Temperance and Prohibition:
Primary Sources and Activities

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The temperance movement was active in the United States for almost a century before the 18th amendment to the Constitution prohibited alcohol manufacture, sale and distribution. Various reasons for the “evils of alcohol” were used by temperance advocates, countered by arguments from anti-prohibitionists. Both groups used a variety of methods to support their positions and protest the other side.

Temperance and Prohibition instruction can begin during discussions of antebellum America, continue through the Gilded Age, and finish in the era of World War I. Temperance as a social reform movement, particularly as a movement involving women, reflects and is impacted by several other events, including industrialization, suffrage and war. Prohibition, the “failed experiment,” remains one of the most fascinating subjects in early 20th century American history.

When students enter high school, they might have a beginning understanding of Prohibition, in particular the people who broke the law during those years. But to understand the impact of Prohibition, students must first understand the context of the long temperance movement, the reasons behind a struggle for a national Prohibition amendment, and the ways in which the “wets” and the “drys” advocated for their positions. The 14 years of Prohibition have very deep roots.

Library of Congress Resources

The Library of Congress has an interesting collection of temperance and Prohibition sources, dating back to the early 19th century. The best place to find such documents are in the following locations:

- Temperance images in Prints and Photographs Online: [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=temperance&sg=true](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=temperance&sg=true).
- Prohibition images in Prints and Photographs Online: [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=prohibition&sp=2](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=prohibition&sp=2).
Temperance and Prohibition Primary-Source Set: Sources and Activities

This primary-source set identifies Library of Congress sources and supporting sources from the Minnesota Historical Society to create three in-class activities for high school students to teach about three particular elements of the temperance and prohibition movements:

- **The Long Road of Temperance Activism**
- **Vote Yes v. Vote No: Ratification of the 18th Amendment**
- **The “Wets” Fight Back**

The sources and activities here provide teachers with activity suggestions that can occupy one class period or less. The inclusion of Minnesota sources helps to make the connection between state and national history, illustrating that events on the national stage also played out in Minnesota. Library of Congress sources include:

- Drunkard’s Progress. 1846.
- Tree of Intemperance. 1855.
- Tree of Temperance. 1855.
- Woman’s Holy War. Grand charge on the enemy works. 1874.
- Illustration of the dangers of alcoholic beverages. 1884.
- Evading the liquor law in Colorado Springs. 1877.
- Anti Prohibition. 1888.
- Said Prohibition Maine to Prohibition Georgia. 1907.
- *The Mahoning Dispatch*, 1 November 1918. “Will You Back Me, or Will You Back Booze?”
- *The Mahoning Dispatch (Ohio)*. 31 October 1919. “How to Keep Ohio Dry.”
- One of the rum runners at night. 1924.
- Prohibition Unit Cow Shoes. 1924.
- Latest thing in flasks. 1926.

Minnesota sources (from the Minnesota Historical Society) include:

- “Patriotism versus Prohibition.” No date.
- Anti-prohibition card. No date.
- Bread not Beer button. 1918.
- “Vote Yes, Make Minnesota Dry.” Photo. 1918.
- Root cellar still. 1921.
- People with bumper stickers. 1932.
Temperance and Prohibition: Context

The organized temperance movement in the United States began to gather steam in the early decades of the 19th century. Temperance groups advocated for moderation and sometimes abstinence from alcoholic beverages. Alcohol was blamed for many of society’s ills, including crime, abuse, poor health and poverty. Women filled the ranks of temperance societies, as many of them had been subjected to fathers and husbands whose use of alcohol led to abuse of body, mind and finances.

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union was founded in 1874 and the Anti-Saloon League in 1895. Powerful leaders such as WCTU president Frances Willard and hatchet-carrying Carry Nation brought the issue of temperance to national attention. They advocated for government regulation and instruction about temperance in schools.

During World War I, temperance advocacy grew in response to anti-German sentiment in the United States; many of the country’s brewers were of German origins. Support for the temperance movement also included many in the United States Congress. In January 1919, the required number of states ratified the 18th amendment, which prohibited the sale, transport and manufacture of intoxicating beverages. The Volstead Act, sponsored by Minnesota Representative Andrew Volstead, was passed as the Prohibition Enforcement Act, which defined the nature of intoxicating beverages. The laws took effect in January 1920.

