



CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH LESSON PLAN

OBJECTIVES:

Students will analyze and interpret the lyrics of the Gold Rush song, *Oh, California!* While doing so, students will connect the lyrics of the song with its historical context. Finally, students will illustrate the song and provide support for their illustration.

STANDARDS:

History-Social Science 4.3.2

History-Social Science 4.3.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R5

TIME:

45-60 Minutes

MATERIALS PROVIDED:

Oh, California! Lyrics Handout

California Gold Rush Worksheets (A & B)

Teacher Information Handout

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS NEEDED:

Pencils/Pens

Coloring Supplies

Dictionaries (optional)

Musical recording of *Oh, California!*

DIRECTIONS:

1. Review the provided background information on the California Gold Rush and the song, *Oh, California!* in the **Teacher Information Handout**.
2. Use the *Oh, California!* **Lyrics Handout** to read the song together or individually. On the handout, have the students annotate the song using the following guidelines:
 - a. Put a circle around every location/city/state name you find.
 - b. Put a box around every mention of gold you find.
 - c. Underline any word or phrase you do not know or find confusing.
3. Students should use a dictionary to define any words they do not know.
4. After students have annotated the song and defined their underlined words, read the song again as a class. Together or independently, students should answer the questions that accompany each verse on the *Oh, California!* **Lyrics Handout**.
5. Have students complete **Worksheet A** (suggested for younger students or abbreviated lesson) or **Worksheet B** (suggested for older students or a longer lesson.)

CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH TEACHER INFORMATION

CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On January 24, 1848, James Marshall discovered gold in California. This discovery was the beginning of the California Gold Rush – an event that not only helped define California, but the entire nation. Marshall made this discovery in Coloma, California, while working at a saw mill owned by John Sutter. News of this discovery was spread by a local merchant, Sam Brannan. Shortly after Marshall’s discovery, Brannan traveled to San Francisco and spread the news that gold had been found on the American River. The Gold Rush had begun.

Once news of gold in California spread, miners flocked to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. These “forty-niners” were mostly unmarried men who set out to California to strike it rich quickly. They came from all over the United States and from all over the world. Mining was extremely difficult work, and most miners discovered that their dreams of making a quick fortune were unfounded. Merchants were often more successful in making a fortune during the Gold Rush than the miners were.

The flood of newcomers to California quickly sparked the emergence of new cities and towns. These makeshift towns usually included stores, theatres, and saloons, all eager for business from miners. The cities of San Francisco, Sacramento, and Stockton all grew rapidly during this time. In 1850 San Francisco had a population of 34,776; by 1870 this would grow to 149,473 people. Not only San Francisco, but all of California experienced this kind of growth during the Gold Rush. California grew from a state with less than 20,000 people in 1846 to a state of 200,000 by the end of the 1850s. This influx of people from the rest of the United States, as well as from countries such as China, Mexico, and Australia, transformed California into the diverse state it is today. This diversity is one of the greatest legacies of the California Gold Rush.

***OH, CALIFORNIA!* BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Oh, California! was one of the most popular songs of the Gold Rush. The melody was originally written by Stephen Foster for the song *Oh, Susannah!* John Nichols, who travelled to California around the time of the Gold Rush, changed the lyrics and title to what you see today. *Oh, California!* soon became popular with miners who identified with the lyrics of the song.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

California Historical Society. *History through the Collections Series: The California Gold Rush*. Written by Diane Barklay and others. San Francisco: California Historical Society.

The Songs of the Gold Rush. Edited by Richard A. Dwyer, Richard E. Lingenfelter, and David Cohen. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

Rohrbough, Malcolm. “No Boy’s Play: Migration and Settlement in Early Gold Rush California.” *Rooted in Barbarous Soil: People, Culture, and Community in Gold Rush California*. Edited by Kevin Starr and Richard J. Orsi, 25-43. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.

OH, CALIFORNIA! HANDOUT

OH, CALIFORNIA! LYRICS

I come from Salem City with a washbowl on my knee,
I'm going to California the gold dust for to see.
It rained all night the day I left, the weather it was dry,
The sun so hot I froze to death, oh brother, don't you
cry.

*Oh, California, that's the land for me,
I'm bound for San Francisco with my washowl on my knee.*

I jumped aboard the largest ship
And traveled on the sea,
And everytime I thought of home,
I wished it wasn't me!
The vessel reared like any horse
That had of oats a wealth,
I found it wouldn't throw me,
So I thought I'd throw myself!

*Oh, California! that's the land for me,
I'm bound for San Francisco with my washbowl on my knee.*

I thought of all the pleasant times
We've had together there,
And I thought I ought to cry a bit,
But I could not find a tear.
The pilot's bread was in my mouth,
The gold dust in my eye,
And though I'm going far away,
Dear brother, don't you cry.

