

PANNING FOR GOLD

This “hands on” activity simulates a gold rush. It can be completed in one class period. The students rush to the “gold fields,” stake their claims, and begin panning for “gold.”

Materials

- Eight paper cups per mining team
- Fishing weights (“gold nuggets”) spray painted yellow:
 - 60-70 small BB size split shots
 - 30 medium size split shots (size 7)
 - 10 oval fishing weights (size 10)
 - 5 oval fishing weights (size 8)
 - 3 oval fishing weights (size 6)
 - 1 large fishing weight (larger than the others)
- Sand to fill the paper cups
- Mining pans or pie pans for every other student
- Water (plastic milk cartons work fine) for each team



Setup directions

1. Divide students into groups of five or six.
2. Select a group of students to fill the paper cups with sand.
3. Later, when no students are around, bury one of the BB size gold nuggets in the sand of each paper cup. Add the remaining “gold nuggets” (all other fishing weights) to the cups so that the number of gold nuggets per cup ranges from many to just a few. Keep all the gold nuggets buried in the sand.
4. Fill the plastic containers with water.
5. Select a site on the playground or field for your mini gold rush.
6. Determine the value of the “gold nuggets.” (A good idea is to put the values of the gold nuggets on the chalk board so the students can see them. It gets them motivated to start the Mini Gold Rush.)

Here is a suggested list:

| Size | Value in Gold Nuggets |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| BB size | 5 |
| Medium | 10 |
| Small oval | 15 |
| Medium oval | 20 |
| Large oval | 50 |
| Largest | 100 |



Procedures

1. Just before you begin, have an aide, parent volunteer, or a small group of students take the paper cups with the gold nuggets to the site of the Mini Gold Rush. Have them distribute the cups into "claim sites" so that each site has eight cups. There should be one "claim site" per team.
2. Read your students the following:

"In just a few minutes you are going to participate in a gold rush. You will stake a claim and pan for gold. It won't be real gold; it will be pieces of lead that have been painted yellow. Lead, like gold, is heavy and will stay in the bottom of your pan. Save all the gold you find. After the gold rush we will add up the value of the 'gold' you found to see how much you earned.

"Before you start panning for gold you must stake a claim. You do this by making a sign that says MINING CLAIM then having each team member sign it. When this is done one member of your team takes the sign to one of the mining claims. The first one to a claim gets it, but if there is a tie the team with the neatest sign gets the claim. Each team gets only one mining claim. When all the claims are taken, the rest of the team joins the one member that staked the claim and everyone begins panning. You can only pan from the cups that are on your claim and each claim has eight cups."
3. Take your class outside to the mining sites. Each team should have its water and mining pans. Give each team a piece of paper and a pencil and have them get started. The teams have two jobs. First they have to write "mining claim" on the paper and sign it. Then they have to select someone to take the sign and stake their claims.
4. When all the claims are staked and recorded, the rest of the class goes to their claim sites. Have students pour water into each of the cups and begin panning for gold. Move from team to team giving help as needed.
5. Watch carefully and pick a time when the students are about half-way done and tell them it is time to line up and go back to class. Be sure to make them hurry. Quickly start back to class then stop and have your students look at the mining sites. Typically the students leave behind quite a mess. Point this out to the students and explain to them that during the gold rush many miners ruined the land in search of gold. They were not concerned about the environment and the impact mining had on it. After this brief lesson let your students go back to the mining.
6. When the students have finished, have them save their gold and return to the classroom, but only after they have cleaned up the mining sites. Make sure students leave the sand. Once back in the classroom, have the teams bring you the gold they collected. Add it up to find out which group earned the most money.
7. Explain to your students that some miners like the Chinese were not always allowed to have a claim unless it had been abandoned by the other miners. Ask your students the difference between mining the claims when gold was first found and what it would be like after the miners had left. Then tell your students that they may pretend they are Chinese miners and that they can go back to any of the mining sites at recess and sift through the sand to see if they can find any more gold nuggets.