

DISCOVER AMERICA

Teacher Guide



Striking Gold: The Impact and Legacy of the American Gold Rush

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Key Themes

- Dreams of Prosperity
- Persistence and Perseverance
- The Journey West
- Economic Boom and Bust
- Global Impact

Core Values

- Community
- Life
- Liberty



Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- Recognize gold and understand why it was so valuable to people during the Gold Rush.
- Explain what life was like for miners during the Gold Rush, including the tools they used and the challenges they faced.

Key Terms

- 0 1 **49ers:** the nickname for those who flocked to northern California in 1849 hoping to take advantage of the Gold Rush.
- 0 2 **gold miner:** someone who digs or sifts through dirt to find gold, a shiny and valuable metal.
- 0 3 **Gold Rush:** a time period when many people moved to California between 1848 and 1855, seeking their fortunes by searching for gold.
- 0 4 **sawmill:** a place where big logs are cut into boards and planks for building things.
- 0 5 **waterwheel:** a type of device that takes advantage of flowing or falling water to generate power by using a set of paddles mounted around a wheel.

Introduction

TELL Students

Today, we are going to go on a big, exciting journey. But guess what? We are not taking a car, a bus, or even an airplane. We are going to use our imaginations!

ASK Students

Are you ready?

TELL Students

A long time ago, people heard that there was something very special hiding in the rivers of California.

ASK Students

Do you know what it was?

TELL Students

That is right! It was gold! Gold is shiny and valuable, and people thought if they found it, they could buy a lot of nice things. So, they packed up their things and went on a long trip to California to try to find it. But finding gold was not easy. They had to dig, sift through sand, and sometimes even get a little bit dirty. Does that sound fun to you? Now, let's pretend we are gold miners! A **gold miner** is someone who digs or sifts through dirt to find gold, a shiny and valuable metal. **[Reference Gold Miner Image]** We are going to go on our own Gold Rush adventure right here in our classroom. But first, we need to get ready. First, we need to pack our bags. Everyone, pretend to put on your backpack.

ASK Students

What should we bring?

TELL Students

Maybe we should pack a shovel, a pan, and some food. Let's pretend to pack them all in our backpack! [Mimic packing and have the students do the same.] Now, let's pretend to walk to California. It is a long way! Let's march, march, march!

Introduction

TELL Students (continued)

[Lead the students in a short walk around the classroom.] We made it to California! Now it is time to find some gold. Let's pick up our pans and start looking in the river. Can you pretend to scoop up some sand and shake your pan? [Show students how to mimic panning for gold by scooping and shaking an imaginary pan.] Look! I see something shiny!

ASK Students

Did you find some gold?

TELL Students

Hold up your gold for everyone to see! [Encourage students to pretend they found gold and show it to their classmates.] Wow! We found so much gold! But remember, even though finding gold was exciting, it was also a lot of hard work. People who joined the Gold Rush had to be very strong and brave, just like all of you today. The **Gold Rush** was a time period when many people moved to California between 1848 and 1855, seeking their own fortunes by searching for gold. Now, let's sit in a circle and talk about what we found.

ASK Students

Was it fun to pretend to look for gold? What do you think people did with the gold they found? [Allow a brief discussion and encourage the students to share their thoughts.]

TELL Students

Great job, everyone! You are now official gold miners like John Sutter! **[Reference John Sutter Image]** In 1834, John Sutter left Switzerland and moved to the United States. He had big dreams! By 1839, he found his way to California and decided to become a Mexican citizen to get a large piece of land. He had a vision of turning this land into a new settlement he wanted to call Nueva Helvetia, which means "New Switzerland."

ASK Students

Why do you think John Sutter named his new settlement "Nueva Helvetia," which means "New Switzerland"? What does this tell us about how he felt about his new land and his homeland?

Introduction

TELL Students 📷 🔑

John Sutter named his new settlement "Nueva Helvetia," or "New Switzerland," because he wanted to bring a piece of his homeland, Switzerland, to his new life in California. **[Reference California Image]** It also suggests that he saw his new land as a place of opportunity, where he could start fresh and build a good life. To help build his dream, Sutter hired a carpenter named James Marshall to build a sawmill in Coloma, along the south fork of the American River.

[Reference James Marshall Image] A **sawmill** is a place where big logs are cut into boards and planks for building things. They finished building the sawmill in January 1848, but they needed more water power to run it, so they started to deepen the stream. **[Reference Sawmill Image]**

ASK Students

Why do you think John Sutter and James Marshall needed to deepen the stream to run the sawmill, and what might have happened if they didn't make the stream deeper?

