

Prohibition, the “Noble Experiment”: Success or Failure?

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Abstract

The early 20th century witnessed a heightened awareness of the social ills that plagued American society. Whether it was urban social reforms characterized by Jane Adams’ Hull House Movement or a more general looking back to the past to find a real or imagined era of social morality, this time period has often been termed the Progressive Era. In fact, the quintessential achievement for many reform-minded progressives of this time period was the enactment of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, Prohibition. For decades prior to its passage, reformers had touted the evils of alcohol and advocated for its ban in America. But was an all out nation-wide ban on alcohol the answer to America’s morality problems? In this lesson, students will analyze a variety of national and local primary sources to examine America’s “Noble Experiment”, and ultimately answer the question, “Prohibition: Success or Failure?”

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- 1.) Identify and explain ideas and events that characterized the Progressive Era and the Prohibition Movement.
- 2.) Analyze and categorize a variety of primary source documents relating to Prohibition.
- 3.) Synthesize an argument based on primary source material that explains how and why Prohibition was a success or failure.

Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings

- 1.) Do individual rights outweigh the rights of an entire group?
- 2.) Can governments limit the rights of individuals to benefit the entire group?
- 3.) How do individuals/groups benefit or not benefit from governmental legislation?

Illinois State Learning Standards

16.A.3b Make inferences about historical events and eras using historical maps and other historical sources.

16.A.5a Analyze historical and contemporary developments using methods of historical inquiry (pose questions, collect and analyze data, make and support inferences with evidence, report findings).

National Primary Sources

Students will analyze the following national primary sources to gain a greater understanding of Prohibition:

-The 18th Amendment

- The Volstead Act
- Letter Concerning Transportation of Alcohol from California to Washington
- Letter Concerning the Sale of Alcohol in Oregon
- Drawing of a Still
- Truman Letter Alluding to Prohibition
- Presidential Proclamation 2065
- The 21st Amendment
- Federal Council of Churches Testimony
- Prohibition Quotations
- Physicians Prescription for Alcohol
- Fiorella H. LaGuardia Testimony
- Senator James Reed Testimony
- Prohibition Political Cartoon Packet #1
- Prohibition Political Cartoon Packet #2

Local Primary Sources

Students will analyze the following local primary sources to gain a greater understanding of Prohibition:

- “*A Saloon in an Illinois Mining Town*” Reading
- “*Elliot Ness Busts Bootleggers*” Reading

Procedures

- 1.) **Setting the Purpose:** Show transparency #1 (Prohibition Begins) and have students Think – Pair – Share using handout #1 (Photo Analysis Worksheet).
- 2.) Have groups report out to the entire class and record student responses on the board.
- 3.) Begin a short lecture/discussion on the Progressive Era and Prohibition Movement using Lecture Notes Graphic Organizer #1.
- 4.) Explain to students that they will be analyzing a variety of primary source documents to develop a conclusion about the success or failure of Prohibition.
- 5.) Pass out handout #2 (The 18th Amendment) and handout #3 (The Volstead Act), and complete handout #4 (Document Analysis Worksheet) as an entire class. **Note: Teachers will need to model how to complete the worksheet with the class, and will need to explain some of the terminology and language used in these documents.**
- 6.) Pass out handouts #5 – 17, and have students complete handout #4 (Document Analysis Worksheet) for each primary source document as individuals or in small groups.
- 7.) Have individuals or groups report out on their findings and complete handout #18 (Prohibition: Success or Failure Worksheet) as an entire class.

- 8.) Pass out Prohibition Political Cartoon Packet #1 and handout #19 (Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet) and have students complete them individually or in small groups.
- 9.) Have individuals or groups report out on their findings and continue to add the findings to handout #18 (Prohibition: Success or Failure Worksheet).
- 10.) Pass out Prohibition Political Cartoon Packet #2 and handout #19 (Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet) and have students complete them individually or in small groups.
- 11.) Have individuals or groups report out on their findings and continue to add the findings to handout #18 (Prohibition: Success or Failure Worksheet).
- 12.) Pass out handout #20 (Prohibition the “Noble Experiment”: Success or Failure Writing Assignment), explain the directions to the students, and answer any questions. If time permits, students may begin the assignment in class, or it can be assigned for homework.

Assessment

Materials

- Transparency #1 (Prohibition Begins)
- Handout #1 (Photo Analysis Worksheet)
- Handout #2 (The 18th Amendment)
- Handout #3 (The Volstead Act)
- Handout #4 (Document Analysis Worksheet)
- Handout #5 (Letter Concerning Transportation of Alcohol from California to Washington)
- Handout #6 (Letter Concerning the Sale of Alcohol in Oregon)
- Handout #7 (Drawing of a Still)
- Handout #8 (Truman Letter Alluding to Prohibition)
- Handout #9 (Presidential Proclamation 2065)
- Handout #10 (The 21st Amendment)
- Handout #11 (Federal Council of Churches Testimony)
- Handout #12 (Prohibition Quotations)
- Handout #13 (Physicians Prescription for Alcohol)
- Handout # 14 (Fiorella H. LaGuardia Testimony)
- Handout #15 (Senator James Reed Testimony)
- Handout #16 (A Saloon in an Illinois Mining Town Reading)
- Handout #17 (Elliot Ness Busts Bootleggers Reading)
- Handout #18 (Prohibition: Success or Failure Worksheet)
- Handout #19 (Political Cartoon Analysis Worksheet)
- Handout #20 (Prohibition the “Noble Experiment”: Success or Failure Writing Assignment)
- Prohibition Political Cartoon Packet #1
- Prohibition Political Cartoon Packet #2
- Lecture Notes Graphic Organizer #1