

**THE HISTORY CHANNEL® PRESENTS:
10 DAYS THAT UNEXPECTEDLY CHANGED AMERICA™**



The Gold Rush
(JANUARY 24, 1848)

“Do not lose hold of your dreams or aspirations. For if you do, you may still exist but you have ceased to live.”

- Henry David Thoreau

“American democracy was born of no theorist's dream; it was not carried in the Susan Constant to Virginia, nor in the Mayflower to Plymouth. It came stark and strong and full of life out of the American forest, and it gained new strength each time it touched the new frontier.”

- Frederick Jackson Turner

“Purity, land, opportunity – for one day I will see if these lie on my horizon, the illustrious American frontier, and when these three cease to exist, America will lose part of its precious idealism.”

- Anonymous Observer of the American west

January 24th, 1848 – a seemingly uninteresting day in the minds of most Americans, however the revelations of that day changed the fate of our nation forever. On that day, James Marshall, a naïve American citizen, found gold in the California territory and sparked the massive westward migration after 1848, known as the American gold rush. Unfortunately, not everyone found the wealth that was supposed to exist on the alluring frontier. Competition was rampant and before many 49ers knew it, the age of labor intensive mining turned into industrial, capital-based mining. Although it was majestic idealism that finally led to the east meeting the west, sovereignty and order in California did not come without tragedy and conflict. From wars with Native Americans to fights with the Californias, the settlement of the California territory resulted in

magnificent stories, broken dreams and bloodshed prior to settling and finally becoming a peaceful state.

10 Days that Unexpectedly Changed America: The Gold Rush chronicles the trials and tribulations of settling the west and the stories of the people who were obsessed by the notion of imminent success on the American frontier. The quest for gold transformed America, bringing in over 500,000 people into the California territory and is responsible for the eventual industrialization of the west. Using primary sources, reenactments, expert historians' analysis and dramatic imagery, the program explains the premises for moving west and dissects the myths that were entrenched in the idea of the 19th century American frontier. This History Channel® program is a moving and informative link to the events of great American expansion, thereby fulfilling your curiosity and providing in-depth explanations of life on the trail westward.

Curriculum Links

10 Days that Unexpectedly Changed America: The Gold Rush would be an excellent addition to any middle school or high school class on American History, Science and Technology, the American Frontier, and 19th Century History. It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: (1) Civilization, cultural diffusion and innovation, (2) Human interaction with the environment, (3) Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions, (4) Conflict and cooperation, (5) Comparative history of major events and (6) Patterns of social and political interaction.

Footnotes to History

DID YOU KNOW that there was a California-bound airline in 1849? Rufus Porter, founder of Scientific American, conjured the idea of flying "49ers" westward on propeller-driven balloons. When he advertised his proposition, 200 brave gold-seekers signed up for the ride, but the airline never got off the ground.

Vocabulary

Using the dictionary at www.merriamwebster.com, an internet resource such as www.history.com, or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

"American Character"	Magnanimous
Allude	Manifest Destiny
Cease	Meander
Circumvent	Peregrination
Enrapture	Relict
Frederick Jackson Turner	Sustain
Inherent	The Californias
Intrinsic	Theology

Comprehension Questions

1. Who is James Marshall and what did he discover? Why was his discovery so important? What did it lead to?

2. Who were William Swain and Sarah Royce? Are their stories typical of migrating Americans? Did they find success once out on the frontier? If so, how did they find this success? Are you surprised by their triumphs and tragedies?
3. What did the Sierra Nevada Mountains signify to those who were moving west? What challenges did these mountains and their obstacles present to gold-seekers?
4. What were mining camps? Was it easy to find gold upon arrival into the Sacramento valley?
5. How did Sarah Royce describe her peers in mining towns? Do her descriptions and journal entries strike you as surprising? Why?
6. Who are the Californias? Who is Marian G. Vallejo? What did Mr. Vallejo think of the gold rush at first? Are you surprised at his economic demise after major industrialization and commercialization eventually transformed California?
7. What type of person had the best chance at finding success during the gold rush? What do you think would have been the best way to support yourself if you were in the Sacramento valley in 1849?
8. What does the economic and socioeconomic evolution in San Francisco tell you about the gold rush? Why was San Francisco an epicenter for commerce in California?
9. What happened to California on September 9th, 1850? Why was the speed of this occurrence so shocking?
10. How did hydraulic mining work? Why was it needed? What did the need for hydraulic mining mean for the individual miner who was trying to strike it rich on his own?
11. What does William Swain's story tell you about the gold rush? What do his letters say about his character and the character of those who pursued their own American dream? How do you think the west shaped his character?

"Golden" Facts¹

- ✍ Gold has a tensile strength of 19,000 pounds per square inch
- ✍ It has a melting point of 1,945° F
- ✍ It has a boiling point of 5,378° F
- ✍ It is the most malleable and ductile metal known to humans
- ✍ One ounce of gold can be stretched into a wire more than 40 miles long

Extended Activities

1. The Allure of the American Frontier

The American frontier can be seen as the heart of our nation, especially because it was vital in the westward migration and fulfillment of Manifest Destiny. In groups of 3-5, discuss the following questions about the frontier: What defines the myths that surround the American frontier? What attributes did the frontier have, besides gold, to make so many people migrate westward? After discussing the frontier with your group, pick one aspect of it and give a brief presentation to

¹ California Department of Conservation, California Geological Survey, 2002.

the class on its significance to the gold rush and the eventual development of America from “sea to shining sea.”

