

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

Pro/Con

**Is Lowering the Drinking Age a Good Idea?**

Source: Jessica Pauline Ogilvie, *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 2011

It's no secret that people drink alcohol before they turn 21. Stories about binge drinking on college campuses and alcohol-fueled high school parties are as easy to find as the Facebook photos that document them.

But underage drinking isn't all fun and games. Kids who don't know their limits can drink to the point of alcohol poisoning, and those who feel invincible — as many at that age do — may underestimate the danger of getting behind the wheel.

Some experts say the solution is to lower the legal drinking age to 18. More than 130 college chancellors and presidents have signed a petition initiated in 2008 in support of the idea. In Alaska, a bill was recently introduced that would allow active members of the military to drink at the age of 18, with the rationale that if they're old enough to fight and die for their country, they're old enough to have a beer.

Those opposed to the notion point to the fact that since the National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984 raised the drinking age to 21 in all 50 states, roads have become safer and kids have delayed the onset of drinking. Underage alcohol consumption is still a problem, they note, but lowering the legal age requirement would do nothing to combat it.

Yes	No
<p><b>What we're doing now to prevent underage drinking isn't working; it's time to try something else.</b></p> <p>Right now we basically have alcohol prohibition for adults ages 18 to 20, and we are getting some of the same results we got through national prohibition in the early 20th century. Fewer young adults drink, but when they do drink they tend to drink more, and I'm mostly concerned about drinking to excess.</p> <p>When you prohibit drinking legally, it pushes it into places that are uncontrolled, like fraternity houses. These are places that promote drinking games and excessive, rapid consumption of alcohol, which puts people in danger of getting alcohol poisoning, and that can be fatal.</p> <p>Research suggests that the reduction in teenage alcohol-related fatalities that some point to as a reason for keeping the drinking age at 21 is in fact a result of nothing more than those fatalities being shifted to an older age group — people ages 21, 22 or 23.</p> <p>Some also argue that the drinking age should be kept at 21 because the brain doesn't finish maturing until around age 25, but in that case we should also raise the voting age and the</p>	<p><b>Keeping the drinking age at 21 has saved lives, and there's no reason to fix what isn't broken.</b></p> <p>Binge drinking among 8th, 10th and 12th graders has been steadily going down since the drinking age was raised to 21. In 2009, it was at an all-time low for 12th graders, many of whom are 18. In colleges, we haven't made as much progress, but lowering the drinking age is not the answer.</p> <p>Back in the 1970s, a number of states lowered the drinking age from 21 to 18, and we saw an increase in alcohol consumption by youth. When it was raised again in 1984 back to 21, we saw lower consumption of alcohol, and we've kept those low rates.</p> <p>When you see younger people starting to drink, if they combine that with driving it results in a lot of fatalities. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that raising the drinking age to 21 saves about 800 lives a year. In fact, most public health groups — including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Medical Assn. — favor keeping the drinking age at 21.</p> <p>The research also shows that if a youth</p>

military age. We have to be consistent.

What we have been doing to prevent underage drinking so far hasn't worked. The DARE [Drug Abuse Resistance Education] program, for instance, which is used in about 70% of the schools in the country, is basically a scare tactic. There has not been a single scientific study of the effects of DARE that has found it to be productive. There have even been some studies that have found that the students who were exposed to DARE ended up using more frequently or more heavily.

There has been a natural experiment going on with young people and drinking for thousands of years. There are a number of groups in which young people drink alcohol — Greeks, Italians, people from southern France, Portugal, Spain. In these groups, people tend to drink at an early age, and there's no evidence that it harms them intellectually or behaviorally.

That said, I advocate a qualified drinking age for adults 18 and over. I propose issuing drinking learner permits for people of that age. The specifics about what would be allowed under the permits would be determined by lawmakers and may change as time goes on, just as we've done with driver's permits. But for example, the person could drink with permission of the parent or in the parent's home, or only in restaurants or bars. Then, if they didn't get into trouble, certain of these restrictions would be dropped. They would have to complete a very specified alcohol education course and have no alcohol-related offenses.

The idea would be to prepare them to be safe drinkers and to help them learn about drinking appropriately if they choose to drink.

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starts drinking alcohol before age 14, their chances of becoming addicted or having an alcohol-related crash or getting into a fight increases, so it's very critical to delay that onset of drinking. Kids still experiment, but the age-21 limit does delay the onset of drinking somewhat. When you start drinking, you have to look 21. A 16-year-old or a 14-year-old doesn't look 21, but they may look 18.

There is also a myth that because the drinking age is lower in Europe, and because in their culture they bring youth up to drink alcohol, that there is a lesser problem. But if you look at the surveys that have been done, most European countries have a much higher rate of binge drinking for 15- and 16-year-olds than we do in the U.S.

I have no problem with education about alcohol, with teaching about moderation or with handing out a drinking license, but I don't think it should be tied to the drinking age.

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WN ideas:

- Which argument do you side with? Explain.
- Explain why you reject the counter-argument.