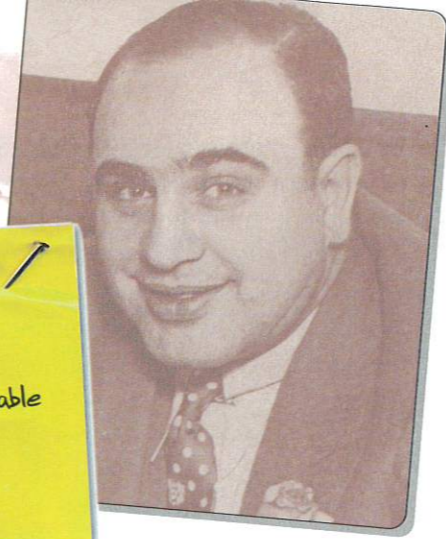


The Al Capone story

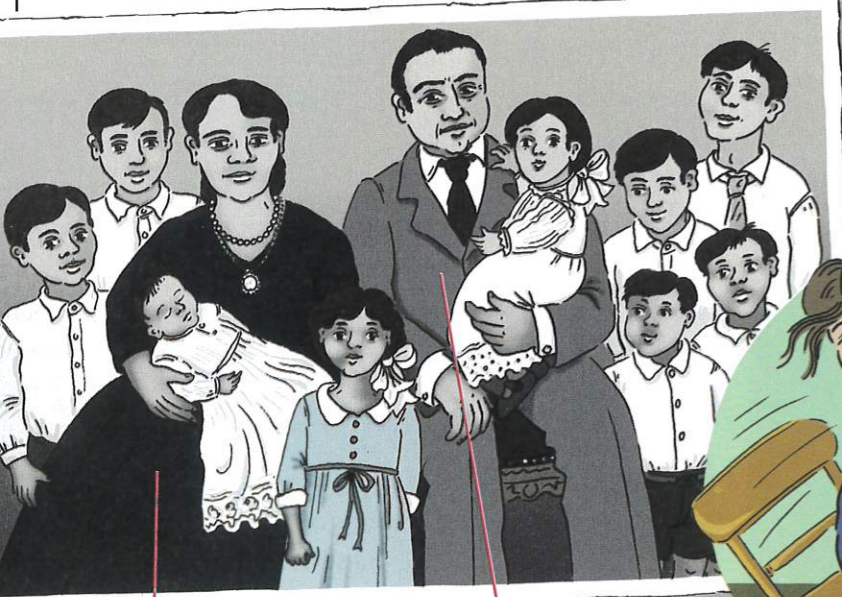


After studying the next four pages, you should be able to identify key events in the life of one of the Prohibition era's most infamous gangsters.



Alphonse 'Scarface' Capone is the most infamous gangster of all time. At the height of his power, he was making \$2 million a week through illegal gambling dens, brothels, bootlegging and racketeering. He ran his multi-million dollar empire like a business – and dealt viciously with anyone who dared to get in his way! But how much do you know about 'Big Al'? What sort of family did he come from? How did he get involved in crime? Why did he have so much power? And for what reasons was he eventually sent to jail?

1 Alphonse Capone was born on 17 January 1899 in Brooklyn, New York.



Mum was very religious Dad was a hairdresser

Al's mum and dad were immigrants from Italy. He was the fourth of nine children. Most of his brothers, like Al, would end up being criminals!

2 Al didn't do well at school. At 14, he was told to repeat a year. He was later excluded for hitting a female teacher.



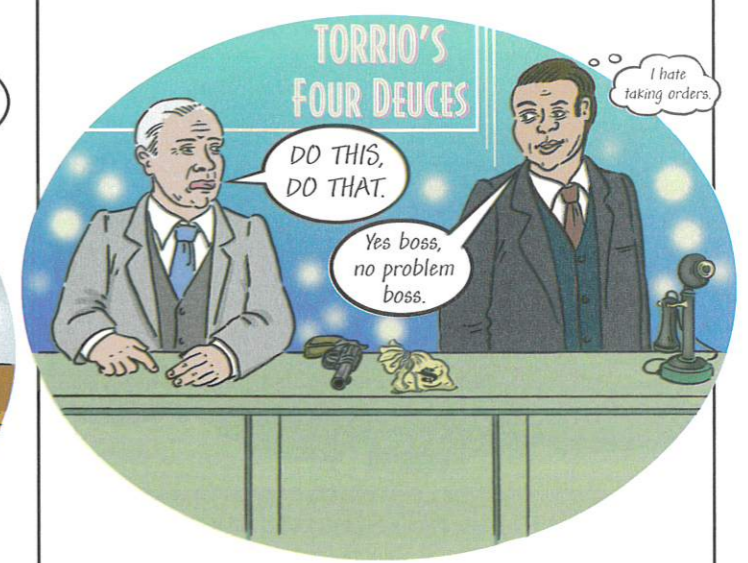
Al had a number of jobs – he worked in a sweet shop, a bowling alley and in a book factory. He also joined a young street gang called the 'Five Pointers' who terrorised his neighbourhood.

