

**Dear Editor: What Do Local Editorials Reveal About Public Opinion On Prohibition?**

Summer Fellowship Lesson 2008  
Jacob Bretz  
Champaign County Historical Archives

**Lesson 2:** Prohibition Enforcement, Challenges, and Punishments

**Abstract:** In this lesson students will learn about various punishments local violators of the Volstead Act received as well as the many challenges local law enforcement officials faced when attempting to crack down on Prohibition violators. Tactics used by local police will also be studied in this lesson.

**Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings:**

- What were some average punishments for violating Prohibition laws?
- How were law enforcement officials challenged in their attempts to crack down on production, sale, and consumption of illegal liquor?
- What types of tactics did local law enforcement use to counteract the challenges they faced enforcing the prohibition of alcohol?

**Assessment:** Students will complete a Prisoner's Record Graphic Organizer Worksheet based on their examination of actual prisoner records from Champaign County Sheriff's Office during the Prohibition Era and answer questions regarding an article about the local county sheriff's attempt to infiltrate local bootlegging rings.

**Setting the Purpose:** Students will use this lesson to build critical thinking skills through the examination of actual prisoner records. The records subtly convey a wealth of information and allow numerous historical inferences to be made about the relation between law enforcement and local citizens who violated prohibition laws.

**Duration:** Two days

**Procedure:**

**Day 1**

- Pass out the Prohibition Law Warm-Up Worksheet and give students 10 minutes to complete it on their own.
- Reconvene as a class and discuss student answers with a focus on the following issues.
  - Comparisons between prohibition which was largely ignored and laws or school rules which are largely ignored.
  - What students believe to be proper punishment for various liquor violations and why?
  - Parallels between prohibition laws and similar laws today that affect society as a whole.

- After discussing student responses to the warm-up activity collect each student's paper and give credit at your discretion, I will give students a small amount of credit for completeness and visible effort on the activity.
- Let students break into partners and distribute a copy of prisoner records from the Champaign County Sherriff's Office 1924-1925 along with the Prisoner Records Worksheet and go over directions as a class.
- For the rest of the class period allow students to work on the Prisoner Records Worksheet in partners while you circulate around the class providing direction and guidance.
  - This is designed to get students to think critically on their own so be judicious in how specifically you steer students toward the answers. The questions are also designed to allow for a variety of answers.

## Day 2

Depending on the time constraints for your specific class allow students a small amount of time to finish their Prisoner Records Worksheet or begin class by going over the activity.

- After students have completed the Prisoner Records Worksheet go around collect one assignment from each partner group. The collected activity will be graded and the activity left with the partner groups will be used for students to look at while sharing answers with the class.
- Go over the Prisoner Records Worksheet as a class.
- After going over the activity reconvene as a class, write the word (infiltrate) on the board, and discuss what the word means.
- Then ask students what the word infiltrate might have to do with law enforcement, specifically law enforcement regarding Prohibition.
- Then ask students to share examples of modern day cinema such as movies and television shows where infiltration is demonstrated in regards to law enforcement.
  - You may want to come up with some examples on your own and show clips or pictures at your discretion.
    - Examples: (Jack Bauer from 24, James Bond)
- After discussing the idea of infiltration pass out the Concerning Mr. Gray Worksheet and have students answer the first questions by themselves. When students are done (2-3 minutes) ask a few of them to share their answers.
- Then distribute the *Daily Illini* Article entitled Concerning Mr. Gray and have students read the article silently and answer the questions by themselves.
- With about 5-10 minutes left in class collect the Concerning Mr. Gray Worksheet and then discuss the various challenges that local law enforcement did face when attempting to crack down on illegal liquor; use the Concerning Mr. Gray Worksheet as a guide.

