Third Grade

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.
- Identify who the "49ers" were and why they traveled so far to reach California.
- Explain what life was like for miners during the Gold Rush, including the tools they used and the challenges they faced.
- Identify how the Gold Rush changed California, such as the rapid growth of towns.
- Discuss basic economic principles by learning how the demand for resources like gold influenced people's decisions to move and set up businesses.
- Examine the diverse effects of the Gold Rush on various groups.

Key Terms

01 **49ers:** the nickname for those who flocked to northern California in 1849 hoping to take advantage of the Gold Rush.

02 **gold miner:** someone who digs or sifts through dirt to find gold, a shiny and valuable metal.

03 **Gold Rush:** a time period when many people moved to California between 1848 and 1855, seeking their fortunes by searching for gold.

04 **merchant:** someone who buys goods and sells them for a profit.

05 **sawmill:** a place where big logs are cut into boards and planks for building things.

06 **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 an exciting learning 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 like 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. We are going on our own little Gold Rush adventure right here in our classroom. The **Gold Rush** was a time period when many people moved to California between 1848 and 1855, seeking their fortunes by searching for gold. But first, we need to get ready. 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 backpacks! [Mimic packing and have the students do the same.]

Introduction

TELL Students (continued)
Now, let's pretend to walk to California. It is a long way! Let's march, march, march! [Lead the students in a short walk around the classroom.] We made it to California! Now it's 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. 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, a man named 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. It also suggests that he saw his new land as a place of opportunity, where he could start fresh and build a prosperous future, much like the hopeful beginnings he associated with Switzerland. To help build his dream, Sutter hired a carpenter named James Marshall to construct a sawmill in Coloma, along the south fork of the American River. **[Reference Marshall and Sawmill 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.

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 necessary to generate sufficient water power to operate the sawmill's machinery effectively. Sawmills require a lot of power to cut through large logs, and in the 1840s, this power typically came from waterwheels. 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. It needs a strong, steady flow of water to turn efficiently and consistently. **[Reference Waterwheel Image]** On January 24, while checking on things, 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. The men tried to keep it 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 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 Sam 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's likely that many people would have continued to doubt the truth of the gold discovery. Without the visual proof that Brannan provided, the excitement and urgency that drove thousands to abandon their jobs and homes to search for gold might not have happened as quickly or intensely. **[Reference Gold Image]**

Lesson

TELL Students (continued)

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 discovered gold. Back in those days, there weren't 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, eventually heard about the gold and came to California to see if they could find some too.

ASK Students

Why do you think people from places like China and Peru came 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 find 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 people to come. When they finally arrived in California, people 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!

ASK Students

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

TELL Students 📷

People traveled all the way to California from places like China and Peru 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. **[Reference Items to Purchase Image]** The journey was very long and hard, but the chance to find gold and improve their lives was worth it to them. They hoped that finding gold would help them and their families have a better future. 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."

Lesson

TELL Students (continued)
They left everything behind and took big risks, hoping to find gold.

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. 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. "**49ers**" is the nickname for those who flocked to northern California in 1849 hoping to take advantage of the Gold Rush. These adventurers were willing to take big risks and leave everything behind because they believed finding gold could give them a much better life.

ASK Students
Why did the "49ers" go to California to find gold?

TELL Students 📷
The "49ers" went to California to find gold because they heard stories about how much gold was there and thought they could become very rich. They wanted to use the gold to buy things they needed, like food and clothes, or even to buy houses. They were excited and hopeful that finding gold would help them have a much better life. So, they traveled long distances, sometimes over mountains or across oceans, taking big risks and leaving their homes behind, all because they believed that finding gold would change their lives for the better. But, panning for gold often wasn't the quick path to wealth many people hoped for. Success mostly depended on luck, despite the hard and exhausting work involved. Life in the mining camps was tough. Miners dealt with poor food, inadequate housing, and unsanitary conditions. **[Reference Miners Image]**

Lesson

ASK Students

What challenges did the "49ers" face when they arrived in California to search for gold, and how did these challenges differ from their expectations?

TELL Students 📷🔑

These challenges were very different from what many of the "49ers" expected. They thought they would find plenty of gold and have a better life, but the reality was hard work with often little reward, tough living conditions, and a lot of risks. As more people arrived in California, mining towns sprang up. **[Reference Mining Town Image]** While a few men did strike it rich by finding gold, many others found their fortune by providing services to the miners. Samuel Brannan, a merchant and newspaper publisher, became California's first millionaire not from mining gold, but from selling goods to miners. A **merchant** is someone who buys goods and sells them for a profit. Other successful entrepreneurs included Levi Strauss, who became famous for his durable blue jeans; Domingo Ghirardelli, who sold chocolate and coffee; and Leland Stanford, who made a fortune from his grocery business. **[Reference Brannan, Strauss, Ghirardelli, Stanford Images]** These businessmen made their wealth by "mining the miners" — profiting from the needs of those who came looking for gold.

