



## Prohibition in Tennessee

**Grade Level 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Questions:** 1. What was Prohibition?

2. How was Tennessee's experience with Prohibition similar or different the rest of the United States?

**Materials:** History Goes on the Record: Knoxville Sessions Documentary

Prohibition in Tennessee Reading

Prohibition in Tennessee Reading Questions

Prohibition in Tennessee Reading Questions Rubric (one copy for the teacher)

**Lesson Activity:** Watch the documentary and discuss as a class. Next, give each student a copy of the Prohibition in Tennessee Reading and the questions. Allow them to complete the questions individually or with a partner and then discuss. You may use the Question Rubric to assess the answers students provide.

## “Prohibition in Tennessee”

As a result of the Civil War, the federal government needed to fund an increased national debt. The solution was a liquor tax as part of the **Revenue Act of 1862**. Many East Tennesseans were impoverished and could not afford to pay the tax. Therefore, they began committing acts of federal fraud, such as distilling **moonshine**. Many believed that the

**Moonshine**- People who distilled illegal corn whiskey in order to avoid the liquor tax and make an income worked by moonlight, earning them the nickname “moonshiners”

prohibition since it encouraged illegal

**Four Mile Law**- The Tennessee General Assembly passed the Four Mile Law in 1877. Alcohol could not be sold within four miles of certain rural schools. The law was expanded in 1887 to include more country schools. In 1899, the Peeler Act ruled that the Four Mile Law applied to towns of less than 2,000. The Adams Bill upped the law to towns of 5,000 or less in 1903. The Pendleton Act of 1907 expanded the law to all but a few of the largest cities. The Four Mile Law finally applied to all schools in 1909.

government did not have the constitutional authority to impose such a tax. Revenue officers sent to arrest moonshiners were faced with violence and resistance. Interestingly, revenue officers were often against a state production of alcohol.

Prohibition in Tennessee arose out of **industrialization**. Industrialization created an upper and middle-class. The individuals in these groups believe alcohol inhibited progress. Someone who is intoxicated is less productive than a sober person. In 1887, the **Four Mile Law** determined that it was illegal to sell alcohol within four miles of a school in rural areas of the state. Many temperance organizations supported

**Revenue Act of 1862**- The act created the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, the country’s first progressive tax, and taxed every day goods.

*How do you think East Tennesseans felt about the liquor tax?*

**Industrialization**- Developments in technology allowed machines to make consumer goods. As factories opened in cities, workers migrated from rural farms to find jobs in the city. Industrialization allowed people to have more spending money to buy non-essential items. Public education also increased as a result of the Industrial Revolution. As more people became educated and had disposable income, the middle class became more distinct from the working class.

*From your other studies, what other impacts did industrialization have?*

temperance-sympathizing political candidates rather than supporting a specific political party. Prohibition supporters believed that alcohol forced people into captivity, but that prohibition would return liberty.

**“Bone-dry Bill”**- State Prohibition in 1909 outlawed the manufacture of liquor in the state, but possession and transportation were not illegal until 1917 with the “Bone-dry Bill ”

Prohibition was implemented in Tennessee in 1909. The main cause of failure was lack of enforcement. Supporters and opponents of Prohibition agreed that laws needed to be enforced. However, officials tasked with enforcing Prohibition resisted doing so.

Liquor sales even increased in Tennessee in 1910. Tennessee politics became chaos in the years following Prohibition, but it finally calmed as politicians accepted Prohibition in 1914. Many Prohibitionists viewed national Prohibition as the only solution to illegal alcohol issues in the states.

**Eighteenth Amendment**- The amendment established Prohibition in all of the United States. The amendment was ratified in 1919, but was not implemented until 1920. The **Volstead Act** was created as a way to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment.

World War I was a major factor in implementing nationwide Prohibition. Grains used in alcohol production were needed as a food source during the war. There was also an element of patriotism to eliminating alcohol. Remaining sober meant productivity, so sober was patriotic.

When the **Eighteenth Amendment** to the United States Constitution was ratified, former Tennessee Governor Patterson exclaimed that the amendment was, “The most stupendous and far-reaching reform legislation the world has ever known...Great reforms of this character never go backward. Prohibition has come to stay.”