TELL Students 📷 🔑

John Sutter and James Marshall needed to deepen the stream to run the sawmill because a deeper stream could provide more water flow. This increased flow was needed to get enough water power to operate the sawmill's machinery. Sawmills require a lot of power to cut through large logs, and in the 1840s, this power typically came from waterwheels. A waterwheel needs a strong, steady flow of water to turn efficiently and consistently. A **waterwheel** is a type of device that takes advantage of flowing or falling water to generate power by using a set of paddles mounted around a wheel. **[Reference Waterwheel Image]** On January 24, Marshall saw something shiny in the river. It sparkled in the sunlight and caught his eye — little did he know, this discovery was about to start a huge event in history! Let's watch another episode of Star Spangled Adventures to learn more!

WATCH ▶

Star Spangled Adventures Cartoon Ep. 33: The Gold Rush



Lesson

TELL Students

One day, James Marshall found shiny gold while building a sawmill for John Sutter. **[Reference Marshall/Sutter Image]** They tried to keep this a secret because they knew it was a very big discovery that could make them a lot of money. But soon, people started talking about the gold, and the news spread everywhere!

ASK Students

Why do you think James Marshall and John Sutter initially wanted to keep the discovery of gold a secret?

TELL Students

James Marshall and John Sutter wanted to keep the discovery of gold a secret because they knew it was a very big find that could make them a lot of money. If the news about the gold spread, they feared that many people would rush to the area to look for gold. This could cause chaos, make it hard for them to control the land, and potentially prevent them from collecting as much gold for themselves. By keeping it a secret, they hoped to have more time to gather as much gold as possible before others came looking for it. The first people to hear about the gold were in San Francisco. At first, not many believed the news until a man named Sam Brannan showed everyone real gold from the mill. **[Reference Brannan Image]** That summer, almost everyone in San Francisco, and soon after, a lot of people in California, left their homes and jobs to find gold. Even the local newspaper stopped printing because everyone went to look for gold!

ASK Students

What do you think would have happened if Sam Brannan had not shown the gold to the people in San Francisco? How might that have changed the way news of the gold spread?

TELL Students

If Sam Brannan had not shown the gold to the people in San Francisco, it is likely that many people would have continued to doubt the truth of the gold discovery. This would have given Marshall and Sutter more time to collect gold quietly, but eventually, the news would likely have spread, perhaps through other channels or after more people independently discovered gold.

Lesson

TELL Students (continued)

Back in those days, there were not any phones or computers, so news traveled very slowly. People from nearby places like Oregon and Mexico, and even as far as China and Peru, heard about the gold and came to California to see if they could find some too. **[Reference Map of China/Peru Showing Distance to California Image]**

ASK Students

Why do you think people from places like China and Peru came a long way to California to find gold?

TELL Students

People from places like China and Peru came all the way to California to find gold because they heard stories about how much gold was there and thought they could find some too. They wanted to get gold because it was very valuable and could help them buy things they needed or wanted. Even though it was a long and hard journey, the chance to find gold and maybe become rich was a big reason for them to come. When they finally arrived in California, they tried their best to find gold, hoping it would change their lives for the better. Then, President James K. Polk talked about gold in a speech in December 1848. **[Reference James Polk Image]** He said that there was so much gold in California that it was hard to believe! He had seen reports from trusted people who saw the gold with their own eyes.

ASK Students

Why do you think people traveled to California to look for gold?

TELL Students

People traveled all the way to California because they heard exciting stories about a lot of gold being there. They thought that if they could find some gold, they could become rich and buy things they needed or wanted, like food, clothes, or even a new house. The journey was very long and hard, but the chance to find gold and improve their lives was worth it to them. **[Reference Travelers Image]** They hoped that finding gold would help them and their families have a better future.

Lesson

TELL Students (continued)

In the spring of 1849, thousands of people, mostly men, traveled across mountains and oceans to California to try to get rich quickly. These gold seekers were called "49ers." **[Reference 49ers Image]** They left everything behind and took big risks, hoping to find gold. The "49ers" is the nickname for those who flocked to northern California in 1849 hoping to take advantage of the Gold Rush.

ASK Students

Why did people want to find gold in California?

