

Gold Rush Stories

Mini-plays are designed to involve students in the study of issues or historical events through the use of drama.

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Stevens & Shea Publishers

These short plays are written to be read in the classroom without staging. Students may read at their desks or in front of the room. There are enough parts in the five plays for each student to participate, so enough copies should be made for each to have a script.

The Plays, Characters, and Lines

Sam Brannan (pages 1 and 2)

The true story of how the Gold Rush began.

Narrator (20 lines)

James Marshall (25 lines)

Captain John Sutter (24 lines)

Charles Smith (9 lines)

Sam Brannan (17 lines)

Levi Strauss (pages 3 and 4)

The story of how jeans were invented.

Narrator (17 lines)

Dockworker (12 lines)

Levi Strauss (30 lines)

Miner (7 lines)

Tailor (9 lines)

Jacob Davis (28 lines)

Alkali Ike (11 lines)

Prosecutor (5 lines)

Donovan (pages 5 to 7)

A story about how a slave got his freedom.

Narrator (10 lines)

Wilkes, a slave owner (59 lines)

Bartender (25 lines)

Gambler (26 lines)

Donovan, the slave (19 lines)

Joaquin Murieta (pages 8 and 9)

The story of the elusive Mexican bandit.

Narrator (9 lines)

Jose (10 lines)

Mario (6 lines)

Joaquin Murieta (38 lines)

Catain Love (11 lines)

Miner (5 lines)

Posse Member (8 lines)

Vigilantes (pages 10 to 12)

The story of lawlessness in early San Francisco.

First Narrator (14 lines)

Second Narrator (10 lines)

Sam Brannan (40 lines)

First Man (17 lines)

Second Man (11 lines)

Third Man (7 lines)

Fourth Man (6 lines)

Fifth Man (8 lines)

Sixth Man (3 lines)

Seventh Man (2 lines)

Coleman (14 lines)

Jenkins (12 lines)

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ISBN: 0-89550-331-X

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Phone: (209) 465-1880

Introduction

The discovery of gold was the event that attracted the first large numbers of people to California.

It was an exciting time and there are many interesting tales about the period. The stories in this collection about Sam Brannan, Levi Strauss, and the Vigilance Committee are true. The story about Donovan is based upon folklore and may or may not be true. Slaves were brought to work in the gold fields and some of them either bought their freedom or escaped.

The famed Joaquin Murieta was only one of several bandits named Joaquin. Even though it was claimed that he was caught by Captain Love, the evidence indicates that he was probably not. What happened to the real Joaquin Murieta is not known.

Other plays you may enjoy

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Sam Brannan and the Gold Rush

Narrator

James Marshall

Captain John Sutter

Charles Smith

Sam Brannan

Narrator: James Wilson Marshall, who was building a sawmill for John Sutter on the American River, saw something glittering in the water of his tailrace on January 24, 1848. He collected a few pieces of the glittering ore and rode to Sutter's Fort.

James Marshall: I found something. I'm not sure what it is, but if it is what I think it is, we may be rich.

Capt. John Sutter: What is it?

James Marshall: Gold! Look here!

Capt. John Sutter: It looks like gold, all right, but what looks like gold is not always gold.

James Marshall: Isn't there something we can do to find out?

Capt. John Sutter: I have an encyclopedia here. Maybe we can find out how to test it.

Narrator: Sutter conducted a few tests on the precious metal.

Capt. John Sutter: It looks like gold, all right—23 carat gold, at least.

James Marshall: We may be rich!

Capt. John Sutter: Where exactly did you find this?

James Marshall: We had to cut this tailrace through a sandbar to bring water to the sawmill.

That's where it was. I bet there's gold all over the bottom of that river.

Capt. John Sutter: There might be.

James Marshall: Oh, boy! I'm getting back there right now.

Capt. John Sutter: It's the middle of the night.

James Marshall: That doesn't make any difference.

Capt. John Sutter: But it's raining. At least stay until morning.

James Marshall: No sir! I'm getting back up there right now.

Capt. John Sutter: The gold is not going to get up and run away. We have a sawmill to finish.

James Marshall: Other people might hear about it.

Capt. John Sutter: Let's try to keep it a secret.

James Marshall: The men up there working on the sawmill all know about it.

Capt. John Sutter: We want them to keep working on the sawmill. We need that lumber. People need to build houses.

James Marshall: When they find out it's gold, they'll want to leave the mill and go prospecting for themselves.

Capt. John Sutter: Tell them they can prospect on Sundays when they finish at the sawmill.

James Marshall: Well, I'll try. I'm going to be on my way now.

Capt. John Sutter: I'll be coming up there tomorrow or the next day to see about leasing the land in the area from the Indians so that we can mine the gold.

Narrator: The discovery of gold was not kept a secret for very long. The news actually appeared in a San Francisco paper on March 15, 1849, but raised no excitement. The Gold Rush didn't start until Sam Brannan gave the gold discovery some thought. Brannan ran a store at Sutter's Fort.

Charles Smith: Sam, more and more people are coming into the store with gold to buy their things.

Sam Brannan: Yes, I've noticed.

Charles Smith: Maybe this gold discovery is more than just a flash in the pan. Maybe it really amounts to something.

Sam Brannan: You know, you just may be right. The Mexicans had discovered gold in California before, but it didn't add up to too much before it was gone.

Charles Smith: Well, each day people come in with more and more of it. Maybe we should get up there and get some for ourselves.

Sam Brannan: Why should we go up to the mountains when they have to bring the gold to us to buy goods. If we get more people to dig for gold, that means they will have to buy their supplies from us.

Charles Smith: That's sharp thinking, Sam.

Sam Brannan: In fact, no one realizes how much gold there is. If we buy up all the shovels, picks, tents and the like that miners need to mine, and then convince people to go up there to mine, they'll have to buy their equipment from us.

Charles Smith: How are you going to convince them?

Sam Brannan: First, let's quietly buy up all of the mining merchandise in California.

Narrator: On May 12, Brannan went to San Francisco with a bottle filled with gold dust. He went up and down the streets shouting that gold had been discovered on the American River. The Gold Rush was started.

The End