



mining in colorado and

A HISTORY LESSON IN 10 PAGES OR LESS

the colorado gold rush



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The City of Loveland Cultural Services Department strives to enrich lives and connect our community through diverse arts and history experiences.

The Loveland Museum has created a series of quick lessons designed to provide basics on a topic important to our local history. These lessons have been compiled by staff and volunteers at the Loveland Museum. Suggested activities give ideas for hands-on learning and are not intended to be all-inclusive. Other resource links may also be provided in some sections for additional online learning.

Introduction

Colorado Gold Rush

Explorer Zebulon Pike had heard reports of gold in the South Park, Colorado area as early as 1807. Decades later, in the 1850s, the first reports of gold discovery in Colorado with far-reaching consequences came from Ralston Creek. In 1858, prospectors returned to the spot, found more gold and the “rush” began. Discoveries of gold were found in more of the rivers near Denver and traced back to the Rocky Mountains. As the word of discovery spread, additional expeditions into the mountains were formed.

In the spring of 1859, it was said that of the 100,000 gold seekers who set out from Missouri River, only about 50,000 of them reached the mountains and, shortly after arriving at Cherry Creek, half returned home discouraged.

Exaggerated rumors prompted a great migration to Pike's Peak, even though gold in paying quantities did not exist there. New gold discoveries west of Denver saved the rush. In January 1859, George A. Jackson discovered placer deposits of gold near present day Idaho Springs. His was the richest placer yet discovered. In May 1859, John H. Gregory discovered a rich lode of gold bearing quartz near the site of present day Central City. This was the first lode gold found in the region.



ACTIVITY ONE

Mapping Mining Camps

Along with the discovery of gold and its recovery, came the development of mining camps all over the Territory of Colorado, many of which later became cities. The mining camps were usually isolated and had to become self-sufficient. The miner relied on luck and store-purchased goods and equipment. A principal characteristic of mining camps was the quick appearance of "ready cash", in the form of gold dust. "Easy come, easy go" was the motto. Some miners possessed a crudeness and roughness along with a gambling nature that led to lawlessness, but most were generous and kind.

This a map of Colorado. On your map, mark these mining camps that later became Colorado cities. If you can't print the map, just use a blank sheet of paper. Colorado is shaped the same as a piece of paper and makes mapping easy!

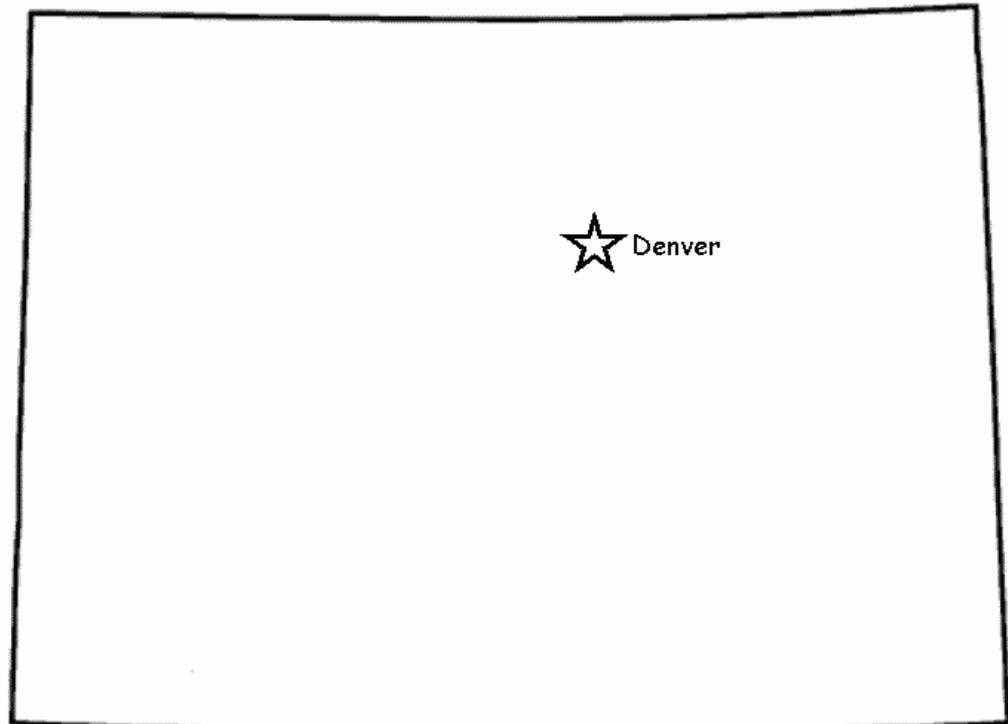
Mining Towns:

- Cripple Creek
- Fairplay
- Central City
- Telluride
- Steamboat Springs
- Leadville
- Breckenridge
- Idaho Springs

Additional challenge:

Map the rivers and creeks that flow near most of these camps.

Colorado



ACTIVITY TWO

Ways to Mine for Gold

Learn and talk about the ways to mine for gold and silver.

Parent or educator note: Amazon® has great kits available for both panning and digging ore out from a stone. If purchasing these kits is not feasible, think about how you can mimic the activity of panning with rocks, soil and a plastic container.