TELL Students 📷

People wanted to find gold in California because they heard it could make them very rich. They imagined using the gold to buy things they needed or wanted, like food, clothes, or even houses. **[Reference Gold Image]** The stories of a lot of gold in California made them excited and hopeful, so they traveled long distances, even across mountains and oceans, to try and find this treasure. They were called "49ers" because so many of them came in the year 1849. These adventurers were willing to take big risks and leave everything behind because they believed finding gold could give them a much better life. Thanks to the Gold Rush, California's population grew very quickly. Between 1849 and 1855, about 300,000 people from all around the world came to California. It was an exciting time, but it was also hard for many people. Let's watch two exciting Learn More with Liberty videos to learn more!

WATCH 🎬

Learn More With Liberty: The Science of Gold: What Makes Gold So Valuable?

Learn More With Liberty: The Discovery of Gold at Sutter's Mill





Gold Panning Adventure

Objective

Introduce kindergarten students to the concept of gold panning in a fun and hands-on way.

Materials Needed

- A large, shallow container (like a plastic bin)
- Sand (to simulate dirt)
- Gold-colored paper or plastic "gold nuggets"
- Small scoops or shovels
- Colanders or strainers
- Water

Preparation

- Before the activity, hide the gold nuggets in the sand within the container.
- Set up a station with the sand and nuggets, scoops, colanders, and water.

Introduction

- Briefly explain that in the past, people looked for gold in rivers and streams. They used special tools to find the gold hidden in the sand and dirt.

Activity

- Let each student take turns scooping sand from the container and placing it into the colander.
- Have them rinse the sand with water, shaking the colander gently. The "gold nuggets" will be left behind in the colander.

Exploration

- After finding the gold nuggets, let the students examine them and discuss what they found.
- Talk about how gold panning was an important part of the Gold Rush and what people hoped to find.



Discussion

- Ask students how they felt about finding the gold and if they enjoyed the activity. Relate their excitement to how people felt during the Gold Rush.

Extension

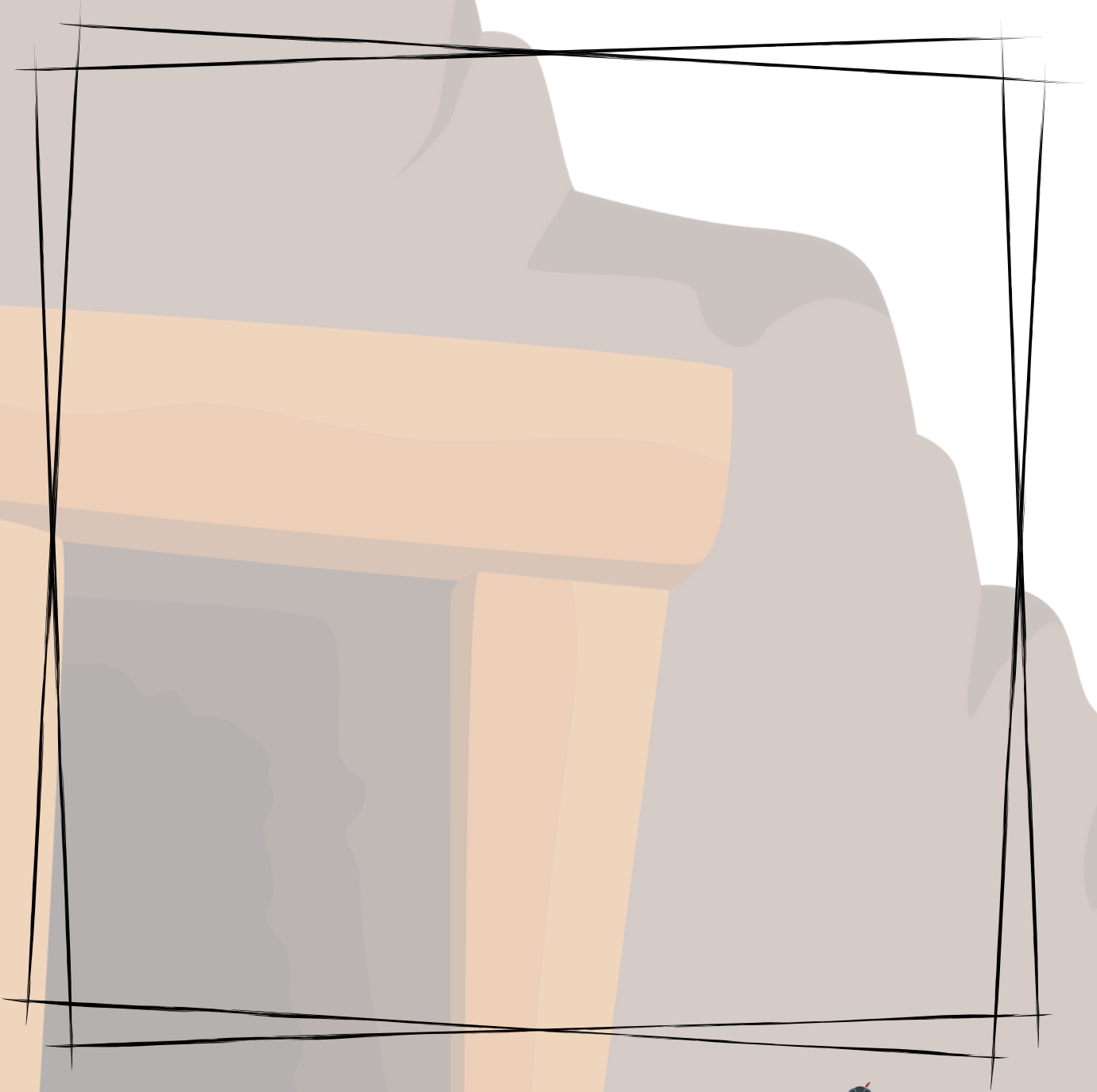
- Provide gold-colored stickers or small gold-foiled pieces for the students to decorate a “Gold Rush Certificate” as a keepsake of their adventure.