ASK Students

How did Samuel Brannan become rich without finding gold?

TELL Students

Samuel Brannan became rich during the Gold Rush not by finding gold himself, but by selling goods to the miners who were looking for gold. He was a merchant, which means he sold things that people needed to buy. Brannan knew that all the miners coming to California would need tools, food, and other supplies, so he set up a store to sell these items. As more and more miners arrived hoping to find gold, they needed supplies, and Brannan's business thrived. He made a lot of money because he was selling what the miners needed to try their luck at finding gold. This smart approach to business made him California's first millionaire.

Lesson

ASK Students
What did Samuel Brannan sell to the miners to become rich?

TELL Students
Samuel Brannan became rich during the Gold Rush by selling necessary items like tools, food, and other supplies to the miners who came to California hoping to find gold. He set up a store where all these miners could buy what they needed to mine for gold. As more miners arrived, they all needed these essential supplies, and Brannan's business flourished. His smart business strategy allowed him to profit from the miners' needs, making him California's first millionaire without ever having to find gold himself.

ASK Students
How did Samuel Brannan become California's first millionaire without finding any gold himself?

TELL Students 📷
Samuel Brannan became California's first millionaire without mining for gold. He opened a store and sold tools, food, and other supplies that the gold miners needed. As more miners came to California to find gold, they all shopped at Brannan's store, making his business very successful and making him very wealthy. In the five years following Marshall's discovery of gold in California, an astonishing 750,000 pounds of gold were extracted from the region's mountains, streams, and rivers. However, by the mid-1850s, the easily accessible surface gold had largely been collected, leading many prospectors to join larger mining companies. **[Reference Hydraulic Mining Image]** These companies began using hydraulic mining, a method developed in 1853 that allowed for the extraction of gold on a larger scale but significantly damaged California's environment. Due to its destructive impact, hydraulic mining was eventually banned in 1884.

ASK Students
How did Samuel Brannan become wealthy even though he never mined for gold, and what happened to gold mining in California after the easy gold was gone?

Lesson

TELL Students

The huge number of people and wealth that came to California during the Gold Rush helped the state grow quickly and become the 31st state in the United States in 1850. After that, more people kept moving to California, and its economy and industries grew even more. Today, California remembers its Gold Rush history with the state motto, “Eureka,” which means "I have found it," and it is also called “the Golden State” to celebrate this important time in its past. **[Reference Golden State Image]**

ASK Students

Why is California called “the Golden State,” and what does the state motto “Eureka” mean?

TELL Students

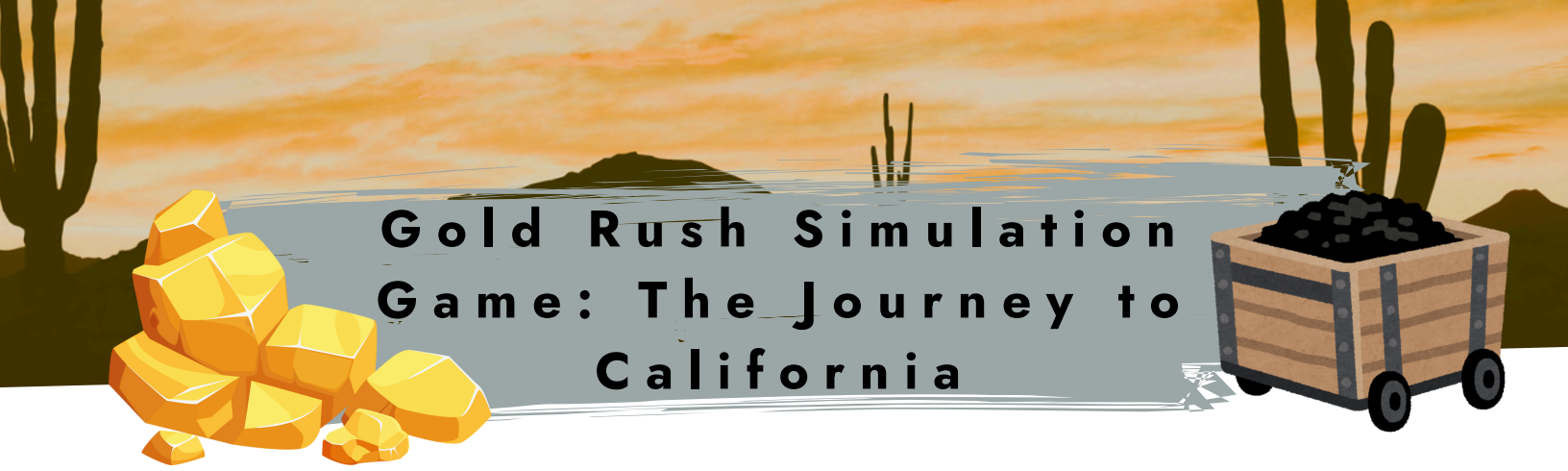
California is called "the Golden State" because of the Gold Rush, which brought a lot of people and wealth to the area and helped the state grow quickly. The state motto, "Eureka," means "I have found it," and it reflects the excitement of discovering gold during that time. Thanks to the Gold Rush, California's 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 and another Patriot of the Week to learn more!

WATCH

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

Learn More With Liberty: Gold Rush Entrepreneurs: The Story of Levi Strauss and Samuel Brannan

Patriot of the Week: James Marshall



Gold Rush Simulation Game: The Journey to California

Objective

To help third graders understand the challenges and decisions faced by “49ers” during the Gold Rush through an interactive, role-playing simulation that incorporates geography, problem-solving, and teamwork.

Materials Needed

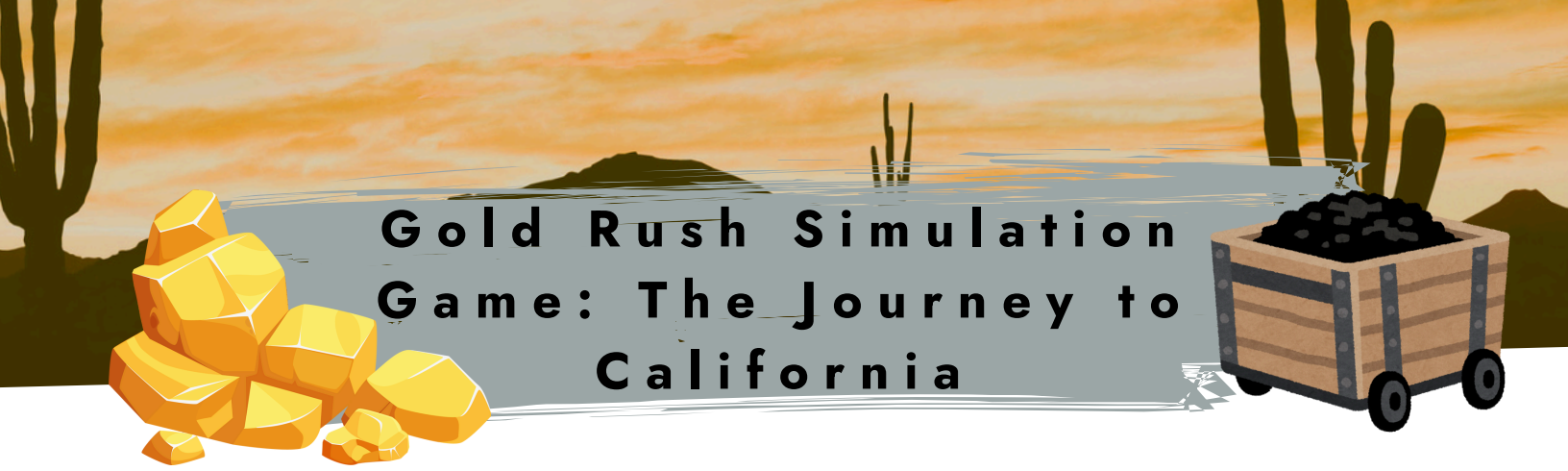
- A large map of the United States with key locations (like St. Louis, the Rocky Mountains, Sierra Nevada, and San Francisco) marked along the route to California
- Role cards (e.g., Miner, Trader, Guide, Doctor, Cook)
- Event cards with scenarios that present challenges or opportunities (e.g., "You found a gold nugget! Gain 10 points," or "Your wagon wheel broke. Lose one day.")
- Supply tokens (representing food, tools, medicine, and gold)
- A score sheet to keep track of supplies and progress
- Dice to determine the movement of each group along the map

Setup

1. Divide the Class into Small Groups:
    - Each group represents a team of “49ers” traveling to California. Assign roles to students within each group, such as Miner (responsible for finding gold), Trader (handles supplies and trading), Guide (leads the group along the path), Doctor (takes care of health), and Cook (manages food).
2. Set Up the Map:
    - Place the large map where all groups can see it. Mark starting points and the final destination (San Francisco).
3. Distribute Initial Supplies:
    - Give each group a set amount of supplies, including food, tools, and medicine. They’ll need to manage these wisely throughout the game.

Starting the Journey

- Each group rolls the dice to see how many spaces they can move on the map. The spaces represent days of travel.



Gold Rush Simulation Game: The Journey to California

Encounter Events

- After each roll, groups draw an event card. The card describes a scenario they must deal with, such as finding a gold nugget, encountering a storm, or trading with another group. They must make decisions based on the scenario, which can affect their supplies or progress.

Interactive Challenges

- At each geographical station, groups face a challenge related to that area:
  - Great Plains: Decide how much food to consume or trade.
  - Rocky Mountains: Solve a puzzle to find a path through the mountains.
  - Sierra Nevada: Participate in a quick panning activity to find gold.

Resource Management

- As the groups move along the map, they must manage their supplies carefully. If they run out of food or medicine, they face penalties like losing a turn or moving fewer spaces.

Reaching California

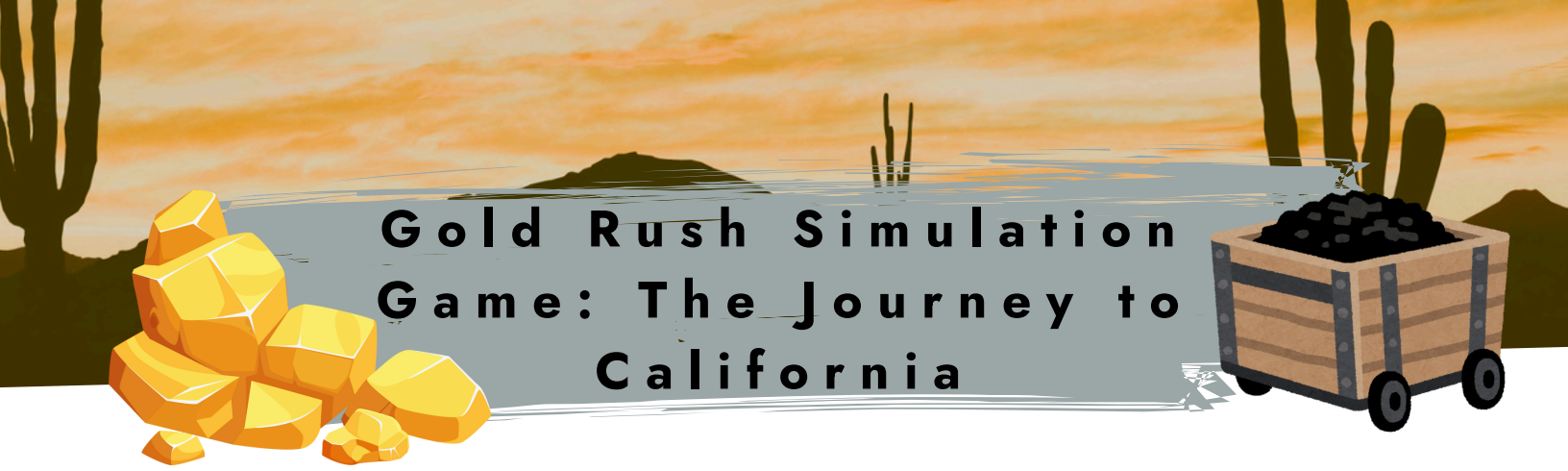
- The first group to reach San Francisco with supplies and gold remaining wins the game. However, all groups should be encouraged to finish, as the goal is to learn about the journey and the challenges faced.

Debriefing

- After the game, discuss the different challenges each group faced. Talk about how the real "49ers" might have felt and the difficulties they encountered on their journey.

Reflection

- Ask students to write a short paragraph or draw a picture about what they learned from the game, focusing on the decisions they made and how it impacted their journey.

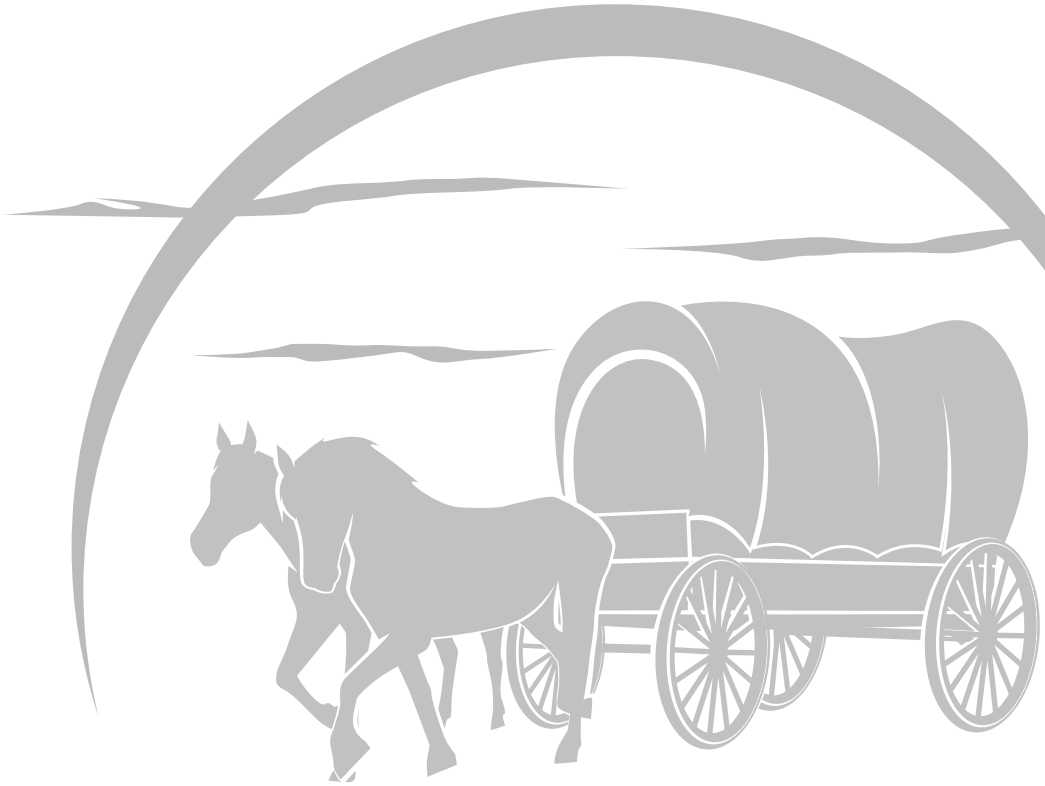


Gold Rush Simulation Game: The Journey to California

Learning Outcomes

- Students will gain a deeper understanding of the physical and emotional challenges faced by “49ers” during the Gold Rush.
- Students will develop teamwork and decision-making skills by working together to overcome obstacles.
- Students will learn about the importance of resource management and the consequences of their choices.

This activity provides a fun, immersive way for third graders to experience the Gold Rush while learning important historical and social concepts.



Gold Rush Multiple Choice Quiz

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Instructions: Please read each question carefully and circle the correct answer.

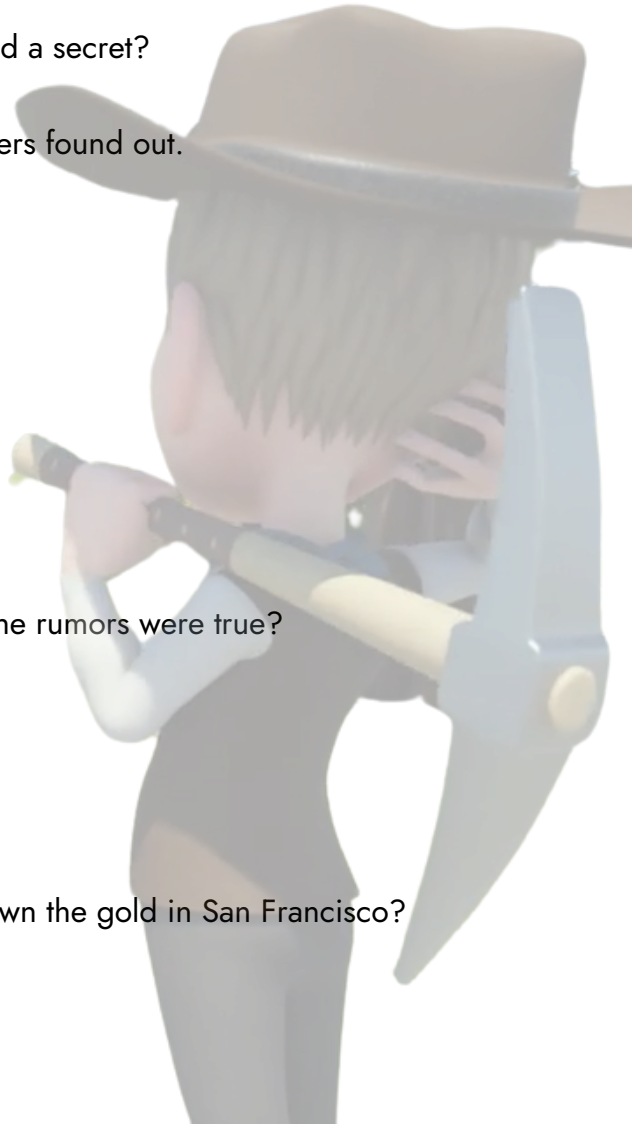
1. What did James Marshall discover while building a sawmill for John Sutter?
   a) Silver
   b) Gold
   c) Oil
   d) Coal

2. Why did Marshall and Sutter want to keep the discovery of gold a secret?
   a) They didn't think it was important.
   b) They wanted to gather as much gold as possible before others found out.
   c) They were afraid of losing their jobs.
   d) They were worried about bad weather.

3. What happened when news of the gold discovery spread?
   a) People ignored the news.
   b) People rushed to California to find gold.
   c) Gold was no longer valuable.
   d) The sawmill was abandoned.

4. Who showed the people in San Francisco real gold to prove the rumors were true?
   a) John Sutter
   b) James Marshall
   c) Sam Brannan
   d) Levi Strauss

5. What would have likely happened if Sam Brannan had not shown the gold in San Francisco?
   a) People would have believed the news faster.
   b) People might have doubted the gold discovery.
   c) More gold would have been found immediately.
   d) The Gold Rush would have started earlier.



Gold Rush Multiple Choice Quiz

Instructions: Please read each question carefully and circle the correct answer.

