

## **BOOM TOWN/CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH**

### **Overview:**

Young children should begin to learn about the concept of value and why some items are considered more valuable than others are. These concepts relate to a geographical understanding of natural resources and the reasons why people work very hard to extract resources, such as during the California gold rush. This lesson has students go through a simulation to learn about value, abundance, and scarcity and asks them to consider the things that they would be willing to work very hard for.

### **Connections to the Curriculum:**

Geography, history, economics

### **Materials Required:**

- Computer with Internet access
- Google Earth: prepare land and sea routes ahead of time
- Construction paper or crayons

### **Objectives:**

Students will

- discuss the latest fad or popular item for kids their age;
- perform a simple simulation demonstrating the concepts of value, abundance, and scarcity;
- use Google Earth to view the land and sea routes for the California gold rush, and discuss what journeys might have been like;
- view pictures of miners and mining facilities during the California gold rush, and discuss whether the work looks easy or difficult;
- list or draw the things they would be willing to work very hard for; and
- write stories or draw pictures of themselves working very hard for one of these things.

### **Opening:**

Ask students to name items that kids their age are trading today. Discuss these questions with the class:

- Why do you like these objects?
- What would happen if you found out that your best friend had the one you really wanted?
- What if you learned there was a big room full of these things on the other side of the school?

### **Whole Group Activity: What do you value?**

- Cut out small strips of construction paper, or use different colored blocks, crayons, or other items. Make the colors available in different levels of abundance (e.g., yellow can be the most scarce, red can be the most abundant, and the others can fall in-between those two).
- Distribute the items at random throughout the class so that each student has the same number of items in varied colors. (Items are NOT evenly distributed by color!)
- Ask students to trade with one another to try to get one item of each color. You can have students trade within the whole class or within smaller groups.
- Stop the activity after about ten minutes. Discuss the trading process with the class. Which colors were the easiest to get? Which were the hardest? Why do they think this was the case?

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Explain to students that, as they have learned from this activity, things that are less abundant tend to be more valuable. Can they think of any other things that are very valuable because they're hard to get? What about the trading card they discussed at the beginning of this lesson? Are some types of this item (e.g., a particular trading card) more valuable than others?

Ask students if they know anything about gold. What do people use gold for? Is it valuable? Why do people like gold?

Tell the class that about 150 years ago, many people traveled a long distance from the eastern United States to California when they learned that gold had been discovered in the northern California mountains.

Use Google Earth to show them the gold rush land and sea routes. Make sure they realize that the wagon trail involved crossing mountains. Use the suggested links to plot route: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldrush/> or <http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/journey.html>

Ask students what they think it might have been like to have traveled from the East Coast to California during the gold rush. Do they think it would have been a difficult journey? Why do they think so many people left their homes in search of gold?

Discuss the idea of gold as a valuable commodity that, for those fortunate enough to find it in California, could make people rich. Ask students why they think people are willing to do difficult things in order to become wealthy.

Have students look at gold rush pictures online to see examples of miners working hard to find gold in California. Ask the students to describe what the workers are doing and to explain whether the work looks easy or difficult. Suggested links: <http://www.malakoff.com/goldcountry/images.htm> and [http://www.nps.gov/cali/historyculture/gold\\_rush2.htm](http://www.nps.gov/cali/historyculture/gold_rush2.htm)

### **Closing:**

Use Google Earth to show students the gold rush region of California. Tell them that Native Americans already lived in this region when the miners arrived. What impacts do students think the mining activities would have had on the people, animals, and plants of this region?

### **Suggested Student Assessment:**

Have students make lists or draw pictures of the things for which they would be willing to make long, difficult journeys or work very hard. Make sure students realize that these don't have to be material objects but can also be nonmaterial things such as getting good grades, being in good shape, or having the opportunity to explore a new place. Have them write stories or draw pictures of themselves doing this hard work and obtaining the things they desire. Have students share their stories or drawings with the class, and compare their ideas. Pose these questions to the class:

- Why do you value these things, and why would you be willing to work so hard for them?
- Do you think you will always value these things, or might they go out of style?
- What would happen if everyone else were trying to get these things at the same time?