

# **Teacher's Guide**

## **Primary Sources in the Classroom: A Gold Rush Perspective**

Enduring Understandings

The Klondike Gold Rush was a premiere event that impacted Alaska's history, Native people, and economy. The Gold Rush would fire the imaginations of people throughout the world, and would help lure future generations of people to Alaska. The Gold Rush drew outsiders into a land that was not only misunderstood, but also sometimes painfully unforgiving. About 100,000 people set out for the Klondike gold fields. Less than half that number actually made it to Dawson, and only a few hundred found enough gold to be able to classify themselves as rich.

Estimated Time:

One-two class periods

Materials needed:

Access to the following website: <http://www.library.state.ak.us/goldrush>  
The Alaska Rich Mining Project Committee developed this site. Its goal is to "make archival, library, and museum materials more accessible to users throughout the state and to assist teachers in using primary source materials in the classroom." The website is broken down into the following sections: The Discovery of Gold, Traveling to the Gold Fields, Gold Mining, Daily Life, Our Legacy, The Edgren Saga, Gold Rush Stories, Alaska Gold Lode, Teacher's Guide, Links. Almost every section contains a short thematic description, and includes

primary sources and probing questions for students to consider prior to and while examining the primary sources. One special gem in this collection is the "Alaska Gold Lode," which allows you to browse Gold Rush primary sources by theme.

### Miner's Checklist

The following materials are suggested, and can be adapted to use with this activity, or for any other primary source assignment.

Document analysis sheet developed by the National Archives

Photo analysis sheet developed by the National Archives

Map of the Chilkoot and White Passes

### Lesson Plan:

Introduction: Using primary sources in the classroom can help students develop and hone their historical inquiry and analytical abilities, and teach them to use documents and historical records to help support or refute a particular interpretation of an event. This lesson provides the teacher with some resources to help explain how primary resources can be used in the classroom. It also includes a straightforward lesson that engages students in the use of primary resources associated with the Klondike Gold Rush. Students will explore primary resources within a website developed by the Alaska Rich Mining Project Committee.

A good site that explains the rationale for using primary sources in the classroom, and how to develop classroom activities can be found at the following site: <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/fw.html> This site offers suggestions for using primary sources in the classroom, and a discussion on how historians use these sources to interpret the past. The teacher will also find information for designing effective primary-source-based lessons and activities.

Explain to the students that the Klondike Gold Rush was an important event in the history of Alaska. In the late 1800s, many people in the United States were in the grips of an economic "panic" and when word came back that gold had been discovered in the Klondike, many were all too eager, despite their inexperience, to strike out for the gold fields. Many who set out for the gold fields had no idea what to bring on the journey. Of the 100,000 who set out for the gold fields, less than half reached Dawson. This activity will help students understand a question many of the stampeder had to contend with, mainly what should they bring on a journey. Many miners had no idea what to expect, or what they would need once they arrived in Alaska. Most stampeder wound up in Dyea or Skagway to begin the 33-mile march up Chilkoot Pass, or White Pass, which was a shorter hike, to Lake Bennett. At Lake Bennett, the stampeder would then build a boat for the 500-mile trip down the Yukon to Dawson.

Begin the lesson by placing students in teams of two. Ask them to draw up a list of 20 essential items they would have to bring to survive one year as a Gold Rush stampeder. They should complete the top portion of the Miner's Checklist. They will have to make the arduous journey up Chilkoot Pass with a thousand or more pounds of supplies. Once across the pass, they will continue the march to Lake Bennett where they will have to build a boat for the final trip down the Yukon to Dawson. They will have to survive the rain, the mosquitoes, and temperatures that can dip to 50 or 60 below zero.

After the students have created their lists, tell them they will now investigate how closely their decision on what supplies to bring matches what was advised by a number of sources connected with the Klondike Gold Rush. Have the students go to the following website: <http://www.library.state.ak.us/goldrush> Click on the section titled "Traveling to the Gold Fields," and then on the link titled "What do I need for a trip to the gold fields?" Ask the students to examine the following primary sources: Governor's letter 1886, J.C. Nichols' Oregon Herald newspaper article, Horace Fletcher Clark miners' manual, December 31, 1897 Skagway Newspaper article. Have the students complete the questions on the Miner's Checklist and discuss their answers with the class.

Point out to the students that they went through a process many historians follow when they examine history. Historians have certain ideas about an event based on their understanding of what took place, but by evaluating primary sources, they re-examine, and sometimes refine their understanding of an event (Activity and Question 2). They must also learn to detect "bias" in primary sources, or the motivation of those writing a document (Question 3). Finally, historians must learn how to select primary sources that can help shed light on the event they are studying (Question 4).

Alaska Standards:

History: C-2, C-3, C-4

AK History: AH. CPD 1, AH. CPD 2

Extension Activity:

See Gold Rush Guided Writing Activity