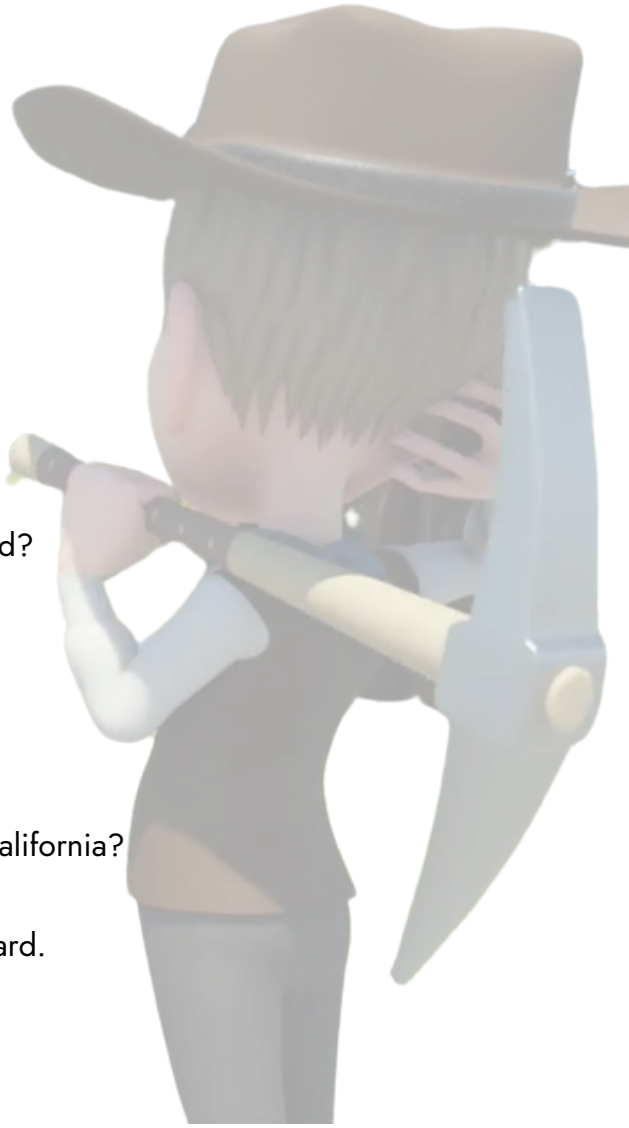
6. Why did people from places like China and Peru come to California?
   a) They were looking for new homes.
   b) They wanted to find gold and become rich.
   c) They were visiting family.
   d) They were escaping bad weather.

7. What did President James K. Polk say in his speech in December 1848?
   a) There wasn't much gold in California.
   b) The gold in California was hard to believe but true.
   c) Gold was not valuable anymore.
   d) California had already run out of gold.

8. Why did people travel long distances to California?
   a) To escape cold weather.
   b) To find gold and improve their lives.
   c) To visit family members.
   d) To build new houses.

9. What were the people who traveled to California in 1849 called?
   a) The Miners
   b) The "49ers"
   c) The Explorers
   d) The Gold Seekers

10. What challenges did the "49ers" face when they arrived in California?
    a) They found gold easily.
    b) They faced hard work, poor living conditions, and little reward.
    c) They built large houses quickly.
    d) They were given free gold by the government.



Gold Rush Multiple Choice Quiz

Instructions: Please read each question carefully and circle the correct answer.

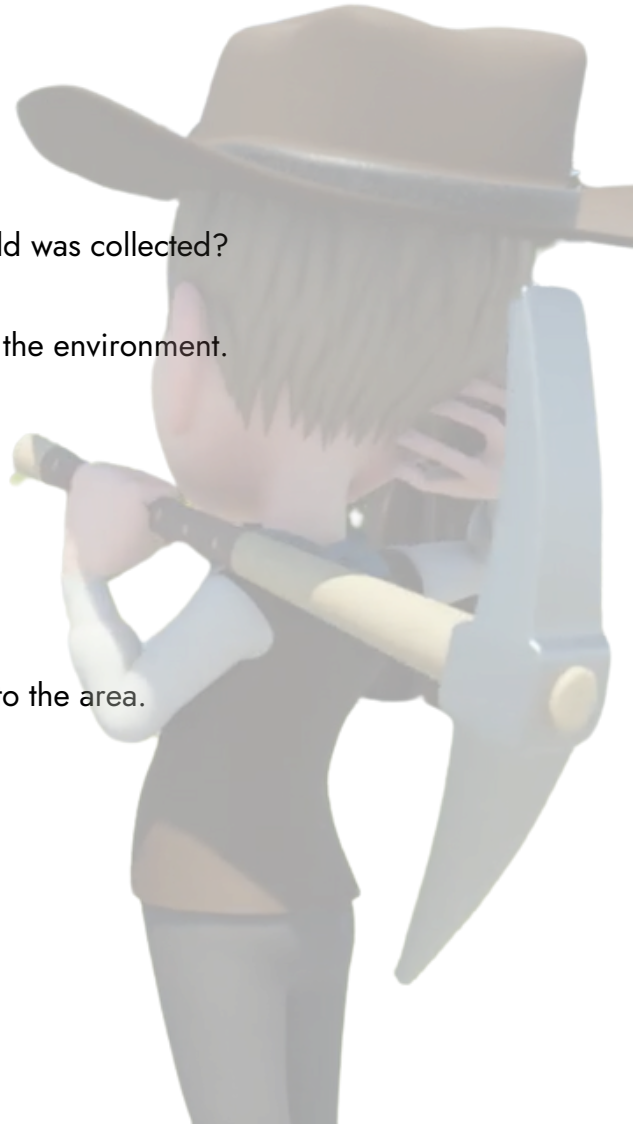
11. Who became California's first millionaire during the Gold Rush?
    a) James Marshall
    b) Levi Strauss
    c) Samuel Brannan
    d) Domingo Ghirardelli