Panning- Of all the contraptions designed to help separate gold from the earth and dirt, the most popular was the lowly pan. The pan was usually made of tin or iron. It was flat-bottomed with gently slanting sides. The miner first filled it with dirt and then began swirling it around under water. Next the miner agitated the pan so the mud and sand could be washed over the edge of the pan while particles of gold, if present, would sink to the bottom. The pan was simple to use and versatile, but panning meant hours of squatting in ice-cold water, and rotating the pan until arms were numb. Panning was slow, hard work, so means were devised to increase the per-man-per-day output.



Sluice- The rocker, the long tom, and the sluice-box all served the purpose of increased output. The rocker was somewhat like a child's cradle. While one man shoveled in the debris, another added the water and rocked the cradle back and forth. The long tom was an inclined trough or chute with a screen in the bottom. It was wider at the bottom than at the top, and had a small stream of water that flowed over it. The sluice-box was a long trough, eight to twelve inches wide and six to ten inches deep. On the bottom were removable cleats to catch the gold particles as strong streams of water washed the gravel along. Each of these methods depended on a good supply of water, and the fact that the heavy particles of gold would gravitate to the bottom as the water loosened them from the mud, dirt, and rocks.



Digging and drilling- Lodes were larger ores of gold that were stuck inside rock formations and lode mining was conducted differently. It required more labor and equipment. Miners obtained the ore by digging around the rock and blasting tunnels to access more ore. Hand or machine drills, blasting powders and high explosives were used. As work progressed, miners braced the sides of the mines with timber. At depths of two hundred feet or more, a steam engine and hoists were used to help remove the rock and ore.



Learn and talk about the life of a miner by learning some of the vocabulary below.

Then, pretend that you are a miner.

You left your family, headed west and settled in a small mining camp in Colorado. You want to write a letter home to let your family know about your life and if you have struck it rich or not! Read through the vocabulary and write your letter using some of the terms.

Some things to think about for your letter:

What is the name of the camp you are in?

What methods or tools do you use to search for gold or silver?

What are the living conditions like?

What are the challenges?

What makes you keep looking for gold?

Argonaut- a person in search of gold

Bonanza- the discovery of an exceptionally rich vein of gold or silver

Boom Town- a town that grew fast as the result of mining

Borrasca- an unproductive mine or claim; opposite of a bonanza

Claim- a parcel of land in a gold field that a person was legally entitled to mine because he had staked it out and recorded his title

Claim Jumping- stealing someone else's mining property (usually after it had been staked out, but before it had been officially recorded)

Giant Powder- a miner's expression for dynamite

Hard Rock- ore that could be removed only by blasting, as opposed to with hand tools

Lode- a clearly defined vein of rich ore

Miner's Pan or Gold Pan- miner's most essential piece of equipment used to gather dirt, water and ore. The miner would swirl and shake the pan until materials were stratified, or sorted, by weight.

Mother Lode- a huge deposit of gold running through quartz in the Sierra Nevada foothills. It was the source of placer gold.

Muck- the debris left after blasting hard rock

Pickaxe or Hand Pick- a tool used by miners to break up rocks and hard soils by hand

Placer- a deposit of sand, dirt or clay, often in a stream bed, containing fine particles of gold or silver

Poke- a bag used to carry money or gold

Pyrite- fool's gold; a mineral composed of silicon and oxygen that is often mistaken for real gold

Shaft- a vertical or inclined excavation, usually a mine's main entrance leading to the tunnels where the ore was dug

Sluice- a wooden trough for washing placer gold

Toplander- an aboveground worker at a mine

Turned house- a mine tunnel that took a sudden change in direction

Winze- a passageway usually connecting two tunnels at different levels

ACTIVITY FOUR

Learn More

Mining in Colorado in the 1860s was founded on gold, but silver gradually began to gain significance. In 1864, silver was found near Georgetown, and the 1870s became the silver decade. Georgetown became Colorado's first "Silver Queen", but the most exciting silver mining district was Leadville. There, Horace Tabor made his first million dollars and others made thousands of dollars. During the twentieth century, mining focused on non-precious minerals. Molybdenum became the state's most valuable mineral from 1924 to 1946. It is still mined at Climax, Colorado. Coal production reached an all-time high in 1943, but after World War II there was a greater demand for oil and gas. In the late 1940s, uranium became the important element because of its use in atomic energy. Today in the US, Colorado is among the top three producers of molybdenum, vanadium, gold, uranium, zinc, coal, oil, natural gas and copper. The only mine in Colorado that continues to produce gold is located near Cripple Creek, outside of Colorado Springs.

Look at some additional resources to learn more about mining in Colorado.

History Colorado:

<https://www.historycolorado.org/lesson-plans>

<https://www.historycolorado.org/hands-history-home>

<https://www.historycolorado.org/mining-industry-colorado>

Western Museum of Mining and Industry: <https://www.wmmi.org/>

National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum : <https://mininghalloffame.org/>

Colorado School of Mines– Museum; <https://www.mines.edu/museumofearthscience/>