#### **Temperance Societies-**

Organizations dedicated to Prohibition arose across the country. There were a few that were particularly notable in Tennessee. The **Nashville and Davidson County Temperance Society** was formed in 1829, decades before the federal liquor tax and rise of illegal distilleries. The **Women’s Christian Temperance Union in Tennessee** was formed in 1874 with the focus on schoolchildren. The union encouraged educating children on the evils and dangers of alcohol. They also pressured preachers to include the topic in church sermons. The **Prohibition Party** was established in 1880, which tried to put sympathizers in political positions. In 1893, the **Anti-Saloon League of America** was founded and began publishing propaganda and literature throughout the country.

*Why were these organizations in favor of Prohibition?*

It is important to note that not everyone who voted in favor of Prohibition was entirely against alcohol. Even moderate consumers of alcohol were in support because they were against saloons. Saloons were known for violence and vice. Citizens found them obnoxious and

preventing progress.

Prohibition mainly

arose out of

progressivism, but it ultimately failed due to lack

of enforcement and the rise of **organized crime** on

a national level. Tennessee supported the **Twenty-**

**first Amendment**, which repealed the Eighteenth.

After Prohibition returned to a matter of the states,

Tennessee allowed local governments to make

decisions regarding the manufacture, sale, and

consumption of alcohol.

**Twenty-first Amendment-**

Although alcohol was prohibited in the United States from 1920-1933, people continued to purchase illegal liquor. There was little enforcement and the rise of mobs created violence and upset the economic and political structure. Prohibition had failed, so it was repealed by the Twenty-First Amendment in 1933.

*Did you know? In Tennessee today, 14 counties are "dry," 70 are "limited," and only 11 are considered "wet."*

**Organized Crime-** Mobs were formed after Prohibition to transport and sell illegal alcohol. These mobs were sometimes violent and responsible for murders. One of the most famous Prohibition-era mobsters was Al Capone.

**Timeline:**

1829- The Nashville and Davidson County Temperance Society formed

1862- Revenue Act of 1862

1874- Women's Christian Temperance Union of Tennessee founded

1877- Four Mile Law enacted for unincorporated towns

1880- Prohibition Party in Tennessee founded

1887- Four Mile Law expanded to all rural schools

1899- The Peeler Act

1900- Anti-Saloon League established in Tennessee

1901- Further expansion of the Four Mile Law

1903- The Adams Bill

1907- The Pendleton Act (Knoxville is now dry)

1909- Four Mile Law applies to all schools in the state, and alcohol production is prohibited

1917- "Bone-dry bill" officially prohibits possession and transportation of liquor. Tennessee is dry.

1919- Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution is ratified

1933- Eighteenth Amendment is repealed

**Questions (Rubric found below):**

1. What can we learn about Prohibition through music?
2. What did people write songs about during the 1920s?
3. Why did people sing about Prohibition?
4. What do people write songs about today?
5. If Prohibition was passed today, would singers write about it?
6. What types of songs would we have if music recording had been around since the beginning of human existence?
7. If you met someone who was alive during Prohibition, what would you ask them?
8. Besides music, are there other elements from daily life that will tell us how people felt about Prohibition?
9. Research and find a primary source on Prohibition. It can be a song, political cartoon, letter, diary, sermon, newspaper clipping, etc.
10. What issues did policy-makers in 1909 face? Pretend you are a member of the Tennessee General Assembly and are tasked with creating a compromise between the “wets” and “drys.” Are you able to create a piece of legislation that satisfies both sides?
11. How did the rise and implementation of Prohibition differ in rural and urban areas?
12. How are Prohibition, class, and race connected?
13. How does Prohibition relate to the women’s suffrage movement?
14. How does Prohibition relate to the Scopes Trial?
15. What were other Progressive causes?

## Sources to read:

### Primary:

Lyman Beecher's 1828 sermon, "The Nature and Occasions of Intemperance"

<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sentimnt/sneslbat.html>

Political cartoons (21) from late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Published in *Prohibition Cartoons* in 1904.

<https://prohibition.osu.edu/prohibition-party-cartoons>

Progressive Party Platform of 1912

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/progressive-platform-of-1912/>

Images from Prohibition in Tennessee. Documents with words are difficult, even impossible, to read, but still can be shown in a discussion of object learning.