12. How did Samuel Brannan become rich during the Gold Rush?
    a) By finding lots of gold.
    b) By selling tools, food, and supplies to the miners.
    c) By building sawmills.
    d) By opening a gold mine.

13. What happened to gold mining after the easily accessible gold was collected?
    a) It became easier to find gold.
    b) Larger companies used hydraulic mining, which damaged the environment.
    c) Mining stopped completely.
    d) The government gave everyone gold.

14. Why is California called "the Golden State"?
    a) Because of the color of its mountains.
    b) Because of its warm weather.
    c) Because of the Gold Rush that brought people and wealth to the area.
    d) Because of its beautiful beaches.

15. What does the state motto "Eureka" mean?
    a) "I have found it."
    b) "Gold is here."
    c) "Welcome to California."
    d) "Let's go find gold."



Gold Rush Answer Key

This key provides the correct answers for the 15 multiple-choice question quiz.

1. b) Gold
2. b) They wanted to gather as much gold as possible before others found out.
3. b) People rushed to California to find gold.
4. c) Sam Brannan
5. b) People might have doubted the gold discovery.
6. b) They wanted to find gold and become rich.
7. b) The gold in California was hard to believe but true.
8. b) To find gold and improve their lives.
9. b) The “49ers”
10. b) They faced hard work, poor living conditions, and little reward.
11. c) Samuel Brannan
12. b) By selling tools, food, and supplies to the miners.
13. b) Larger companies used hydraulic mining, which damaged the environment.
14. c) Because of the Gold Rush that brought people and wealth to the area.
15. a) "I have found it."

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

John Sutter

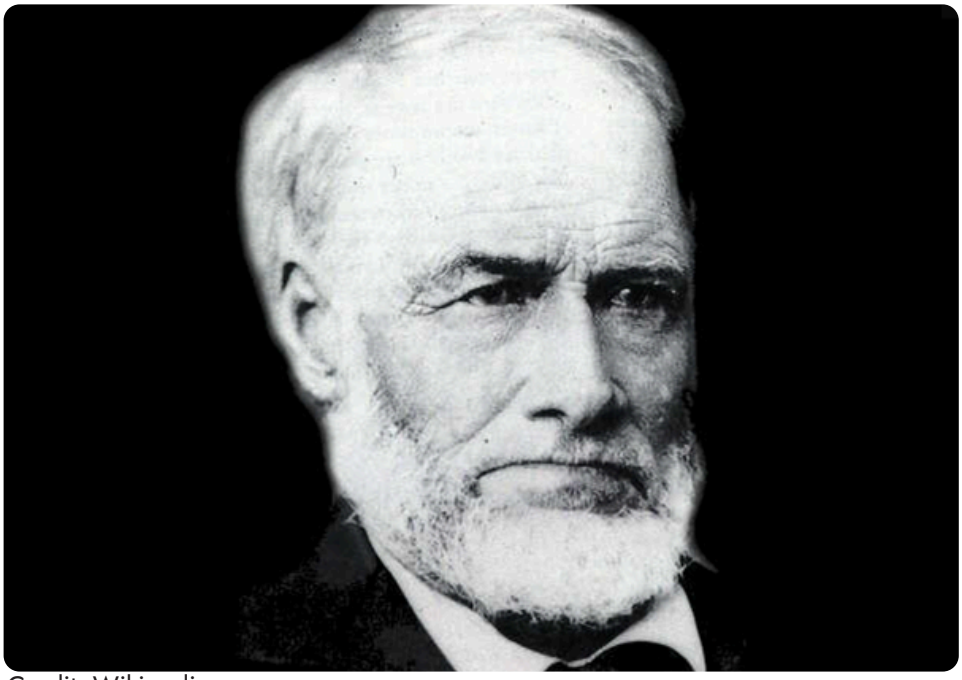
Credit: Wikipedia.

Sawmill

Credit: Canva Pro.

Images

James Marshall



Credit: Wikipedia.

Waterwheel

Credit: Canva Pro.

Images

Sam Brannan

Credit: Canva Pro.