For the next 13 years of Prohibition, many Americans followed the law: saloons closed, breweries shut down, people stopped consuming alcohol. But many more broke the law. Speakeasies, which were saloons operating in secrecy, operated across the country. Americans made wine and beer and spirits at their homes. Rum-runners made a lot of money bringing alcohol into the country from places like Canada. Organized crime flourished.

In the early 1930s, political and social movements in opposition to Prohibition grew. In December 1933, the states ratified the 21st amendment, which repealed the 18th amendment. Prohibition officially came to an end, but temperance movements have continued and some states chose to remain dry for decades following the 21st amendment.

Minnesota During Temperance and Prohibition

Minnesota was active on both sides of the alcohol debate. The WCTU was active in the state, and Rep. Andrew Volstead sponsored prohibition legislation. The state’s proximity to Canada, however, allowed for alcohol to be shipped in by rum-runners. Minnesotans frequented speakeasies and built stills, and many of the era’s notorious gangsters (particularly John Dillinger) spent time in Minnesota, due to an agreement reached between the criminals and St. Paul’s chief of police, John O’Connor.
The Long Road of Temperance Activism

**Library of Congress documents for this activity:**

Drunkard’s Progress. 1846. [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91796265/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91796265/)

Tree of Intemperance. 1855. [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003689279/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003689279/)

Tree of Temperance. 1855. [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003689278/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003689278/)


Illustration of the dangers of alcoholic beverages. 1884. [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006690212/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006690212/)


**Minnesota documents for this activity:**


**Activity Procedure:**

Movements for temperance have been active in the United States since the country came into being. Temperance advocates gained momentum in the later part of the 19th century, using a variety of methods and reasoning, until their eventual success led to the 18th amendment.

1. Begin with a discussion for the motivation of temperance. Ask students why they think people have been advocating temperance for so many years; what are the arguments against alcohol and for abstinence? (Possible answers: alcohol is destructive to health, morals and family; it harms people’s priorities; it causes financial and resource strain).

2. Project each source individually. Determine the motivation for each piece of propaganda: what was the general message, what were the temperance advocates trying to accomplish, and who was their intended audience? How are they effective or ineffective?

3. Each student will craft a written response to one of the sources, using the RAFT method of writing (Role, Audience, Format, Topic). Each student will choose a source to respond to, but not from their personal point of view. Students will choose a particular role for their response’s point of view (are they a fellow temperance advocate, a saloon-keeper, an alcoholic’s wife, a social drinker, etc.), an audience for their response (are they writing a response for a newspaper-reading audience, for their mother, for schoolchildren, for brewers, etc.), a format for the response (is the response in the form of a newspaper editorial criticizing/supporting the source, a letter to a family member, a homily in a church, a propaganda poster), and the topic (responding to the particular piece of temperance propaganda they have chosen).
Tree of Temperance. 1855. Library of Congress.
Illustration of the dangers of alcoholic beverages. 1884. Library of Congress.
Will You Back Me—or back Booze

Vote “Yes” for Prohibition
Nov. 5th.

The Ohio Dry Federation
J. A. White, Manager

The U.S.A.

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER
Will You Join In This Demand?

The Hun and the Brewer are Bitter Foes of Humanity
VOTE “OVER HERE” AS OUR BOYS SHOOT “OVER THERE”
Vote Early in the Morning Tuesday, Nov. 5, ’18
BE A PATRIOT! DO YOUR DUTY!
Vote Dry

Vote Yes vs. Vote No: Ratification of the 18th Amendment

Library of Congress documents for this activity:


Minnesota document for this activity:


Activity Procedure:

The push to ratify the 18th amendment to the Constitution was a heated battle across the United States, as “wet” and “dry” communities and “wet” and “dry” legislators fought for their sides. The prohibition battle also took place during World War I, when women were pushing for the right to vote and thousands of men were in Europe.