This activity allows students to experience a simplified version of gold panning, which helps them understand the excitement and hard work of the Gold Rush era.

Gold Rush Adventure

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Instructions: Draw a picture of a gold miner searching for gold. What tools do you see? What does the miner find?



Resources

- <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/guadalupe-hidalgo>
- <https://www.loc.gov/collections/california-first-person-narratives/articles-and-essays/early-california-history/discovery-of-gold/>
- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldrush-california/>
- https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1099
- <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldrush-california/>
- <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/annual-message-to-congress-5/>
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/how-the-gold-rush-transformed-california>
- <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/docs/CirGuides/Ridge-Crime-Gold-Rush.pdf>
- <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/california-gold-rush/sources/1912>
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-gilded-age/american-west/a/the-gold-rush>
- <https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/gold-rush-of-1849>
- <https://www.library.ca.gov/california-history/gold-rush/legacy/>

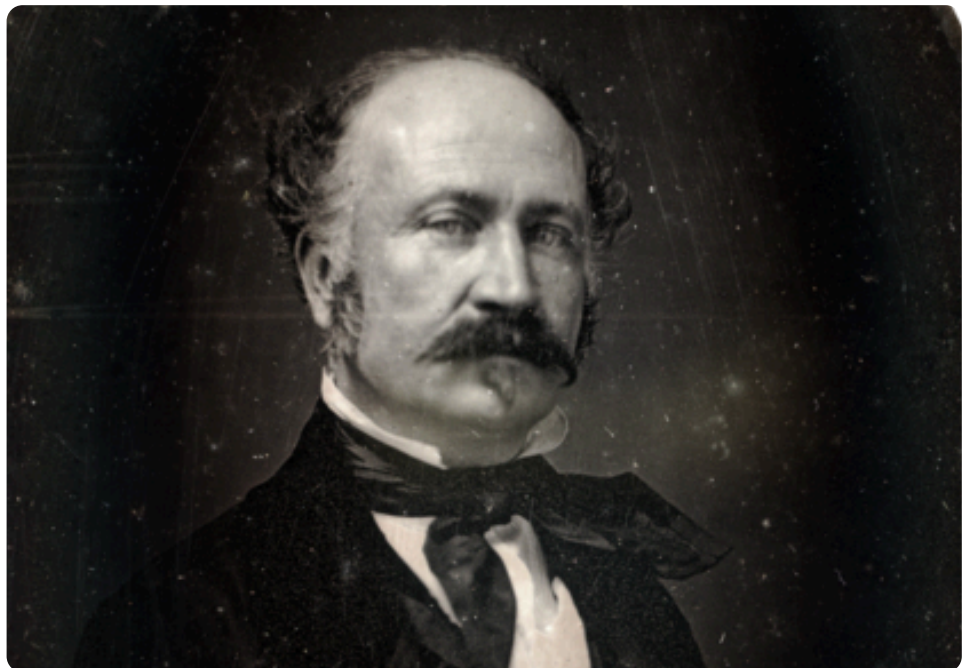
Images

Gold Miner



Credit: Canva Pro.

