



Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 9, WEBISODE 3

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



Segment Overview

The discovery of gold at John Sutter's mill in 1848 unleashed an epidemic of gold fever that brought hundreds of thousands of immigrants to California. One writer noted, "The excitement produced was intense...The blacksmith dropped his hammer, the carpenter his plane, the mason his trowel, the farmer his sickle, the baker his loaf, and the tapster his bottle. All were off for the mines..." By 1849, news of the gold discovery had circled the globe, bringing a stampede from China, Japan, Ireland, Germany, France, and other nations. In 1848, the non-Indian population of California stood at 13,000; by 1854, after the largest mass migration in American history, the state claimed 300,000 residents. In 1849 alone, more than 65,000 new migrants arrived.

Between 1849 and 1855, miners harvested several hundred million dollars in gold. The zeal and optimism of new migrants was quickly tempered by the harsh realities of frontier life in general and gold prospecting in particular: sickness, cholera, sunburn, overpriced supplies, fleas, and the grueling, repetitive hard labor of prospecting. While some men did find their fortunes in gold, many more earned barely enough to keep themselves alive. Some entrepreneurs struck gold not in prospecting but in providing gold seekers with supplies, transportation, and lodging.

Teacher Directions

1. Students, in small teams, discuss the following questions.
 - How did people respond to the news of gold in California?
 - What misconceptions did people have about the gold?
 - How did the discovery of gold change California?
2. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the questions.

Upon hearing of the discovery of gold, many people left their jobs and families for California. Some people expected that they would quickly and easily find gold, and return home as wealthy as kings. While a few men became rich, many more struggled to survive. California's population exploded as people came from all over the world; while the pre-gold rush population stood at only 13,000 people, by 1854, some 300,000 people called the state home. California became an even more multicultural state with native Americans, Mexicans, Anglos, Black Americans, and immigrants from many European and Asian nations.



Let's Discuss



History Sleuth



What do you Think?



Moving Toward Freedom

Teacher Directions

1. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Dame Shirley's Gold Rush Tale*. Working with teammates, students read this first-person account of the gold rush.
2. Students research additional information about the gold rush to create a camp newspaper describing a typical week in the mining camp.

Teacher Directions

Students respond to the following writing prompt.

- How would you have responded to news of gold in California? Would you have left your school or job to pan for gold? Or would you have gone to California to establish a business catering to miners?

Teacher Directions

1. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Chinese and African Americans in the Gold Rush*. Working with teammates, students read the information and answer the following questions.
 - What obstacles did Chinese immigrants and African Americans face in California during the gold rush?
 - What opportunities did California offer?
 - How would moving to California be a move toward freedom for these groups?
2. Students brainstorm the pros and cons of going to California with teammates.
3. Students hold mini-debates in their teams to discuss whether they should immigrate to California during the gold rush. One student role plays an African American in favor of seeking gold in California; another roleplays an African American against heading west; one student role plays a Chinese planning to immigrate; another represents a Chinese who does not believe he should go to California.



Connections

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Art/Photography — Students find examples of political cartoons, period photographs, and etchings from the gold rush and create an exhibit.

Geography — Gold seekers could choose one of three routes to travel from the east coast to California: a difficult overland trek; a long sea passage around Cape Horn, or a ship to Panama followed by a trip across the Isthmus to board another ship to California. Students research the length and dangers of each route.

Geography — Students locate the Klondike of Alaska, which drew thousands of prospectors after the discovery of gold in 1896.

Music — Students listen to traditional folk songs inspired by the gold rush, such as “The Days of Forty-nine” or “Clementine.”

Language Arts — Gold prospectors who flocked to California were sometimes called *Argonauts* after the Greek myth *Jason and the Argonauts*. Students read this myth and compare and contrast the two quests.

Language Arts — Students read *Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep, the story of Chinese immigrants in California in the late 1800s. Partner Discussion Guides are available from the Johns Hopkins University Talent Development Program. (Another juvenile historical fiction by Yep, *Dragon’s Gate*, tells the story of several Chinese immigrants who work on the Transcontinental Railroad.)

Science — Students research the mining industry in the American southwest. What minerals are extracted? What methods are used? What geologic events produce these minerals?

Dame Shirley's Gold Rush Tale

Would you have enjoyed being part of the gold rush? By reading the letters of a woman who experienced it first-hand, you can! Louise Clappe wrote twenty-three letters from two mining camps to her sister in Massachusetts. Because they were published under the pen name "Dame Shirley," they are called The Shirley Letters. Mrs. Clappe described primitive living conditions, the rugged beauty of the region, the struggles of the miners, and the occasional violence in the camps.

One can easily imagine, dear M., the look of large wonder which gleams from your astonished eyes ... as you exclaim, "What, in the name of all that is restless, has sent 'Dame Shirley' to Rich Bar? How did such a shivering, frail, home-loving little thistle ever float safely to that far-away spot, and take root so kindly, as it evidently has, in that barbarous soil?"

...(Rich) Bar forms a part of a mining settlement situated on the East Branch of the North Fork of Feather River, "away off up in the mountains," ...at almost the highest point where, as yet, gold has been discovered...

You already know that F. (*her husband*), after suffering for an entire year with fever and ague...was advised...to go into the mountains. A friend...suggested Rich Bar...not only on account of the extreme purity of the atmosphere, but because there were more than a thousand people there already, and but one physician, and as his strength increased, he might find in that vicinity a favorable opening for the practice of his profession, which, as the health of his purse was almost as feeble as that of his body, was not a bad idea...

