

# To the Teacher

*I am among the French and Dutch and Scotch and Jews and Italions and Sweeds and Chinese and Indians and all manner of tongus and nations but i am treated with due respect by them all.*

—Mary Ballou, California mining camp, 1851.

Quoted in *Women's Voices from the Western Frontier* by Susan G. Butruille (Tamarack Books, Inc.)

As this statement from an emigrant reveals, the Gold Rush did more than turn California into a state—it also created a richly multicultural society. Studying the Gold Rush uncovers the origins of California's diversity today. Men, women, and children from countries around the world flocked to California in hopes of making their fortune. Native Americans, too, tried their hand at prying wealth from the earth.

Their stories bring to life this era in American history. In the mid-19th century, journal-keeping and letter-writing were a commonplace activities, and gold-seekers were no exception. One of the legacies of this era is the huge number of diaries written by those who ventured to the gold fields and lived to tell about it. In recent years, many diaries written by women and newly-arrived immigrants have been discovered. These first-person accounts greatly enrich our knowledge of the period. Many of them recount the same experiences that native-born gold-seekers had. In addition, these narratives add the personal flavor and perspective of each family or ethnic group.

## Using These Readings

These readings complement the study of California history in the fourth grade, and United States history in grades 5, 8, and 11. Depending on the abilities of your students and the organization of your classroom, you'll want to customize your use of these sources. You may want to read aloud selected passages to younger students. For more able readers, you may want to photocopy selected passages for every student, or have students work in small groups to share materials. Several reproducible activity pages suggest ways to use the sources. To facilitate research by you or your students, this booklet also contains an extensive bibliography on the multicultural aspects of the Gold Rush.

The readings in this booklet can introduce lessons on the Gold Rush and the growth of California. They can also serve as the basis for any number of extension and enrichment activities. The selections are grouped in

chronological order—traveling to California, arriving in San Francisco, in the gold fields, and after the Gold Rush. In addition to complementing the social studies curriculum, these readings can serve as the springboard to many classroom activities in other subject areas as well. Here are a few suggestions.

### Social Studies

- Have students locate the place of origin of each writer on a world map. Using the map scale, have students calculate the approximate distance each one traveled to California. Who made the longest trip? (See activity sheet on page 18.)
- Ask students to find out the climate of each writer's place of origin and compare it with that of the gold fields. Which ones were most similar? most different?
- Divide the class into groups and have each research one of the groups of people represented by these readings. Have them answer questions such as *Why did this group of people leave their homeland? How many came to California? How well were they received? What customs did they bring with them? Did they enter any particular field of work? Did they settle in any particular region of California?* Student groups can report their findings through skits, creative writing, or a mini-museum exhibit.
- What was your community like at the time of the Gold Rush? Have students investigate local history to find out who was living there and how they lived. If no one lived there at the time, have students find out what was the natural state of the land. Younger students can report their findings by building a diorama. Older students might create a poster or handbill advertising your community and its advantages.
- Where was your family in 1849? Ask students to research their family history and create a family tree and a map of origins and migrations. This introductory investigation could lead to oral history interviews with older family members and the creation of a scrapbook of family history. Encourage students to share family histories. How many different places of origin are represented in your class? What similar experiences did all of these families share?
- Would you have joined the Gold Rush in 1849? Why or why not? Ask students to write a short essay to answer this question. You can have them answer as themselves or have them assume the identity of one of the writers represented by these readings. Have students use the activity sheet on page 17 to organize their thoughts before writing.

**Mathematics**

- People who traveled overland usually had wagons measuring about 4' x 10'. Goods were piled 2'-4' high, with a narrow aisle down the center. Have students measure out this space on the classroom floor and discuss what they could fit in so small a space.
- Tell students that a wagon carrying more than 2,000 pounds might not make it to California from Missouri. Ask students to list what they think Luzena Wilson (page 4) took in her wagon, estimate the weight of each item, then find the total. Students may have to discard items to stay within the weight limit. What criteria will they use to determine what to eliminate?
- Finding gold was at best a long shot. People who were willing to take this risk often enjoyed games of chance in their spare time. Have your students play the Chinese miners' game of Fan Tan, described on page 20. Use this activity as an exercise in probability.

**Science**

- Have students find out how gold is formed in the earth. Then have them look for other gold-mining areas in the world. Which writers might have had some knowledge of gold mining from their place of origin?
- The Chinese workers who helped to build the railroads were often healthier than other workers. Ask students to discuss which elements of Chinese culture might have contributed to better health. (Boiling water for tea killed germs in the water. Bathing also removed germs; many Americans and Europeans did not bathe.)
- What foods were available to emigrants who traveled overland to California? Have students investigate the plants and animals gold-seekers might have found to eat on the trail. Students might enjoy reading the authentic trail recipe found on page 19.

**Language Arts**

- Ask students to assume the identity of one of the writers. As this person, have them write a letter or series of letters to someone "back home" describing his or her experiences.
- Divide students into small groups and assign each group several of the writers in this collection. Ask them to role-play a meeting of their writers. What would they have to say to each other? What questions might they ask each other? What did they have in common?
- Keeping a journal was an important part of the emigrant experience 150 years ago. Ask your students to create a Gold Rush journal. You might

have them concentrate on common themes for these gold-seekers, such as entering a new culture or dealing with profound disappointment.

**Fine Arts**

- Journals of the Gold Rush often included sketches of things the writers saw. Have students illustrate the stories told by these writers. Encourage students to research historical details to help in their drawing. Students might also create a mural of the many voices from the Gold Rush.
- The Gold Rush contributed a number of songs to American folk culture—"Clementine" is one of the best known. Have students look for other music of the period. They can perform selections or make a tape recording to play for the class.