*Oh, California, that the land for me,
I'm bound for San Francisco with my washbowl on my knee.*

I soon shall be in 'Frisco and there I'll look around,
And when I see the golden lumps there,
I'll pick them off the ground.
I'll scrape the mountains clean,
My boys, I'll drain the rivers dry,
A pocketful of rocks bring home, so brothers,
Don't you cry.

*Oh, California, that's the land for me,
I'm bound for San Francisco with my washbowl on my knee.*

OH, CALIFORNIA! QUESTIONS

Where is the narrator going? what is the weather like as he leaves Salem City?

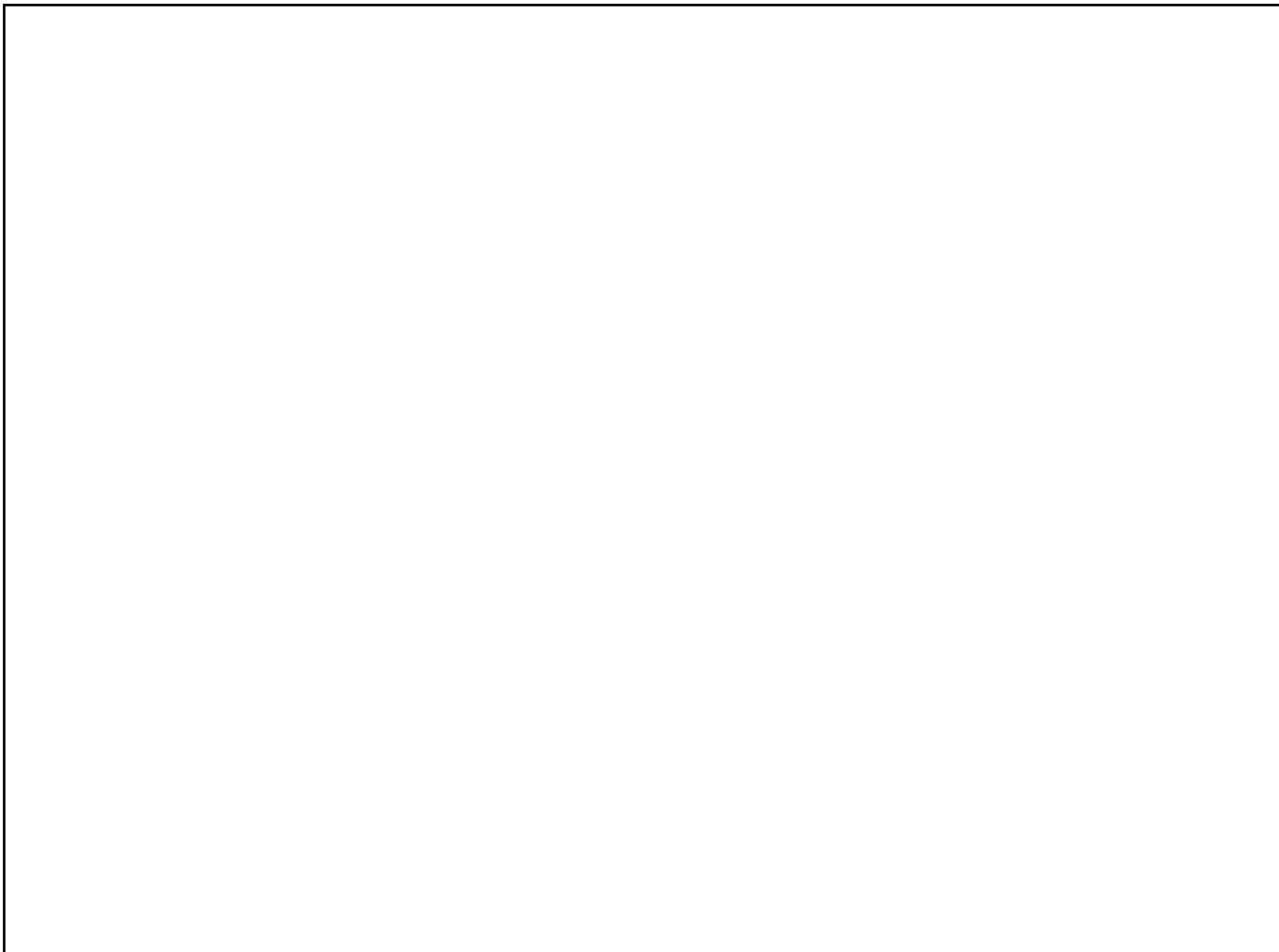
What mode of transportation does the narrator use to get to California?

