

Topic: Gold Rush

Historical Thinking Skills Assessed: Sourcing, Contextualizing

Grade Level: Middle

National History Standards

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)

Standard 2: How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and lead towards regional tensions.

Using the Item: The question assesses students' abilities to use sourcing and contextualizing to determine the subject of the source.

Background: On January 24, 1848, James Marshall discovered gold in a stream at Sutter's Mill, California. As news spread of the find, settlers from the eastern United States and all over the world flooded into the California gold fields in search of their fortunes. By the end of 1849, the population of California had increased tenfold, from about 15,000 to more than 150,000. Over the next 10 years, miners extracted \$550 million worth of gold, although most miners never made a major strike. Contrary to the stereotypical image of the white bearded male panning for gold, women and children, African Americans, Mormons, Chinese, Hawaiians, Hispanics, Australians, French, and many other groups made the journey to California during this period to seek their fortune.

Sources:

American History, s.v. "California gold rush." Accessed June 19, 2013. <http://americanhistory.abc-clio.com/>

"California Gold Rush (1848-1858)." *Aspiration, Acculturation, and Impact: Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930.* Harvard University Library Open Collections Program. Accessed 10/10/14. <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/goldrush.html>

"The Gold Rush of 1849." History Channel. Accessed 10/10/14. <http://www.history.com/topics/gold-rush-of-1849>

Source

The ____ excitement spread like wildfire, even out to our log cabin in the prairie, and as we had almost nothing to lose, and we might gain a fortune, we early caught the fever. My husband grew enthusiastic and wanted to start immediately, but I would not be left behind. I thought where he could go I could, and where I went I could take my two little toddling babies. Mother-like, my first thought was of my children. I little realized then the task I had undertaken. If I had, I think I should still be in my log cabin in Missouri. But when we talked it all over, it sounded like such a small task to go out to California, and once there fortune, of course, would come to us.

Source: Wilson, Luzena. *Luzena Stanley Wilson, '49er; Memories Recalled Years Later for Her Daughter Correnah Wilson Wright*. Mills College, California: The Eucalyptus Press, 1937. American Memory, Library of Congress. Accessed 9/30/14. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/calbk:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(calbk089div2\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/calbk:@field(DOCID+@lit(calbk089div2)))

Which of the following words would most likely fill the blank at the beginning of the source?

- A. Silver (1)
- B. Land (0)
- C. Gold (4)** [answer cue]
- D. Oil (2)

Explanation

Although there was a silver rush, “A” is not correct because California was never a major silver producing state, and silver had been heavily devalued by the time of this source’s creation. Answer “B” is unlikely to be the answer since cheap land was abundantly available across the west at this point in American history. Answer “C” is the best response because the date of the source is within the time period of gold mining in California, and the term “49er” is in the source title. Answer “D” may have some merit in that oil was discovered in the late nineteenth century in California, but it was not seen as especially valuable until the invention of the automobile years later made it a major fuel source. **[Sourcing, Contextualizing]**

HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Directions: Analyze the source below, and circle the response that best answers the question.

Source

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