...Enter (our log cabin) my dear; you are perfectly welcome; besides, we could not keep you out if we would, as there is not even a latch on the canvas door, though we really intend in a day or two to have a hook put on to it.

The room ...is about twenty feet square. It is lined over the top with white cotton cloth, the breadths of which being sewed together only in spots stretch apart in many places, giving one a bird's-eye view of the shingles above...

The fireplace is built of stones and mud, the chimney finished off with alternate layers of rough sticks and this same rude mortar.....a hole two feet square in one side of the room (is) a window, although it is as yet guiltless of glass...

I must mention that the floor is so uneven that no article of furniture gifted with four legs pretends to stand upon but three at once, so that the chairs, tables, etc., remind you constantly of a dog with a sore foot.

...I have given you...a description of my new home. How would you like to winter in such an abode? In a place where there are no newspapers, no churches, lectures, concerts, or theatres; no fresh books, no shopping, calling, nor gossiping little tea-drinkings; no parties, no balls, no picnics... no charades, no latest fashions, no daily mail (we have an express once a month), no promenades, no rides nor drives; no vegetables but potatoes and onions, no milk, no eggs, no *nothing*? Now I expect to be very happy here. This strange, odd life fascinates me.

...I have become a *mineress*; that is, if the having washed a pan of dirt with my own hands, and procured therefrom \$3.25 in gold dust (which I shall inclose in this letter), will entitle me to the name. I can truly say...that “I am sorry I learned the trade”; for I wet my feet, tore my dress, spoilt a pair of new gloves, nearly froze my fingers, got an awful headache, took cold, and lost a valuable breastpin in this my labor of love...

...I myself thought (now don't laugh) that one had but to saunter gracefully along romantic streamlets, on sunny afternoons, with a parasol and white kid gloves, perhaps, and to stop now and then to admire the scenery, and carelessly rinse out a small panfull of yellow sand...in order to fill one's workbag with the most beautiful and rare specimens of the precious mineral. Since I have been here, I have discovered my mistake...To be sure, there are now and then “lucky strikes”; such, for instance...where a person took out of a single basinful of soil \$256. But such luck is as rare as the winning of a \$100,000 prize in a lottery. We are acquainted with many here whose gains have *never* amounted to much more than “wages”; that is, from six to eight dollars a day...

...Those who worked in these mines during the fall of 1850 were extremely fortunate, but, alas! the monte fiend* ruined hundreds. Shall I tell you the fate of the most successful of these gold-hunters? From poor men, they found themselves, at the end of a few weeks, absolutely rich. Elated with their good fortune, seized with a mania for monte, in less than a year these unfortunates, so lately respectable and intelligent, became a pair of drunken gamblers. One of them, at this present writing, works for five dollars a day, and boards himself out of that; the other actually suffers for the necessaries of life, — a too common result of scenes in the mines....

*desire for money

Chinese and African Americans in the Gold Rush

People from around the globe rushed to California in 1848. They came from China, Mexico, South America, Sweden, Ireland, Germany, and other lands. What caused this mad dash? Gold—and the promise of a better life. Free African Americans also joined the exodus west, hoping to find not only gold but greater freedom.



California Department of Conservation

When news of the gold rush reached China, in 1848, thousands of Chinese headed to California. They wanted to escape the civil war, floods, droughts, and typhoons they faced back home. They thought they would get rich in “Gold Mountain,” as California was known. Before the gold rush, only a few Chinese people lived in California, but by 1852, over twenty thousand Chinese immigrants had settled there.

The Chinese immigrants hoped for jobs and riches, but they faced many problems. They worked long hours for low pay. Some white miners thought the Chinese should be sent back to China. The Chinese miners (along with Mexican American miners) had to pay a special tax. Some places wouldn’t hire Chinese workers or threw them out. They were not allowed to testify in court. But the Chinese stayed, and started organizations and unions. They also started newspapers and public schools.



California Department of Conservation

Many African Americans came to California as well. They hoped to find freedom and good jobs. Most were free men and women from eastern cities. Some free African Americans had fled the east to escape the Fugitive Slave Law. This law punished anyone who helped runaway slaves. Even free men and women were afraid that a slave catcher would claim they were runaways and sell them south. Some free blacks came to California after reading success stories in Frederick Douglass’ newspaper, *North Star*. Others came as slaves and bought their freedom

with gold they panned from streams or dug out of mines. In the first three years of the gold rush, over a thousand African Americans came to California. About half of the three hundred and fifty African Americans in Sacramento, California, were free. Some miners formed all-black settlements such as Negro Bar and Negro Slide. Like other minorities in California, African Americans could not vote, testify in court, or attend public schools. In spite of this, they worked hard. They used their gold to free their families, start churches, schools, libraries and newspapers, and work for greater legal rights.

Mifflin Gibbs came to California in 1850 to work as a carpenter. After white carpenters refused to work with him because of his race, he started a business shining shoes and boots. A few years later, he and Peter Lester, another African American, opened a store. They worked hard and became rich. They later moved to Canada because California law did not protect their rights. Gibbs returned to the United States, became a lawyer, and was appointed an ambassador. Both men worked in the antislavery movement and to protect the rights of African Americans.