John Sutter



Credit: Wikipedia.

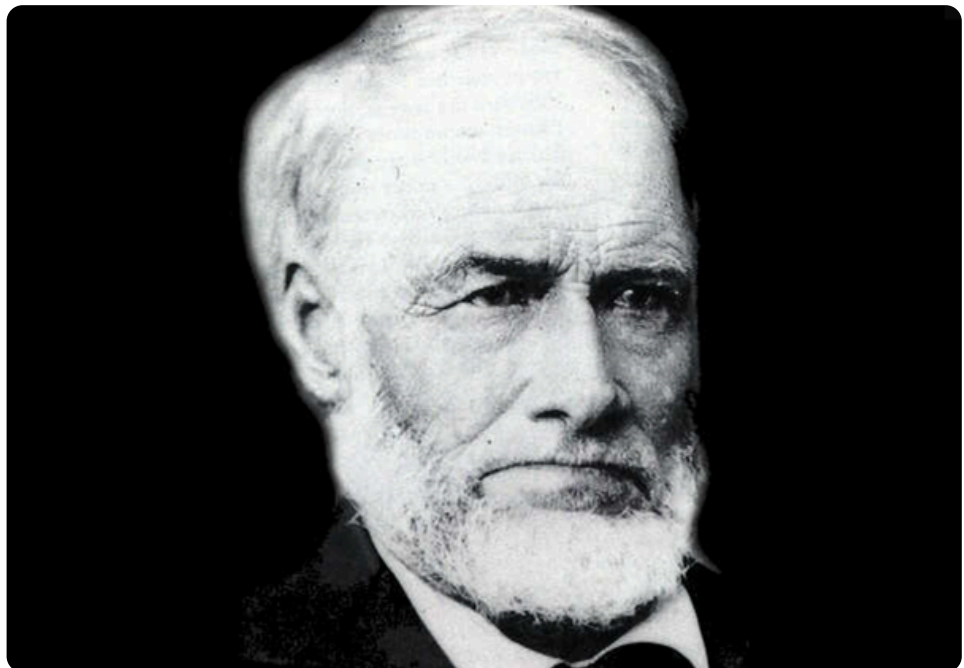
Images

California



Credit: Britannica.

James Marshall



Credit: Wikipedia.

Images

Sawmill



Credit: Canva Pro.

Waterwheel



Credit: Canva Pro.

Images

Sam Brannan



Credit: Canva Pro.

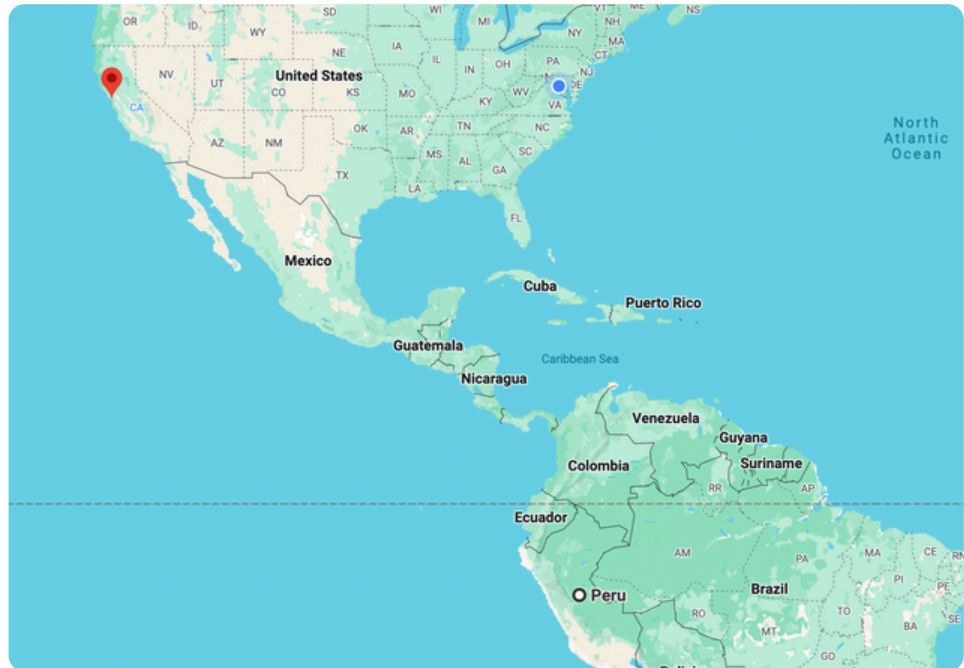
Map of China



Credit: Google Maps.

