

7F: The Gold Rush Collection

In 1848, gold was discovered in California and the gold rush began. People came to California from all over America and the world—including Mexico, China, and Europe—to find (and lose) their fortunes, significantly shaping the economy and the landscape of California, and the lives of its indigenous and other existing residents. In this Collection, students explore primary documents and conduct independent research to better understand the complex story of the California gold rush. Students build information literacy skills and learn how to construct their own research questions and explore the Internet for answers. They also participate in a Socratic seminar in which they rely on their research to examine the many issues inherent in the gold rush story.

Throughout these activities, students conduct research to learn about the wide diversity of people who took part in the California gold rush. They compare and contrast a fictional portrayal with historical accounts and use the information they gather to write narrative accounts from the point of view of a specific person living through this complex and dynamic era. As students reach the end of the unit, they synthesize all of the skills they've developed to tackle a culminating research assignment—part essay, part multimedia project.

Core texts your student will read:

- Excerpt: "California Culinary Experiences" from *The Overland Monthly* by Prentice Mulford
- Excerpt: "Letter the Tenth: Amateur Mining—Hairbreadth 'Scapes, &c." from *The Shirley Letters from California Mines in 1851–1852* by Dame Shirley
- Excerpts: Chapter XXVII and Chapter XXVIII from *Roughing It* by Mark Twain
- Excerpt: "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" from *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman
- Song Excerpt: "Oh My Darling, Clementine" by Percy Montrose
- Excerpt: Chapter 3—"The Magic Equation" from *California: The Great Exception* by Carey McWilliams
- Excerpts: Preface and Chapter XI from *Sights in the Gold Region, and Scenes by the Way* by Theodore T. Johnson
- Excerpts from July 22–August 10, 1849, *The Gold Rush Diary of Ramón Gil Navarro* by Ramón Gil Navarro
- Excerpt: Chapter 8—"Good Haul of Diggers" from *Digger: The Tragic Fate of the California Indians from the Missions to the Gold Rush* by Jerry Stanley
- Excerpt: "The Toil of Trace and Trail" from *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London

What my student will do/learn:

- Students conduct fun and "low-stakes" scavenger hunts to become familiar with the range of texts and images included in this unit.
- Students learn how to construct research questions and identify appropriate and relevant websites and Internet sources for answers.
- Students assume the identity of someone who experienced the gold rush, then research their experience and write a diary entry from their point of view.
- Students establish expectations, prepare questions for, and engage in a Socratic seminar, discussing the circumstances and consequences of the California gold rush.

- Students continue to write in response to prompts 2–3 times weekly, and practice analytic writing in response to text by developing a controlling idea or claim and providing support with details or evidence.
- Students write an end-of-unit essay responding to one of the following prompts:
 - a. Research Option 1: Argumentative Essay: Was the gold rush good for the state of California? Like all things, it depends on how you look at it. Who benefited from the gold rush (remember to consider different populations such as Native Americans and immigrants)? How and why? How did the gold rush affect California in the short term? How did it shape the California we know today? Conduct research and write an argumentative essay that persuades the reader of your point of view.
 - b. Research Option 2: Informative Essay: Who was John Sutter? Who was Elsa Jane Guerin? Choose one of these two famous figures from the gold rush era and start digging. Where did this person come from? Did he or she strike it rich? Has his or her legacy had a lasting impact on the state of California? Conduct research and write an informative essay on one of these fascinating characters from the Old West.
- Students also create an interactive timeline to share their essay research with the class.

Here are some conversation starters that you can use during this unit to promote discussion and encourage continued learning with your student:

1. As you worked to evaluate sources, what did you notice about the credible websites? What advice might you give a friend looking for information on the Internet?
2. What is the difference between an open-ended and closed-ended question? Why do people prefer open-ended questions during a Socratic seminar?
3. What are some facts you learned about the circumstances and/or consequences of the California gold rush?
4. What are some of the ways particular people's lives changed for the better? What about for the worse?
5. Can you share the diary entry you wrote as someone who participated in the California gold rush? (Provide feedback to your student by finding something in their writing that you can respond to as a reader. For example, "This is great how you describe being sick and not being able to help with panning for gold. Nice job adding in those specific details of the poor conditions they experienced.")