3 At 18, Al got a job as a barman and bouncer. One night he insulted a local tough guy's sister and he slashed Al across the face. Al hated his scar (and his nickname) and often tried to cover it up with make-up. If anyone asked, he said he did it fighting in the war.



Al soon started to get a reputation for being vicious. In 1919, he beat a policeman to death – but nothing was proven.

4 Al left New York in 1919 and moved to Chicago, America's second largest city. A gang boss called Terrible Johnny Torrio had offered him a job.



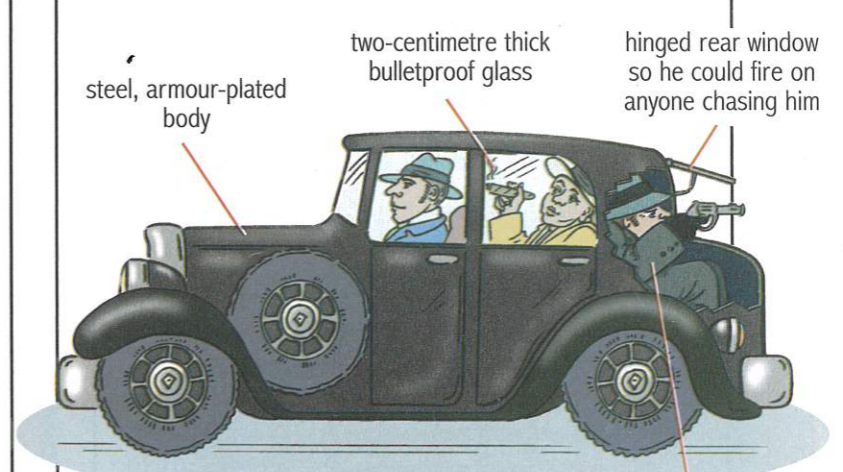
Torrio and Al soon took over a few of the other gangs. Chicago was perfect for criminals because many policemen, judges and even the mayor took bribes to 'look the other way'.

5 Torrio and Al were soon making a fortune from bootlegging, protection rackets, fixing horse and dog races and organising prostitutes. Al liked to show off with his money and enjoyed being photographed.



Al was arrested from time to time but no witnesses could ever be found!

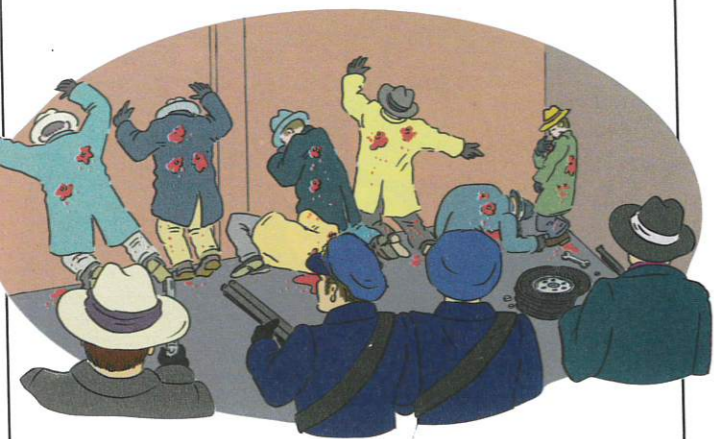
6 In 1925, Torrio retired (he kept being shot). Al took over, aged 26. Other rival gangs kept trying to kill him so he surrounded himself with bodyguards and drove a bulletproof car capable of 110mph (the average car did 40mph).



weighed 8000lbs (as heavy as three cars today)

By 1927, Al had 700 men working for him. One by one, his rivals were 'rubbed out' – 227 gangsters killed in four years.