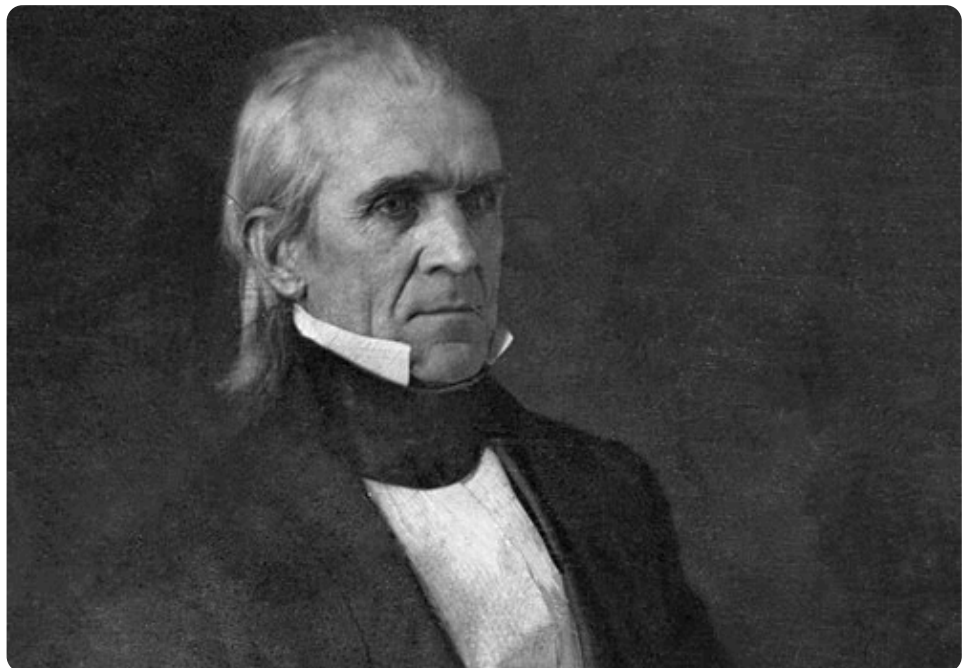
Images

Map of Peru



Credit: Canva Pro.

