



6 The Gold Rush

1 Synopsis

In this video, we learn about John Sutter and the California Gold Rush of 1849. Sutter was in the process of building an agricultural empire in California when gold was discovered in a river on his property in 1848. As a result of the discovery, and the U.S. president's official announcement of it in Congress, hundreds of thousands of young men from all over the U.S. traveled to California in the hope of becoming rich. However, Sutter, who could have made a lot of money from the gold rush, refused to change his original plans. In response, the miners destroyed his property and crops. Sutter eventually left California in 1850 a ruined man.
Length of video: 4:10 min

2 Target Language

Grammar: the passive

Vocabulary: words to talk about the 1848 California Gold Rush

Language Points: *a handful, have no idea, another matter entirely, in the way of*

3 Procedural Notes

A Before you watch

As a class. Focus students' attention on the picture on the worksheet or freeze the video at the frame of the man and his mule [02:55]. Ask students to say what they can see in the picture (A man, a mule, and rocks. The mule has a pack.).

In groups. Give the students a few minutes to discuss the questions. Direct them to speculate about the place (where he is), the year (what year it is), and what he is doing. When they are ready, ask groups to call out their ideas. Write some on the board. If there are any correct answers on the board, say which ones they are. Then, teach *gold rush* (a period in the past when a lot of people went to a place where gold had been discovered in order to become rich) and *gold miner* (someone whose job is to dig gold from the ground). Also teach *gold fever* (the feeling of excitement at the idea of becoming rich that makes people join a gold rush).

B While you watch

1 As a class. Nominate students to read the numbers in 1–7 and, if necessary, review the correct way to read years and large numbers. They may need help with 49er (forty-niner). Play the video. Tell the class to shout *Stop!*

whenever they hear one of the numbers. Stop the video each time a number is heard, then have students look for the matching answer. Elicit or explain the meaning of *cattle* (cows kept by farmers) and *discovered* (found) as they come up.

Answer key: 1 b 2 f 3 a 4 g 5 e 6 c 7 d

2 As a class. Nominate students to read aloud the sentences and explain or elicit the meanings of these words:

immigrant (n.) – someone who comes to live in a country from another country

mine (n.) – a large hole or tunnel in the ground from which people take coal, gold, etc.

sawmill (n.) – a building where wood is cut into boards using machines

empire (n.) – a large powerful group of companies ruled by one person or company

fort (n.) – a strong building with a high wall around it

In pairs. Ask students to read the sentences and try to answer the questions based on their first viewing of the video. Then, play the entire video again and ask the pairs of students to listen for the correct answers as they go along.

Answer key: 1 F (John Sutter was a Swiss immigrant in California.) 2 F (When he arrived in California, he built a fort.) 3 F (In 1848 Sutter sent James Marshall with a group of men to build a sawmill near the American River.) 4 T 5 T 6 F (Sutter wanted an agricultural empire.) 7 T

As a class. Check the answers as a class. Encourage students to correct the false statements.

C After you watch

1 In groups. Have students form groups of three to four students. Give each group one of the groups of items to write an answer for. If you have more than three groups, two or more groups can work on the same answer. After five minutes, have a representative from each group write their answer on the board. Check the answers and correct any mistakes or suggest improvements.



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Possible answers: **1** John Sutter went to California to build an agricultural empire. However, gold was found there and so the region was hit by “gold fever.” Sutter left the state a disillusioned man.

2 James Marshall and about 20 men went to the American River to build a sawmill. When it was nearly complete, Marshall saw something shiny. It was a lump of gold that was about half the size and shape of a pea. **3** U.S. President James Polk announced the discovery of gold. This started the California gold rush in 1849 and gave “the 49ers” their name.

4 The 49ers took Sutter’s fort apart and used it for building materials. This was the start of the collapse of Sutter’s empire, and this was followed by Sutter’s departure.

2 As a class. Elicit or remind students of the active and passive voices. Write these sentences on the board:

*James Marshall discovered gold in 1848.
Gold was discovered in 1848 (by James Marshall).*

We use the passive when we don’t know who did the action, or we don’t feel that it is important information.

Individuals. Ask the students to complete the exercise and then compare their answers in pairs, discussing any differences. Nominate students to write the correct sentences on the board.