<http://cdm15138.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/search/searchterm/Prohibition%20and%20the%2018th%20Amendment/field/instru/mode/exact/conn/and/order/nosort/ad/asc/cosuppress/0>

### Secondary (available on JSTOR):

Carole Stanford Bucy. "Tennessee in the Twentieth Century". *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 69 (3). Tennessee Historical Society: 262-73.

Emelie K. Peine, and Kai A. Schafft. "Moonshine, Mountaineers, and Modernity: Distilling Cultural History in the Southern Appalachian Mountains". *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 18 (1/2). Pp. 93-112. 2012.

Eric Russell Lacy. "Tennessee Teetotalism: Special Forces and the Politics of Progressivism". *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 24 (3). Tennessee Historical Society: 219-40.

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"A Sermon on Temperance". The Columbia Herald. (Columbia, Tennessee). *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. The Library of Congress. April 4, 1898.

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"Raid on Moonshiners". The Maryville Times (Maryville, Tennessee). *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. The Library of Congress. November 22, 1893.

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Foster, Gaines. *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, North Carolina. 2002.

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Lacy, Eric Russell. "Tennessee Teetotalism: Special Forces and the Politics of Progressivism". *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 24 (3). Tennessee Historical Society: 219-40.

Lamme, Margot Opdycke. "The "Public Sentiment Building Society"." *Journalism History* 29, no. 3. (Fall 2003): Communication & Mass Media Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed November 19, 2015).

Miller, Wilbur. *Revenuers and Moonshiners: Enforcing Federal Liquor Law in the Mountain South 1865-1900*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, North Carolina. 1991.

Okrent, Daniel. *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*. Scribner: New York, New York. 2010.

Peine, Emelie K., and Kai A. Schaftt. "Moonshine, Mountaineers, and Modernity: Distilling Cultural History in the Southern Appalachian Mountains." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 18, no. 1/2 (2012): 93-112.

Sinisi, Kyle. *Sacred Debts: State Civil War Claims and American Federalism*. Fordham University Press. 2003.

The Bourbon News (Millersburg, Kentucky). *Chronicling America: Historic Americans Newspapers*. The Library of Congress. March 21, 1882.

The Morristown Gazette (Morristown, Tennessee). *Chronicling America: Historic Americans Newspapers*. The Library of Congress. April 9, 1879.

The Southern Standard (McMinnville, Tennessee). *Chronicling America: Historic Americans Newspapers*. The Library of Congress. April 30, 1887.

## “Brief Summary of Prohibition in Tennessee”

The United States government implemented a liquor tax to help pay off debt resulting from the Civil War. East Tennesseans who were impoverished and unable to pay the liquor tax turned to illegal alcohol production, including distilling moonshine. While the impoverished class suffered, industrialization created an upper and middle-class in Tennessee. Educated individuals in these classes associated alcohol with preventing progress and production. Temperance organizations were created throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century to promote Prohibition. These organizations included the Nashville and Davidson County Temperance Society, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in Tennessee, the Prohibition Party, and the Anti-Saloon League of America. Even moderate consumers of alcohol were in favor of Prohibition because they were against saloons. They viewed saloons as obnoxious, violent, and hurting progress. Tennessee eventually passed state Prohibition in 1909. The state act did not solve all issues associated with alcohol, however. Tennessee politics became chaotic, liquor sales increased, and officials were unwilling to enforce the laws. Prohibitionists turned to national Prohibition as a solution to state alcohol problems.

National Prohibition became an important topic during World War I as grains were needed for food and could not be wasted on alcohol. Productivity and soberness became emblems of patriotism. The Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified in 1919 and prohibited alcohol throughout the country. The governor of Tennessee believed the amendment was one of the greatest pieces of legislation in the world. He also affirmed that Prohibition would remain. He was, however, incorrect. Prohibition was repealed in 1933 by the Twenty-first Amendment as a result of an increase in organized crime, lack of enforcement, and overall disillusionment with the ban of alcohol. Tennessee supported the amendment, repealed state Prohibition, and gave local governments the ability to regulate the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcohol within counties. Prohibition arose through progressivism, but ended due to overall failure.