James Polk



Credit: Wikipedia

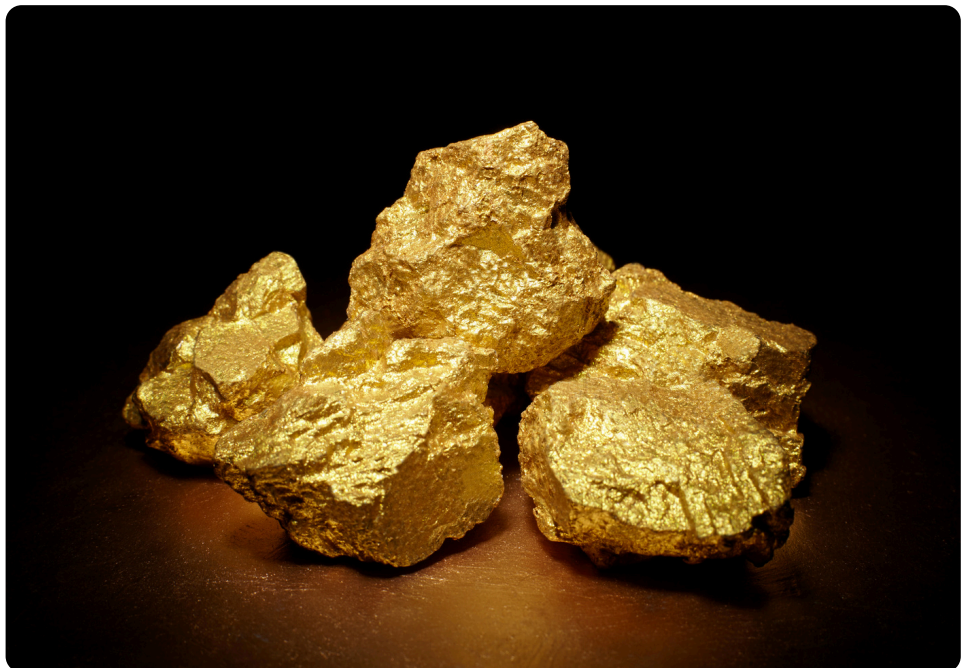
Images

49ers



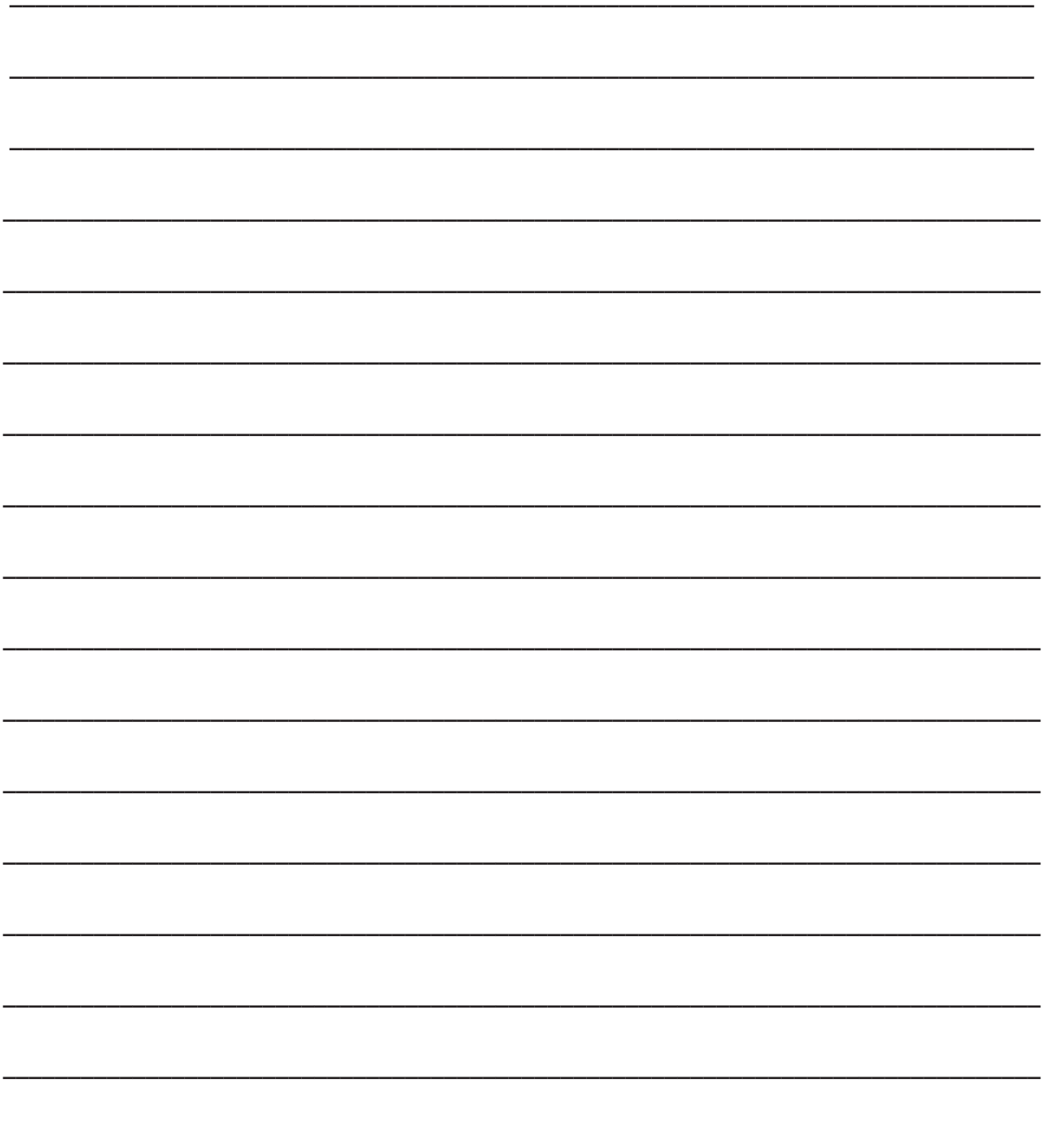
Credit: Canva Pro.

Gold



Credit: Canva Pro

Notes

A series of 18 horizontal lines for writing notes, arranged in a single column.