7 On 14 February 1929, Capone attempted to get rid of his biggest rival – ‘Bugs’ Moran and his North Side Gang.



Dressed as policemen, two of Al's hit men shot dead seven members of the gang in the St Valentine's Day Massacre. Moran survived but soon retired.

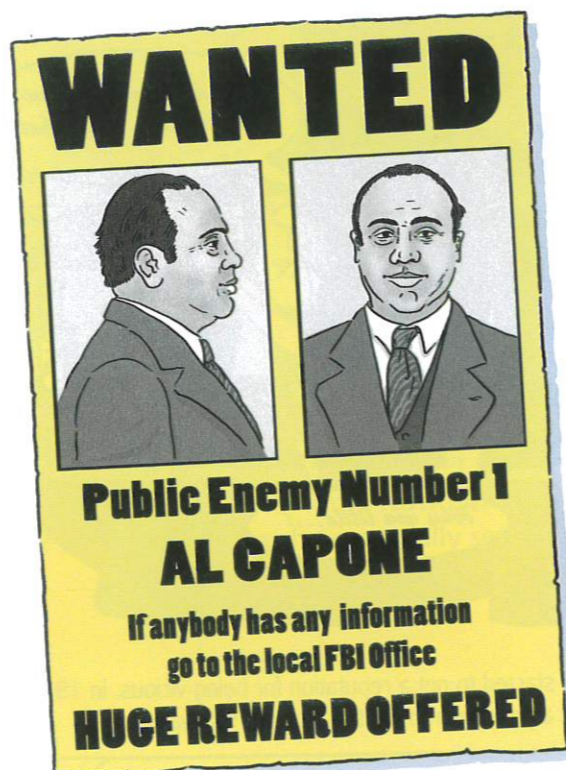
9 In 1931, Al was sentenced to 11 years. He was released in 1939, suffering from a brain disease, probably caused by a sexually transmitted infection he picked up from a prostitute in the 1920s.

ALCATRAZ PRISON



Al never went back to his gangster lifestyle and retired to Florida. He was so poorly he spent some of his final days fishing in his swimming pool. He died on 25 January 1947 from a massive heart attack.

8 By 1930, Capone had made such a bad name for himself that government FBI agents in Washington vowed to jail him. He was declared Public Enemy Number 1!



No people could ever be found who witnessed any of Al's crimes but he was eventually jailed for not paying his taxes!

Source A A statement made by Al Capone. Lake Shore Drive was a rich area of Chicago.

"I make my money by supplying a popular demand. If I break the law, my customers – who are some of the best people in Chicago – are as guilty as I am. The only difference between us is that I sell and they buy ... I call myself a businessman. When I sell liquor, they call it bootlegging – when my customers serve it on a silver tray on Lake Shore Drive, they call it hospitality."

Source B Al Capone in March 1930 on the front cover of *Time*, one of America's biggest-selling weekly magazines. If you look carefully, you can see his scar. Capone achieved celebrity status in America – he was cheered when seen out in public, he opened jazz clubs, organised expensive parties and went to the best sports events. Everyone knew of his activities but it was impossible to convict him for any brutal crimes because of his control of the police.



FACT Great shot Al!

Al Capone was shot only once ... he shot himself in the leg by mistake! When playing golf, he always kept a gun in his golf bag. Once, when picking up his bag, his gun went off accidentally.

Source C Milt Hinton in *Memories of Al Capone*.

"People in Chicago back then looked on Al Capone as a Robin Hood – he helped the poor. My uncle worked for him. He had a dry cleaning place and Capone used it as a headquarters for selling alcohol ... Capone sold my uncle the alcohol for \$12 a gallon and we'd sell it to people for \$18 a gallon."

WISE UP WORD

- infamous

WORK

- Look at **Source A**.
 - What was the 'popular demand' that Capone supplied?
 - Capone called himself a 'businessman'. Can you think of any other words to describe him?
 - What point is Capone making in this statement?
- Look at **Source B**.
 - Are you surprised to see Al Capone on the front cover of a leading magazine? Give reasons for your answer.
 - What does it tell you about the way in which Capone was regarded by many Americans in the 1920s?
- Imagine you are a reporter for *Time* magazine in 1930. You have been given the job of interviewing 'Big Al' for the March 1930 edition of this top-selling magazine. Capone has stated that he will only answer ten questions.
 - Work out your ten questions (and remember not to offend him!).
 - Work with a partner (or on your own if you prefer) to write out the sort of answers you think Capone may have given.