled “Daddy’s in There.” Discuss the following questions.

- a. How do you interpret this drawing?
- b. To whom is the Anti-Saloon League appealing?
- c. Is this a form of propaganda?
- d. Do you think this kind of advertisement would be an effective way of enforcing Prohibition?
- e. Can you think of any type of advertising today that could be compared to this? (cigarettes, drugs)
- f. What media do we have today that were not available at the time of this drawing? How would this affect the success of such a message?

## Sample Lesson

---

### Words or Terms Associated with Prohibition

#### *Word Find*

Have the student read the following clues very carefully and then find the matching term or word in the puzzle below. The first answer is already circled to give you a start.



1. A distiller of homemade alcohol
2. Nineteenth century term for all hard liquor
3. An unlicensed saloon
4. Illegal liquor
5. A maker and distributor of bootlegged gin
6. A supporter of Prohibition
7. A robber or a bootlegger
8. Outlawing of intoxicating liquor
9. A line of liquor ships outside United States territorial waters
10. A legal drinking place between the Civil War and the Volstead Act
11. An illegal drinking place during the period of National Prohibition
12. An opponent of Prohibition
13. A change in the Volstead Act to allow the manufacture and sale of light wines and beers
14. Beer consisting of less than one-half of one percent of alcohol
15. An election in which communities could vote to close up saloons within their areas
16. The “make-believe” figure that symbolized drink
17. To revoke an amendment

*(figure available in print form)*

## **Student Activities**

---

1. Learn special vocabulary related to Prohibition
2. View slides
3. Film strips
4. Movies
5. Cartoons
6. Puzzles
7. Debate
8. Re-enact plays dealing with Prohibition
9. Records and tapes
10. Read additional literature relating to Prohibition
11. Interviews with people who lived through the era
12. Games
13. Reading biographies of individuals during the era

## Teachers's Bibliography

---

- Dobyns, Fletcher. *The Amazing Story of Repeal* . Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1940.
- Doty, Bob P. Ed. *Prohibition Quiz Book* . Westerville, Ohio: Anti-Saloon League of America, 1928.
- Franklin, Fabian. *What Prohibition Has Done to America* . New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1922.
- Gordon, Ana A. *The Beautiful Life of Frances Willard* . Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publishing Assoc., 1898.
- Gusfield, Joseph R. *Symbolic Crusade : Status , Politics and the American Temperance Movement*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1963.
- Kobler, John. *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* . New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1973.
- Krout, John Allen. *The Origins of Prohibition*. New York: A. Knopf, 1925.
- Lee, Henry. *How Dry We Were : Prohibition Revisited*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.
- Merz, Charles. *The Dry Decade* . Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1930.
- Mowry, George, Ed. *The Twenties: Fords, Flappers and Fanatics* . Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957.
- Sann, Paul. *The Lawless Decade* . New York: Crown Publishers, 1957.
- Severn, Bill. *The End of the Roaring Twenties* . New York: Julian Messner, 1969.
- Sinclair, Andrew. *Prohibition, The Era of Excess*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1962.
- Time-Life Editors, *The Fabulous Century: Vol. III 1920-1930* , pp. 154-175. New York: Time-Life Publishing Co., 1969.

## Periodicals

---

- Burnham, John C. "New Perspectives on the Prohibition Experiment of the 1920's." *Journal of Social History* , Vol. 2, pp. 51-68. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968.
- Sobol, Louis. "Dear Old Golden Saloon Days." *Town & Country* , March, 1962.
- Jantzen, Steven. "Prohibition: The 'Noble Experiment' That Failed." *Senior Scholastic* , Vol. 110, No. 16, April 20, 1978.

## Students' Bibliography

---

Kobler, John. *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* . New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1973.

Landenburg, Thomas. *Between Two Wars* , Vol. 3, Ch. 7. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1970.

Mowry, George E., Ed. *The Twenties: Fords, Flappers and Fanatics* . Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.

Severn, Bill. *The End of the Roaring Twenties* . New York: Julian Messner, 1969.

Time-Life Editors. *The Fabulous Century: Vol. III 1920-1930* , pp. 154-175. New York: Time-Life Publishing Co., 1969.

## Periodicals

---

Jantzen, Steven . "Prohibition: The 'Noble Experiment' That Failed." *Senior Scholastic*, Vol. 110, No. 16, April 20, 1978.

---

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>