

Name _____



Date _____

Prohibition

By Jane Runyon

By the early 1900's, many people in the United States began to worry about the use of alcohol by citizens. They were afraid that too many people were drinking alcohol. It was possible that these drinking people could become a danger to themselves and the people around them. Alcohol can have an effect on those who drink it. They sometimes lose control of their thought processes. Their bodies don't react as quickly to danger. Long time use of alcohol can cause permanent damage to organs in the body such as the liver.

In 1905, three states made it illegal to drink or have alcohol within the state. By 1912, nine states made alcohol illegal. In 1916, twenty-six of the forty-eight states had prohibited the use of alcohol. In 1919, members of Congress passed the Eighteenth Amendment. This amendment to the Constitution made it illegal to make, sell, or transport alcohol in the United States. Prohibition officially began on January 16, 1920.

Often times when a law is passed, it seems to be an invitation for some people to try and get around that law. This happened often during Prohibition. The Volstead Act, which followed the constitutional amendment, spelled out when, where, and how much alcohol could be produced and still be legal. Alcohol as a medicine was still allowed. A doctor could prescribe alcohol to a patient. The patient could take his or her prescription to a druggist, and the druggist had to give the patient the alcohol. Over a million barrels of alcohol a year were consumed in this manner.

If you look closely, you will see that the Eighteenth Amendment says you can't make, sell, or transport alcohol. It said nothing about drinking it. Private drinking clubs were set up all over the country. A guard was at the door to make sure no government agents tried to come into the club. If a person wanted to enter the club, he or she had to "speak easy" to the guard. That's why these clubs were called "speakeasies." The alcohol was smuggled in from Canada or Caribbean islands.

Gangsters found that providing alcohol to speakeasies could bring them a lot of money. The illegal operation of producing "bootleg" liquor became big business. Notorious mobsters such as Al Capone took over the production of alcohol and provided it in illegal proportions all over the country. He kept his operations very secret. It was hard to prove that he was breaking the law. What finally did him in was the fact that he had not paid income taxes on the money he earned from his illegal business.

Some people turned to producing their own illegal "booze." This caused some serious problems. Criminals mixed lethal materials into their "bathtub gin." An industrial chemical was mixed in one batch that left all those who drank it paralyzed in the feet and hands. In other cases, the alcohol was mixed in old automobile radiators. There were still lead salts in the radiators which led to the deaths of those who drank it.

Then there was "near beer." This concoction had a very small amount of alcohol in it. It had just enough to keep it legal. When the near beer was sold, it had a set of instructions with it. These instructions gave specific instructions to the consumer about what should not be done with the near beer. If the instructions were not followed, it would create an alcoholic beverage and, of course, that would be illegal. What an easy way to make beer!

The cost of enforcing the Eighteenth Amendment, and the fact that so many people didn't seem to want to follow the law, caused Congress to reconsider their actions in 1933. At that time the Twenty-First Amendment was ratified. The amendment repealed, or did away with, Prohibition.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Prohibition allowed for alcohol to be sold only in restaurants.
- A. False
 - B. True
- _____ 2. What does the word "prohibition" mean?
- A. Stop the use of something
 - B. Limit the amount of something
 - C. Put something on display
 - D. Allow small amounts of a product to be sold
- _____ 3. Which body organ is typically harmed by the use of alcohol?
- A. Ears
 - B. Hands
 - C. Feet
 - D. Liver
4. Why did gangsters become involved in bootlegging?
- _____
- _____
5. Why was alcohol prohibited in the first place?
- _____
- _____
- _____ 6. What loophole in the Eighteenth Amendment did people take advantage of in order to consume alcohol?
- A. The amendment didn't say people couldn't smuggle alcohol.
 - B. The amendment didn't say people couldn't drink alcohol.
 - C. The amendment didn't say people couldn't sell alcohol.
 - D. The amendment didn't say people couldn't make alcohol.
- _____ 7. What did many people die from?
- A. Near beer
 - B. Speakeasies
 - C. Chemicals in bathtub gin
 - D. Alcohol free booze
- _____ 8. Congress did away with the Eighteenth Amendment because it was too hard to enforce.
- A. True
 - B. False