## **Tennessee State Standards:**

Industrialization

Progressivism

Impacts of World War I

Temperance Movement

Eighteenth Amendment

Volstead Act

Impact of Prohibition

Successes and failures

Twenty-first Amendment

Scopes Trial

Suffrage

## **Prohibition-related objects in the East Tennessee History Museum:**

Temperance fan- Picture of Frances E. Willard with quote, "It will be like dynamite under the saloon if, just where he is, the minister will begin active work against it; just where he is, the teacher will instruct his pupils; if, just where he is, the voter will dedicate his ballot to this movement."

(Notice the exclusive use of male pronouns, even though it is a woman's quote and fan)

Temperance pledge page- Page from a Victorian Bible for family members to pledge their abstention from alcohol

### Suggested Rubric for Prohibition Questions

	Excellent	Good	Poor
1. What can we learn about Prohibition through music?	Relates to the documentary. Answer explains that people sang about what was important to them. We can learn their thoughts on Prohibition.		
2. What did people write songs about during the 1920s?	Relates to the documentary. Gives 3-5 correct topics for songs. Answers may include songs about heritage/roots, work, religion, love, disasters, race, etc.		
3. Why did people sing about Prohibition?	Gives thoughtful answer on how it was an important topic and impacted daily life.		
4. What do people write songs about today?	Love, family, religion, friends, money, history, politics, social activities, etc.		
5. If Prohibition was passed today, would singers write about it?	Answer gives a solid reason why or why not.		
6. What types of songs would we have if music recording had been around since the beginning of human existence?	Answers should reflect knowledge of world history. Answers may include songs discussing agriculture, religion, government, family, and other similar topics. Best answers will give specific points from history.		
7. If you met someone who was alive during Prohibition, what would you ask them?	Answer shows thoughtfulness. Possible questions may include: "What did your family think about Prohibition?" "Did Prohibition affect or change your life?"		

	<p>"Did you see it as a success or failure?"</p> <p>"What was your response to the Eighteenth Amendment, and later, the Twenty-first Amendment?"</p>		
8. Besides music, are there other elements from daily life that will tell us how people felt about Prohibition?	Diaries, letters, political cartoons, sermons, art, textbooks, plays, etc.		
9. Research and find a primary source on Prohibition. It can be a song, political cartoon, letter, diary, sermon, newspaper clipping, etc.	Best sources will be pre-1933. Sources should give insight into how people felt about Prohibition and their responses to the elimination of alcohol.		
10. What issues did policy-makers in 1909 face? Pretend you are a member of the Tennessee General Assembly and are tasked with creating a compromise between the "wets" and "drys." Are you able to create a piece of legislation that satisfies both sides?	<p>Policy-makers were caught between the "wets" and the "drys." The Temperance movement had considerable influence since the members were largely middle and upper class, which was a large portion of the voting base. Women did not yet have the vote, but they could still have influence, especially in matters concerning children. On the other hand, saloons and liquor manufacturers would pay politicians, which caused policy-makers to become corrupt.</p>		
11. How did the rise and implementation of Prohibition differ in rural and urban areas?	The Four Mile Law started with rural schools and slowly expanded to urban schools, moonshiners largely lived in rural areas, and		

	<p>industrialization caused a migration from rural to urban areas, which gave rise to Prohibition</p>		
<p>12. How are Prohibition, class, and race connected?</p>	<p>Upper and middle class white men and women wanted to prevent the white and black working class from consuming alcohol. They wanted the working class to have better working habits, and wanted to lower the crime rate. They also thought black persons and Native Americans were more susceptible to alcohol abuse.</p>		
<p>13. How does Prohibition relate to the women's suffrage movement?</p>	<p>Women who fought for Prohibition saw the impact they had and were inspired to keep fighting for the right to vote, using the skills and connections they had developed.</p>		
<p>14. How does Prohibition relate to the Scopes Trial?</p>	<p>After Prohibition was passed, those who fought for temperance turned their attentions to other topics of importance. One such topic was education and evolution in the classroom. The evolution debate famously resulted in the Scopes "Monkey" Trial.</p>		
<p>15. What were other Progressive causes?</p>	<p>Political reform, women's suffrage, tariff reform, elimination of child labor, and other reforms to stop corruption.</p>		