

PANNING FOR GOLD

Overview:

Just as in the United States, Australia experienced the rapid changes triggered by a gold rush in the 1850s. The population grew as immigrants flocked to the continent to make their fortune. The glamour and frenzy associated with the gold rush infiltrated the daily life of everyone involved. Learners will assume the role of “diggers” or gold miners as they pan for gold, employing some of the same techniques historically used in Australia. Learners will learn the basic history of the Australian gold rush, focusing on the positive and negative impacts on the land and culture.

What You Need:

- *The Scholastic History of Australia* by Manning Clark, Meredith Hooper, and Susanne Ferrier
- Pie tins with a few, small drainage holes poked along the bottom of the surface (create drainage holes by using a small diameter nail and hammer)
- Pebbles
- Balance scales
- Weights
- Gold spray paint
- Water table or playground area with gravel
- Access to water
- Small cloth bags (these can be made by learners using fabric scraps and fabric glue)

Teaching Strategy:

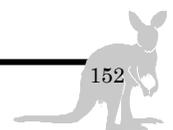
- Prior to the start of the lesson, spray paint pebbles of all sizes and shapes with gold paint. Make sure that some pebbles have only a small area covered in gold spray paint rather than covering the entire surface. Mix the newly created “gold” into a water table filled with water, rocks, and pebbles, or mix gold pebbles with natural pebbles or sand in a playground area. It is

important that you limit the amount of gold that can be found and that you place the gold in “streaks” (small areas that have larger amounts of gold, leaving other areas relatively barren). The frenzy of a gold rush is created by what appears to be large, easily accessible deposits of gold. The reality is that the average digger recovered very little gold.

- Read excerpts on the Australian Gold Rush from *The Scholastic History of Australia*. Ask learners to share their knowledge of the gold rush in the United States. (Novice learners may need additional background knowledge on the gold rush in the United States.) Identify similarities and differences between the two gold rushes.
- Create a mock newspaper and short article with the headline “The Rush is On!”

What to Do:

- Read aloud the mock newspaper headline and story. Explain to learners that during a gold rush, men often left their jobs in the middle of the day, packed their bags, and left their families and friends with little or no notice. Diggers were determined to be on-hand for the discovery of quick riches and after making their fortunes, expected to return to the comfort of their former environment.
- Discuss some of the different techniques used to collect gold. The easiest and most common was gold panning. Gold panning required little equipment and no special knowledge.
- Demonstrate the technique of gold panning. To successfully pan for gold, a digger dips the pan down into a shallow, sandy area, dipping the front lip into the sand and gravel at the bottom of a river in a motion sweeping away from the body. The digger uses one smooth movement to dip the pan down and in and then brings it out of the water at an angle to protect



the water and gravel captured in the pan. The pan is then held horizontally as the digger gently swirls the pan in a clockwise (counter clockwise for left-handed individuals), tipping the lip of the pan just slightly so that the water and lighter sand and gravel will float to the surface and leave the pan. Too large a swirl or tip will cause the digger to lose valuable materials; too little movement and the lighter sand and gravel stay mixed with the heavier gold. Swirl the pan several times, then stop and carefully finger the contents of the pan to search for any large chunks of gold. Continue the swirling technique until the pan and all its contents have been carefully examined and the pan is empty.

- Hand out pie tins and tell learners they get to be diggers for a day.
- Learners should collect their gold in their small bag. Remind learners that inexperienced diggers often shouted out their luck and good fortune drawing a multitude of other diggers to the area. More experienced diggers would quietly pocket their treasure and hope to keep their area secure from other fortune hunters. Ask learners what this might mean to their own search.
- Have learners bring their pans of gold back to the classroom to measure the

weight of their gold on the balance scales. Explain the importance of the digger remaining calm and in control throughout the entire process. Many diggers were cheated of their earnings due to their lack of skill in accurately computing mathematical amounts or because they didn't closely observe the person measuring the gold.

- Ask learners to discuss their experiences with the process and to share what they have learned. Re-visit the idea of natural deposits and ask learners to speculate on why gold seems to collect in certain areas.
- Learners should record their ideas of what the life of a digger was like during the Australian Gold Rush in their unit journal.

Extensions:

- Learners can pretend that they are Australian diggers who have left their family behind in one of the coastal cities. There are several other diggers scattered throughout the area where they are currently working. Learners should write a letter home to their "family" telling them about their experiences. They should include as much realistic detail as possible, using resource materials to help them.