Answer key: **2** The discovery was announced in Congress (by President Polk). **3** The news was sent to every village and town (by telegraph). **4** The miners were called “49ers” (by the people). **5** Sutter’s fort was destroyed (by the miners).

As a class. Practice the *Tell a different story* technique (see *Techniques for teaching with video* in the DVD booklet). Show the segment [2:50–3:18] of the video with the 49er leading his mule through the mountains.

In groups. Ask students to write a short story about what this man and his animal are doing. Encourage them to be as silly as possible. Circulate and help with ideas and language as necessary.

As a class. Nominate a few students to share their group’s story. Then, have the class vote on the best story.

aloud. After each sentence is read, tell the class to circle their answer.

In pairs. Ask students to check their answers with a partner. Call on pairs to give their answers.

Answer key: 1 b 2 a 3 a 4 a

In groups. Divide the class into groups and give each group a language point and ask them to write another example sentence. Circulate and give help as necessary, then nominate students to write their sentences on the board. Here are some ideas you can help out with if they are stuck:

They had no idea the concert started at 8:00, so they arrived late.

*Only a handful of people have read my new novel.
I like my co-workers, but my boss is another matter entirely.*

Now that I have a new bicycle, I don’t use my car, and it’s just in the way.

E Your Viewpoint

In groups. Nominate students to read the questions aloud and check to be sure that everybody understands them. Give students time to discuss the questions in groups. While the groups are working, circulate and help with vocabulary as necessary.

As a class. Discuss students’ answers. Nominate a few students to share the arguments and points that their group brought forward. Take a vote on the whole class’s opinion. Would they join the gold rush or not? Have students call out answers in response to the questions. Write ideas on the board. Add your own ideas and explain as necessary. Nominate a few students to share things their group discussed with regard to question 4. Take a vote from the class as to whether they agree or disagree with the statement *Money can buy happiness*.

A few examples you could discuss:

Howard Hughes, the aviation pioneer featured in the Leonardo di Caprio movie *The Aviator*, was very rich, but he died alone and unhappy. On the other hand, Bill Gates seems to be pretty happy. But would he be equally happy even if he weren’t rich?

In some countries very poor people can’t afford good medical care. Obviously, they would be happier if they had enough money to pay doctors’ bills.

D Language Points

As a class. Have students take turns reading sentences



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4 Video Script

Presenter:

In 1848, when gold was discovered in California, John Sutter was already one of the wealthiest people in the state. By 1850, he was a ruined man. Sutter was a Swiss immigrant who came to California in 1839, intent on building his own private empire. At that time, the state was a distant outpost that only a handful of Americans had seen. San Francisco had just a few hundred residents. Sutter built a fort. Soon he had 12,000 head of cattle and hundreds of workers. By the mid-1840s, more and more Americans were trickling into California by wagon and ship. Sutter welcomed the newcomers. He saw them as subjects for his new kingdom. But he had no idea that the trickle would become a flood. A deluge of humanity that would destroy his dream. At the beginning of 1848, Sutter sent James Marshall and about 20 men to the American River to build a sawmill. It was nearly complete when a glint of something caught Marshall's eye. Later, he wrote, "I reached my hand down and picked it up. It made my heart thump, for I was certain it was gold. The piece was about half the size and shape of a pea. Then I saw another." By the end of the year, whispers of a gold strike had drifted eastward across the country. But few Easterners believed it, until President James

Polk made a statement to Congress on December 5th, 1848. The discovery, he declared, was a fact. Within days, gold fever descended on the country. The news was telegraphed to every village, to every town. Hundreds of thousands of people, almost all of them men, began to prepare for the epic journey west. They sold possessions, mortgaged farms, borrowed money, banded together with others from their towns to form joint stock companies. They said their goodbyes and streamed west. Thousands of young adventurers, willing to take a chance on gold. A year of pain in return for a lifetime of riches. They were called '49ers, because they left home in 1849. When they would return was another matter entirely. By early 1849, gold fever was an epidemic. By the end of 1850, Sutter's grand empire had completely collapsed. Sutter did not have gold fever. He wanted an agricultural empire, and refused to alter his vision. In the new California, he was simply in the way. The '49ers trampled his crops and tore down his fort for the building materials. Disillusioned, he eventually left the state. The man who had the best opportunity to capitalize on the discovery of gold never even tried.