1. Read the text of section 1 of the 18th amendment as a class: “After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.” Break down the language and determine what this amendment means.
2. What was the benefit to the “drys” of having Prohibition written into national constitutional law? What was the problem for “wets” of having it in the Constitution?
3. Talk about the process of ratification. (In 1917, the House intended to make Prohibition the 18th amendment, but three-fourths of the states needed to ratify in order for it to become law. The amendment allowed for seven years to ratify, but three-fourths of the states ratified within 13 months, and it became law on January 16, 1919.) View the primary sources above and discuss how each source is advocating for a “wet” or “dry” stance.
4. Divide the students into two groups: “drys” and “wets.” Each group is responsible for creating an ad campaign for their side of the argument. Students can produce posters, commercials, advertisements, or editorials, among other things.
Hold the Line for Democracy and Sane Legislation

To the Voters of Missouri:

On the 5th of November, the civilian voters of the State will be called upon to adopt or reject a proposed constitutional amendment providing for the prohibition of the “manufacture, sale and giving away of intoxicating liquors” known as proposed Amendment No. 6. An analysis of what this question means to the people of Missouri should be carefully considered by every voter before he casts his ballot.

Some Reasons Why Prohibition Should Be Defeated

- It offends the principles of individual liberty and self-determination upon which American democracy was founded, and substitutes State control of individual habits for self-control, which develops individual character.

- It is a mistake as a prohibition measure for the reason that it exempts liquors for “medicinal, mechanical, and scientific purposes,” which, as shown in other states, opens the door wide for the use of liquors to almost any extent.

- It is destructive and not constructive in its operation, for the reason that it involves the ruin of several hundred million dollars worth of property and the business and livelihood of thousands of citizens, and entails the loss of immense revenues to the State and municipalities without providing any compensation for such destruction of property, business, and livelihood, or any plan for replacing the resources that will be needed to replace the revenue destroyed.

- All European nations except Russia have declined against prohibition, and have regulated the liquor industry in accordance with the report of commissions appointed to study the subject.

- The British Liquor Control Board have declared against prohibition and in favor of liquor regulation.

- By wise legislation, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have, in the course of a generation or two, brought about model conditions with respect to the sale and use of beverages containing alcohol.

- Proposed prohibition in our country is not founded on the report or investigations of any competent commission, but is an extreme proposition, the consequences of which cannot be foreseen.

- The adoption of the proposed amendment may lead to the ratification by the Legislature of the State of Missouri of the prohibition amendment to the Federal Constitution. If the voters of the State wish to prevent the imposition of the tyranny of prohibition on the Nation they should, on November 5th, declare themselves emphatically against prohibition in Missouri.

- Prohibition, both State and Federal, will mean the wholesale adoption of illicit distilling and home brewing, and, as stated by the Internal Revenue Commissioner, will require an army of deputies for its enforcement. The rights and privacy of the home would thereby undoubtedly be totally sacrificed.

- Let the boys decide when they come home.

- Will we make Missouri safe for democracy if we attempt to abridge the liberties or change by law the habits of thousands of our people without giving one hundred thousand Missourians in France or overseas of our votes a voice in the matter?

- Is it wise to destroy vast property and business interests in the midst of war and bring about changes in a political, social, and financial way, the end of which we cannot see?

- The revenue collected in the State of Missouri from the brewing and distilling business for these purposes amounts to something over $1,560,255.00, and for municipal and county purposes, over $2,090,000.00.

- The National revenue derived from beer, wines, and spirits licenses is approximately $500,000,000.00 per annum, which, under the proposed new Revenue Law, it is estimated will reach more than One Billion Dollars per year.

- If prohibition is enacted, new and increasingly heavy taxes will have to be assessed and borne by every citizen of the State and a much greater increase in the income, existing and other taxes will have to be paid by each citizen if revenues on alcoholic beverages are no longer available to the National Government.

- The local option laws of Missouri, as enforced by our highest courts, are more effective, logical, and fair than state-wide prohibition can ever be.

Scratch YES on Amendment No. 6

Vote NO

Citizens’ Committee

HOW ABOUT US?

The A.E.F. has no collective concern with prohibition any more than it has with freight rebates, the market price of sheet steel, or the ad valorem duty on kelp imports into Patagonia.

