

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# California Gold Rush

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Notes

In 1848, while building a sawmill called Sutter's Mill in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, James W. Marshall struck gold. After reporting the gold flecks he found in the bed of The American River, news spread quickly so did gold fever. All across America, especially in the eastern and southern US, groups of mostly young men set out on a long and dangerous journey to Northern California. Their goal was to get rich quick.

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2. b'

Notes

Some prospectors made the journey by land in covered wagons and on horseback. Others went by sea, crossing the Isthmus of Panama or going all the way around South America. In each case, the journey took months, and many died before they made it to California. Those who did make it arrived by the thousand and became known as forty-niners named after the year they began arriving. Prospectors who made it to California settled in mining camps on land around the river and near goldfields to begin their search. Americans weren't the only ones who caught gold fever. Prospectors came from Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Australia, settling in the same camps and mining alongside Americans.

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3. b'

Most prospectors used a technique called panning to extract gold from silt found in placers, or mineral deposits at the bends of a river. They swirled the soil in a pan with water to separate the denser gold. Others used a pickaxe and shovel. Some of the earliest prospectors became rich, but as more and more prospectors arrived, gold became scarce quickly.

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Life as a forty-niner was tough. Mining was extremely hard work that had little payoff for most of the prospectors. Mining camps were dangerous due to a lack of sanitation, housing, and law enforcement. Crime and violence was commonplace, and tensions were high as fewer and fewer prospectors found any gold at all. Food, clothing and other goods were extremely scarce and expensive.

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4. b'

With a growing population, California became a state in 1850. By this time, more than 80,000 White American miners had settled in the northern part of the state. With very little gold left and competition at an all-time high, American miners looked for someone to blame. They turned their attention to foreign prospectors\xe2\x80\x94at first, Latin Americans, and later, Chinese miners.

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In an effort to suppress competition, White settlers convinced the newly elected state legislature to enact the Foreign Miners\xe2\x80\x99 Tax. This monthly tax, levied against all non-citizens, made life difficult for foreign miners. It made living in California too expensive and drove many out of the state. Alongside this tax, American miners grew increasingly violent toward California\xe2\x80\x99s Native American population as miners spread across the region in search for more gold.

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By 1855, the California Gold Rush was over. Very few prospectors had become rich, and many of those who did spent and gambled their fortunes away. The largest fortunes were earned by those who profited off of miners, like hotel and restaurant owners and sellers of mining equipment. With the majority of easy-to-find gold gone, only big businesses with advanced technology could succeed.

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By the end of the California Gold Rush, California had become a state and San Francisco had grown from a village of 800 people to a booming city with a population over 300,000. 80 percent of California's Native American population had been wiped out by disease, starvation, and violence. Despite efforts to drive out immigrants, the city remained more diverse than most other places in the US. Over the next few decades, more gold and silver rushes drew prospectors to Colorado, Idaho, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Alaska.

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