Gold

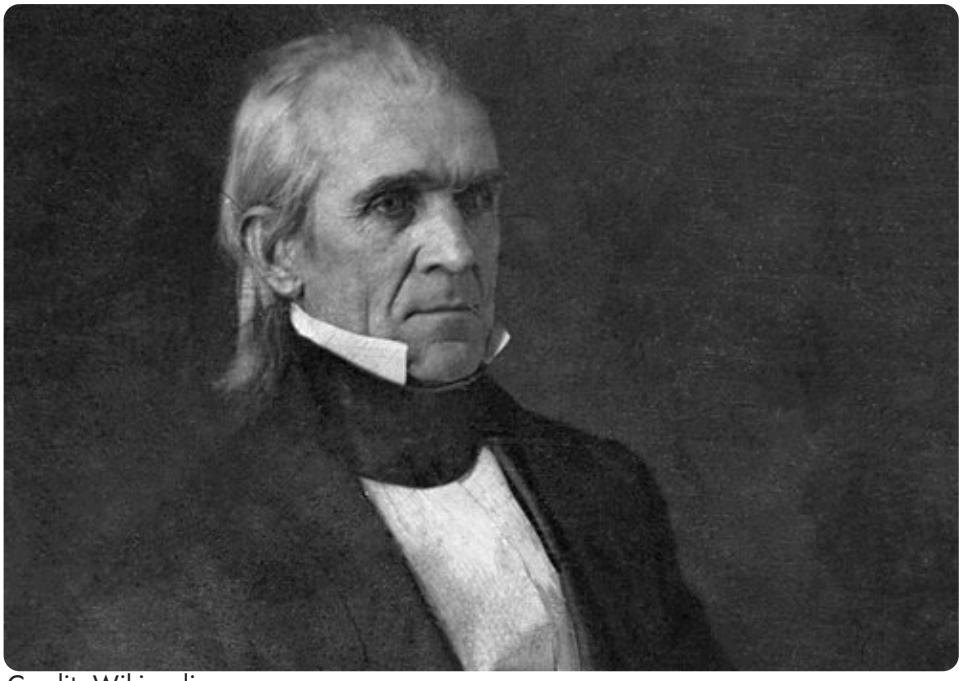
Credit: Canva Pro

Images

Items to Purchase

Credit: Canva Pro.

James Polk



Credit: Wikipedia.

Images

Miners

Credit: Canva Pro.

Mining Town

Credit: Canva Pro

Images

Domingo Ghirardelli

Credit: National Portrait Gallery

Leland Stanford

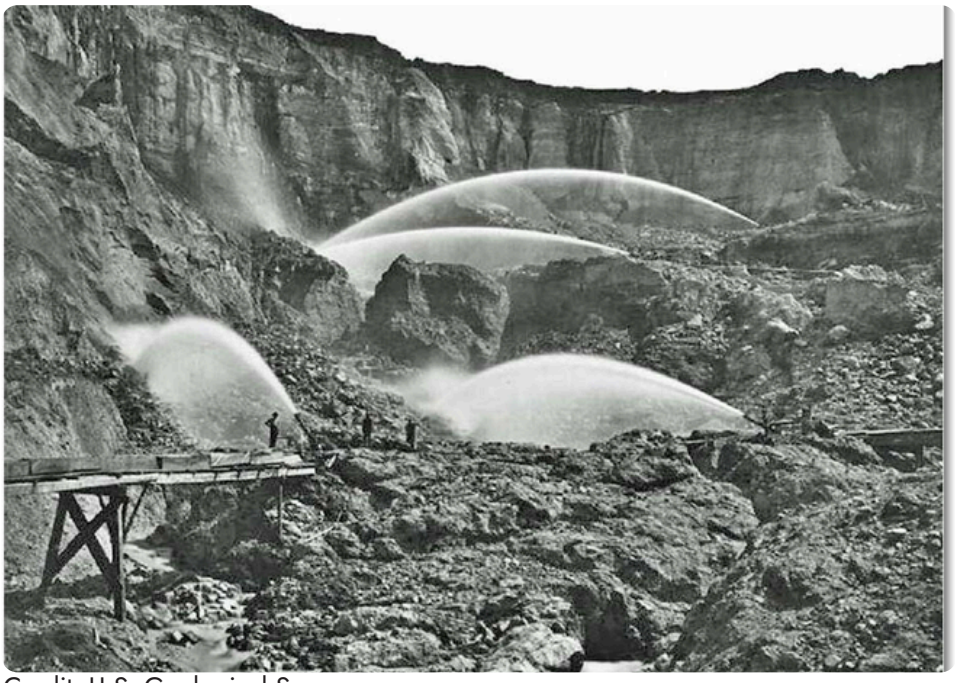
Credit: U.S. Senate Historical Office

Images

Levi Strauss

Credit: Levi Strauss & Co.

Hydraulic Mining



Credit: U.S. Geological Survey

Images

Golden State

Credit: Canva Pro.

Notes