But when a news dispatch states that one explanation of the prohibition advocates' zeal since the A.E.F. came to France is their desire to put over prohibition before the A.E.F. gets home again, then the A.E.F. has the right to make a collective protest. For if the prohibitionists can get away with it, why cannot everybody else?

The A.E.F. represents a very fat share of the entire electorate of the United States—the electorate that picks governors, senators and presidential electors; that instructs its representatives how it wants them to vote on minimum wage and child labor laws; that helps decide whether the home town shall be wet, dry, bone dry, absolutely dry, or, "Stranger, you simply can't get a drop in the whole place." And, in the name of common honesty, is it quite fair for prohibitionists or anybody else to attempt to secure a popular vote on a decision of nation-wide import when the folks who have been fighting for the same nation are calmly, blandly, deliberately left out?

As was earlier remarked, the A.E.F. has no collective concern with prohibition. But it at least ought to have the chance to express its will—it ought at least to be present, if only as a guard of honor, when the water wagon begins its solemn triumphal procession along the Lincoln highway.
Soldiers! Sailors! Marines!
Men and Women of Organized Labor!
Citizens of New York Who Pay Taxes or Pay Rent!

Wake up! Your liberties are threatened!
Your Taxes Will Be Increased!
Prohibition by Constitutional Amendment Will Do Both.
Voice a Mighty Protest Against It at the
Monster Mass Meeting
in
Madison Square Garden
Saturday Evening, May 24th, at 8 o’clock

Be you realize that your rights and liberties to drink what you please will be taken from you on July 1st unless you, the people, make it impossible by letting your protest be heard immediately at the extra session of Congress which opens tomorrow?
The liberties for which the fathers fought must and shall be preserved.
Tell it to your Congressman!
Tell it to your Senator!
Tell it to the President!
AND DO IT NOW!

That’s what the Mass Meeting in Madison Square Garden will give you an opportunity to do.

Next Saturday Night, May 24th

Men and Women of New York, as you love your country, as you would keep the Constitution unbroken by the first prohibition of personal rights and personal liberties ever enunciated, attend this

Meeting of Protest

Taxpayers and rent payers!
Are your taxes not high enough now?
Are your rents not high enough now?
They will be nearly doubled when Constitutional prohibition stops the excise revenue!

Law of Freedom? If the prohibition amendment remains in the Constitution the soldiers of the American Revolution

Fought in Vain!

If the prohibition amendment stands then constitutional liberty in this republic is dead?
If the country goes dry on July 1st then the fourth of July has no meaning.
All these matters will be discussed at the Madison Square Garden Meeting.

The following will speak:

Charles A. Windle, Editor Chicago, ICONOCLAST, the ablest anti-prohibition speaker in the world. The Anti-Saloon League does not dare meet him in debate.
Father John L. Belford, one of the most eloquent speakers against prohibition in the Catholic Church.
Edward L. Hanover, President Central Federated Union.
Congressman Roscoe L. Hardel, who will lead the fight against prohibition at the extra session of Congress.

First Lieut. Edwin J. McDonald, 6th U. S. Artillery, 1st Army, A. E. F.

Fine Music. Famous Musicians. Come by twos, and threes, and thousands!

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN,
SATURDAY EVENING, MAY 24TH, AT 8 O’CLOCK

TICKETS FREE. Tickets may be obtained at Madison Square Garden or at the offices of the Association Opposed to National Prohibitions,
19 West 44th Street (telephones VandERPuth 7716), after 9 o’clock next Tuesday morning.

Meeting under the auspices of

Association Opposed to National Prohibitions
The Central Federated Union
The National Personal Liberty League
The Self Determination League
Franco-American Association for the Protection of American Liberty
HOW TO KEEP OHIO DRY

Study These Ballots
Take Them With You
to the Polls, Nov. 6th.

These four proposals are up for a vote because wet petitions brought them up. Why are they up? Vote them down if you want to stay dry.

1. Vote Yes on National Prohibition—top of the long ballot. Keep Ohio among the 42 states.
2. Kill both wet amendments—vote NO twice on the short ballot below.

WHO WANTS BOOZE BACK?
Wives?
Children?
Parents?
The Booze Dealers?

