

DISCUSSION and ACTIVITY GUIDE

Bootleg: *Murder, Moonshine, and the Lawless Years of Prohibition*

by Karen Blumenthal, 2020, Roaring Brook Press

BOOK SYNOPSIS

Prohibition went into effect in 1920, hailed as the end of a host of social ills related to booze. Instead, it began a decade of lawlessness: children smuggled (and drank) illegal alcohol, citizens casually broke the law, and notorious gangsters entered the public eye. *Bootleg* looks at the rise and fall of this disastrous social experiment.

“Whether you consider ongoing problems with substance abuse or increasingly polarized political discourse, the book is startlingly relevant to modern times in many ways, marking Blumenthal as one of the more intellectually adventurous authors writing for young adults today.”

–*The Horn Book*

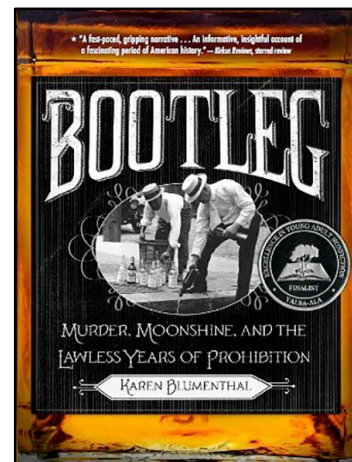
Awards and Honors for *Bootleg*

YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award, 2012 finalist
American Library Association ALSC Children's Notable List
Booklist Editor's Choice Award, 2011
Capitol Choices, 2011
CCBC Choices, 2011
Junior Library Guild selection
Kirkus Reviews Best Books for Teens 2011
School Library Journal Best Books of 2011
Texas TAYSHAS list

Karen Blumenthal is an award-winning nonfiction writer and a long-time journalist. She writes nonfiction for young people with the belief that it brings context to a complicated world. She lives in Dallas, Texas.

Other books by Karen Blumenthal:

Jane Against the World: Roe v. Wade and the Fight for Reproductive Rights
Bonnie and Clyde: The Making of a Legend
Hillary Rodham Clinton: A Woman Living History
Tommy: The Gun That Changed America
Steve Jobs: The Man Who Thought Different
Mr. Sam: How Sam Walton Built Wal-Mart and Became America's Richest Man
Let Me Play: The Story of Title IX: The Law That Changed the Future of Girls in America
Six Days in October: The Stock Market Crash of 1929



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Resources for Teachers

"Prohibition: A Case Study of Progressive Reform"

Library of Congress

"Prohibition in the Classroom"

PBS

Discussion Questions

1. Are the problems that led to Prohibition still an issue today?
2. In the hundred years since Prohibition began, how have attitudes towards alcohol changed in the U.S.?
3. What were you taught about alcohol in school? What messages did you get from family members? What else has influenced your opinion about alcohol?
4. During Prohibition, many everyday people became regular lawbreakers. Is it okay to break laws that you think are wrong? What happens in a society when people choose which rules to follow? What appropriate ways can people work to change a law?
5. Carrie Nation vandalized places that served alcohol. Is it okay to use destructive tactics when you feel strongly that something is wrong? What if the person using such tactics has limited options—for example, if they come from a group that has traditionally been denied access to power or equal rights? Can you think of tactics that might be more effective than vandalism?
6. Compare the fight to end Prohibition and the current fight to legalize marijuana. How are these two battles similar? How are they different?
7. Women played a major role in the temperance movement. Why was this the case? How did the temperance movement help pave the way for women in the U.S. to win the right to vote?
8. What are some examples of how young people's lives were affected by Prohibition?
9. Social movements and historical events often have an impact on language. Terms such as "blind pig" and "teetotaler" arose out of the temperance movement (see "A Prohibition and Temperance Glossary" in the back of *Bootleg*). Can you think of terms that emerged from other critical times, such as the counterculture of the 1960s, 9/11, or the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. Were you surprised to hear that NASCAR was born out of Prohibition? Can you think of other "accidental outcomes" that came about because of governmental decisions?

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11. Who was Richard James “Two Gun” Hart’s more famous brother? Compare/contrast the two men.
12. At different points in *Bootleg*, the author notes that if people had been willing to compromise, they might have achieved their hoped-for results. For example, if saloon owners had cleaned up saloons, Prohibition might have been avoided. Can you think of current issues that might be settled by a compromise? Why is reaching a compromise sometimes difficult?
13. Prohibition, like many other issues, inspired discussions about the appropriate role of state versus federal government. Do you believe laws about something such as alcohol should be made closer to home, or should there be one rule that governs the entire country?
14. Prohibition can be described as a “failed social experiment.” What important lessons can be learned from this failure?
15. Prohibition went into effect in 1920. One hundred years from now, what social movements or issues of our time do you think people will still be talking about?

Dig Deeper

Visit the Mob Museum to experience “[Prohibition: An Interactive History](#)”