2. Individual Labor vs. Commercialized Labor

When the gold rush started, the work to actually collect gold was very labor intensive – many hours were spent grinding, sifting and lifting heavy rocks in order to acquire a few precious ounces of gold. As time carried on, gold mining began to industrialize, therefore big business began to prosper more so than in past decades. In a well written 3-page paper, discuss the evolution of labor and how it pertains to a company in today’s society. Be sure to include current examples of how labor is becoming more capital intensive (money is spent to make money) rather than labor intensive. Furthermore, include the idea of outsourcing and how it pertains to the structure of big companies in today’s global economy.

3. The American Character

Whether or not you have studied American history, the idea of the American character and American success are seen in daily life. In a well developed 3-page essay, discuss what role you think the frontier and the gold rush played in the development of the quintessential “American character?” What, to you, defines the American character? Feel free to use the internet to help you find relevant quotations, excerpts from books or any other sources that may pertain to your argument. However, when doing so, be sure to site your sources properly in order to ensure due credit is given where needed.

4. The 49ers Themselves

By now, you have learned about the gold rush, westward expansion, the American character and the American dream, yet specific examples are needed to reinforce your understanding and bring to life the quest that hundreds of thousands of Americans set out on in 1849. Using the internet, books or other sources, find a story of a “49er” and give a presentation to the class on their life before, during and after the gold rush. Make sure you give a detailed and thoughtful summary to the way they led their lives, their family and their businesses. Once you have gathered information, create the presentation on the computer or on a large poster board (be sure to have handouts for the class) and discuss your findings with the class for around 10 minutes. If possible, try not to choose the same person as someone else in your class.

Primary Source Exporation:

For the all glory, expectation, and opportunity that the American west held for the working class, the Native Americans received none of them and were unjustly treated as their lands were encroached upon by Americans. The United States government treated the Native Americans like savages and followed their unwritten slogan, “A good Indian is a dead Indian.” Read the following passage from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the treaty that ended the United States-Mexican War,

and answer the questions below in well-written paragraphs either on your own for homework or during class in groups:

Excerpts from Article XI of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

Considering that a great part of the territories, which, by the present treaty, are to be comprehended for the future within the limits of the United States, is now occupied by savage tribes, who will hereafter be under the exclusive control of the Government of the United States, and whose incursions within the territory of Mexico would be prejudicial in the extreme, it is solemnly agreed that all such incursions shall be forcibly restrained by the Government of the United States whensoever this may be necessary; and that when they cannot be prevented, they shall be punished by the said Government, and satisfaction for the same shall be exacted all in the same way, and with equal diligence and energy, as if the same incursions were meditated or committed within its own territory, against its own citizens.

And in the event of any person or persons, captured within Mexican territory by Indians, being carried into the territory of the United States, the Government of the latter engages and binds itself, in the most solemn manner, so soon as it shall know of such captives being within its territory, and shall be able so to do, through the faithful exercise of its influence and power, to rescue them and return them to their country, or deliver them to the agent or representative of the Mexican Government. The Mexican authorities will, as far as practicable, give to the Government of the United States notice of such captures; and its agents shall pay the expenses incurred in the maintenance and transmission of the rescued captives; who, in the mean time, shall be treated with the utmost hospitality by the American authorities at the place where they may be. But if the Government of the United States, before receiving such notice from Mexico, should obtain intelligence, through any other channel, of the existence of Mexican captives within its territory, it will proceed forthwith to effect their release and delivery to the Mexican agent, as above stipulated.

1. What does this excerpt mean for the Native Americans that rightfully held property prior to the American settlers coming west?
2. The language used in the official document when referring to Native Americans is very strong. Pick out 3-5 words in the excerpt and discuss the connotation of each.
3. How does this excerpt make America look un-American? Why is it that we seem like the evil empire?
4. Does this document mean anything to you in the context of the show? What was happening to Native Americans at this time in the west? Can you justify the American feelings toward Native Americans at the time?

5. The Americans were devout enemies with Mexico prior to this treaty, but still refer to the Native Americans with irreverent language. Does this juxtaposition strike you as strange? What does it mean to you?
6. If you were the Mexican government, would you have believed the provisions in the excerpt above? Because the United States continuously attacked Native Americans, what prevents them from encroaching on Mexican territories again?
7. How do you think this document makes the United States look today? Do you think that the United States owes an apology to the affected Native American tribes that are still around in the United States or does the establishment of reservations nullify the need for any further apology?

Resources

Internet

A Copy of Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* – <http://history.acusd.edu/gen/text/civ/turner.html>

A website that contains first hand documents on American history and the American west – www.ourdocuments.gov

Oakland Museum of California's official gold rush website – <http://www.museumca.org/goldrush/index.html>

Books

Brands, H.W. *The Age of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the New American Dream*. Anchor Publishing, 2003.

Davis, William C. *The American Frontier: Pioneers, Settlers & Cowboys 1800-1899*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.

Fisher, Vardis. *Gold Rushes and Mining Camps of the Early American West*. Caxton Press, 1978.

Lamar, Howard Roberts. *The Trader on the American Frontier: Myth's Victim (Essays on the American West)*. Texas A&M University Press, 1977.



An unknown group of miners in a western mining pit -- c. 1875