



Kids in the Gold Fields

Close your eyes and imagine you can travel back in time. You're in California in 1850, just after the Gold Rush begins. You're still a child, but your life is completely different.

In the diggings, your family may live in a tent, a rough shelter of pine boughs, or a tiny cabin. Your chores begin early in the morning when you haul water from the river, collect wood for the fire, or feed your family's animals before you watch your younger brothers or sisters. There is no school, but you will work hard all day long. Your parents need all the help you can give them.

You could help your father pan for gold, or, if you're a boy, you may take his rifle and hunt for rabbits, quail, or squirrels. Girls might gather berries or wild edible plants in the forest.

If your mother runs a restaurant out of your family's tent, you may wait on tables or wash dishes. You might sing, dance, or play an instrument to entertain miners—and get paid in gold dust or coins. When the saloons are empty, you can run a wet pin along the cracks in the floorboards to pick up any gold dust spilled by miners the night before.

If you have any free time, you could play games with other kids. Or, if you're adventurous, you might sneak away to a Native American camp. The Pomo and Miwok Indians have lived in this area for generations. Maybe you could learn a few words of their languages, and trade gold dust or coins for deerskin moccasins. You might also learn how these Indians' lives have changed now that miners have taken over the land where the Indians hunt and fish.

Later, you could pay a visit to some miners. Don't be surprised if they fuss over you and tell you stories, make you toys, or teach you to read. Most miners have left their families behind, and they miss their children.

Every once in a while, you might go to a dance nearby. If you're a girl, you'll be very popular. There are very few women in the diggings, so girls of all ages dance. Watch your bare feet around all those heavy boots!

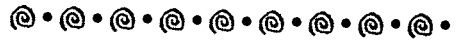
What do you think? Would you enjoy the danger, excitement, hardship, and the adventure of the California Gold Rush?

By Liza Ketchum
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Dear Parents

This week's reading assignment is about children's lives during the California Gold Rush. The next time your child complains about cleaning his room or taking out the garbage, remind him of the hard work kids used to have to do! Please listen to your child read this article out loud and help out with the questions below.



TIP OF THE WEEK

All state and national tests ask students to "use information from the text to support your answers." Help your child find examples of "danger, excitement, and hardship" in the passage. Please remember that the ideas come from the article, but the answers should be complete sentences in the child's own words.

The Questions

1. How was life dangerous? _____

2. How was life exciting? _____

3. How was life hard? _____

We have completed this assignment together.

_____ Child's Signature

_____ Parent's Signature