How does the narrator feel about his journey? Explain your answer.

What does the narrator imagine he will do once he arrives in "Frisco?"

CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH WORKSHEET A

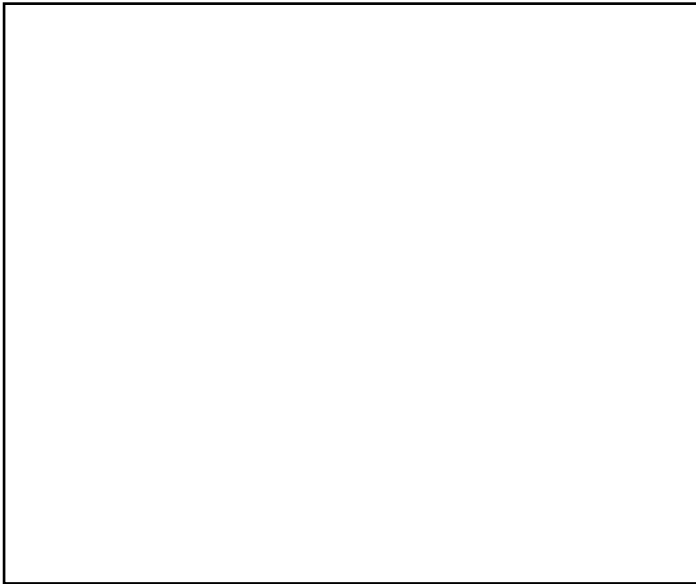
INSTRUCTIONS: Draw a picture that illustrates one of the verses from *Oh, California!* In the space below, tell what number verse you chose, and write one sentence describing what is happening in your picture.



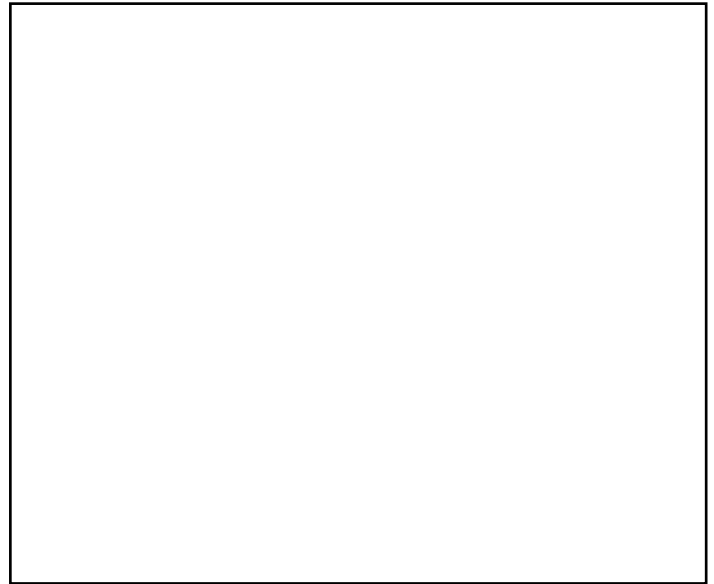
CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH WORKSHEET B

INSTRUCTIONS: Draw a picture for each verse of *Oh, California!* In the spaces below the illustration, write down which line(s) of the song you are illustrating.

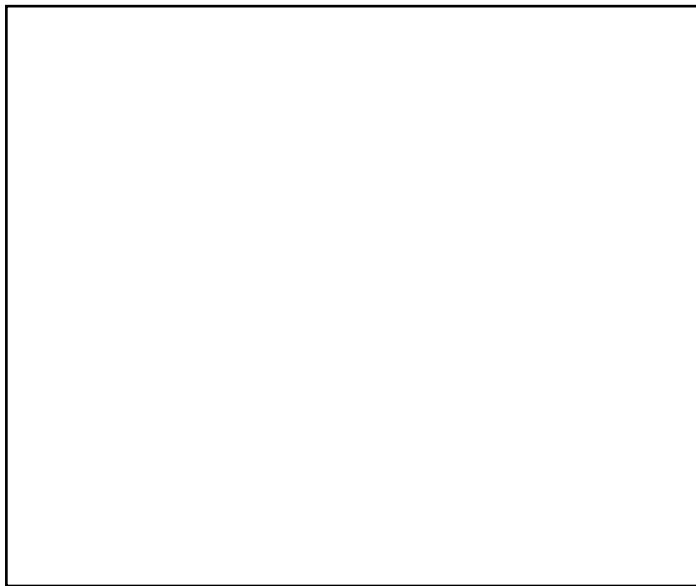
VERSE 1:



VERSE 2:



VERSE 3:



VERSE 4:

