



How do our perceptions change with experience?

Life in California's Gold Rush

Background Information

The California Gold Rush was the largest mass migration in American history, bringing about 300,000 people to northern California. After the discovery of gold near Sacramento in 1848, many people abandoned their lives in other parts of the world and traveled west with the expectation of quickly finding wealth. To accommodate the needs of the miners, towns sprang up all across the region, complete with shops and businesses whose owners also hoped to make their fortune. Gold miners, nearly all men, lived and worked together in these settlements. Many miners who came to strike it rich eventually abandoned their dreams of gold. They soon realized that mining was extremely hard work and that there was great competition for the riches they expected to find. Those who did find gold found that they lost it again quickly. Due to low supply and high demand for goods in the region, prices were extremely high. Many only found enough gold to pay for their daily needs.

Lesson Description

In this lesson students will examine the song lyrics, illustrations, and captions on a wood engraving to contrast the typical miner's expectations of life in gold rush California with their actual experiences and to discover what daily life looked like in the mines. Students will use the information to write and illustrate a letter as if they were miners writing to their family and friends back home.

Grade Range: 4th

Time to complete lesson: 2 hours

Resources needed:

- Devices with internet access and/or presentation system for teacher's laptop
- White board or chart paper
- Analyzing Primary Sources Teacher Guide (provided)
- Lined paper for drafts (1 per student)
- Miner Letter paper (1 per student) (provided)

Lesson Author: Courtney Meier





By the end of this lesson, students will **know**:

- People can use both text and vignettes to tell stories
- Perspectives on events can change with time and experience
- The experiences of miners in the California gold rush did not match their expectations

By the end of this lesson, students will **be able to**:

- Read and analyze a primary source
- Discuss what this primary source tells us about the gold rush
- Describe the experience of a typical miner from the miner's point of view

Supported Standards

CCSS ELA-Literacy RI.4.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS ELA-Literacy RI.4.3 Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

CCSS ELA-Literacy W.4.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.





Lesson Plan

Introduction (5-10 minutes):

- 1) Ask students: If we wanted to draw pictures of people doing activities from their everyday lives, what kinds of things would we expect to see?
- 2) Ask students to think about different types of texts that relate to people's daily lives (newspaper articles, letters, journals, advertisements)
- 3) Briefly discuss why people might choose to write text and to create pictures to go with it.
- 4) Tell students that they are going to look at a primary source to see what we can learn about the daily lives of the people who created it.

Activity #1: Examine Primary Source text (20-30 minutes):

- 1) Project "The Honest Miner's Songs" (Material #2) on a screen so it is visible to the whole class. (Alternatively, if necessary for reading the text, students can access the image on their devices.)
- 2) Use the Library of Congress' "Analyzing Primary Sources Teacher Guide" (Material #1) to facilitate a conversation with students about what they notice, what they are thinking, what they are wondering
- 3) After initial responses, focus on texts. Ask students to identify the difference between the two songs.
- 4) Have a student read the first song aloud. Invite students to share what they notice about it.
- 5) During discussion, introduce the following vocabulary and background information:
 - Argos- probably refers to Argonauts, a group of heroes in Greek mythology who went on a quest for the Golden Fleece on their ship, Argo.
 - Ore - rock or sediment that contains valuable resources, such as gold
 - Thither - to or toward a place
- 1) Have a student read the second song aloud. Invite students to share what they notice about it and how it differs from the first.
- 2) During discussion, introduce the following vocabulary and background information:
 - Peg out - an informal British phrase that means "die"
 - Pelf - rare term used in historical contexts to mean "money"
- 1) Together, compose a summary of the miner's perspective shared in this song.



Activity #2: Examine Primary Source illustrations (15-20 minutes):

Tell students that the pictures are called “vignettes” and why.

- 1) Invite students to share what they notice about them.
- 2) Elicit students’ thoughts on how these visual elements support the text of the songs and/or change the way we experience it.
- 3) Ask students what these vignettes tell us about a miner’s daily activities.
- 4) Generate a list of things a miner might do on a typical day in the mines. Record these on the board or on chart paper for students to refer to later. Miner activities that students have learned from other sources can also be included.
- 5) While making the list, remind students to be specific: rather than saying that a miner would sleep, say that a miner would sleep outdoors under a blanket, with a log for his pillow (as shown in vignette).

Activity #3: Write a letter home (60-90 minutes):

- 1) Tell students they will be writing a letter home as if they were gold miners during the California gold rush.
- 2) In their letter they should include the following:
 - their expectations of California and searching for gold before arrival
 - how those expectations compare to the reality of being there
 - examples of daily activities in the gold fields
- 1) Remind students that they are writing a narrative, a story telling a series of related events
- 2) When students feel ready, allow them to begin composing drafts of their letters on lined paper.
- 3) Allow students time for teacher or peer editing.
- 4) Students will write their final copies on miner letter paper (Material #3).
- 5) Optional: Students may draw their own vignettes, showing activities mentioned in their letters, on the borders of their letters.

Conclusion:

- 1) Put students in small peer groups, where they can read their letters and share vignettes with one another.
- 2) As a class, discuss the experience of creating illustrations to support text.
- 3) Display decorated letters in the classroom.



Vocabulary List

<u>Word</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Variations to Use (and Encourage Students to</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Argonauts / Argos	A group of heroes who went on a quest for the Golden Fleece		From Greek mythology; here used in comparison with miners who went on a quest for the ultimate prize in riches
Ore	Rock or sediment that contains valuable resources		
Thither	To or toward a place		
Peg Out	Die		Informal British phrase
Pelf	Money		Usually referred to money gotten in a dishonest or dishonorable way
Vignette	Small illustration or decorative design		

Vocabulary List



Material #1 The Library of Congress' "Analyzing Primary Sources Teacher Guide"

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Primary_Sources.pdf

Material #2 The Honest Miner's Song:

<https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p9539coll1/id/23497/rec/1>