Vote NO on the Wet Amendments
Vote YES on the Dry Laws

Election Day November 4.

Above is the short ballot.
Vote NO twice. If either of the above amendments should carry, yours would become a wide-open neighborhood.

Vote YES on the Cribbe Act—give Prohibition an enforcement law and a real chance. Vote YES twice on the long ballot.

Mahoning County Dry Federation
804 Mahoning Bank Building
L. G. BATMAN, Chairman Committee. PERRY ROBINSON, Campaign Manager

Youngstown, Ohio

Patriotism versus Prohibition

The Anti-Saloon League

Is agitating for the closing of saloons and breweries as a “Patriotic” War Measure

Are they really as patriotic as they pretend

Let the facts speak for themselves

We are reliably informed that:

The American Federation of Labor has purchased Liberty Bonds for $10,000.

The International Typographical Union has purchased Liberty Bonds for $50,000.

The United Mine Workers of America have purchased Liberty Bonds for $100,000.

The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners have purchased Liberty Bonds for $100,000.

This is only a partial list of international labor unions that purchased Liberty Bonds to help in the struggle for World Democracy.

What is the amount of Liberty Bonds bought by the Anti-Saloon League?

Every labor paper in this country devoted miles of space gratis, in boosting the sale of Liberty Bonds, thrift and war savings stamps.

“The American Issue,” the official organ of the Anti-Saloon League, is the one and only paper (claiming to be patriotic) that did not open its columns to the U.S. Government in its campaign for finances.

Actions speak louder than words.

The Anti-Saloon League is using “patriotism” as a cloak, and is taking advantage of the war in carrying out its un-American program.

Vote against Prohibition

Issued by the Minnesota Trades Union League

For further information apply to Secretary

Jean E. Spielman, 501 3rd Ave. So.

Minneapolis, Minn.

“Patriotism versus Prohibition.” Minnesota Historical Society Collection.
“Vote Yes, Make Minnesota Dry.” 1918. Minnesota Historical Society Collections.
The “Wets” Fight Back

**Library of Congress documents for this activity:**

Evading the liquor law in Colorado Springs. 1877. [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97519109/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97519109/)


One of the rum runners at night. 1924. [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006679172/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006679172/)

Prohibition Unit Cow Shoes. 1924. [http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/npc2008006377/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/npc2008006377/)


**Minnesota documents for this activity:**


**Activity Procedure:**

1. Identify the different types of rules or laws that people break (curfews, speed limits, civil disobedience, stealing, etc). Once you have a list, discuss these questions:
   
   a. Why do people break laws?
   
   b. Is it ever okay to break a law? If so, under what circumstances?
   
   c. When does law-breaking become a crime?

2. Examine the anti-Prohibition documents and discuss the different ways that “wets” protested Prohibition and broke the law. Discuss these questions:

   a. Were the “wets” justified in breaking the law or not? Or is this law like any law: you shouldn’t break it, no matter what your opinion?
   
   b. Were they criminals or harmless trouble-makers?
   
   c. Based on this case, do you think that the “wets” thought it was necessary to break the law in order to change it? Or do you think they were just being defiant? Was there a larger motivation than just the desire for alcohol?

3. *Extension activity:* Each student chooses a modern issue where people deliberately break the law, and identify the law-breakers’ reasoning and methods. Write a position statement explaining why the law-breakers are/are not criminals or why/why not their actions are justified.
Evading the liquor law in Colorado Springs. 1877. Library of Congress.
Said Prohibition Maine to Prohibition Georgia. 1907. Library of Congress.
One of the rum runners at night. 1924. Library of Congress.
Prohibition Unit Cow Shoes. 1924. Library of Congress.
It's a long way to Prohibition,
It's the wrong way to go.
It's a sure way to bring Perdition
To the greatest State I know.
Let's all stick together,
Let this be our cry...

“It’s a long, long way to Prohibition
And we’ll not go dry.”
Root cellar still. 1921. Minnesota Historical Society Collections.
People with bumper stickers advocating the repeal of the 18th amendment (prohibition). 1932. Minnesota Historical Society Collections.