

GOLD FOUND IN CALIFORNIA

Questions to ask before reading the story:

- 1) If you won the California lottery, what would you do with the winnings?
- 2) How well can you keep a secret?
- 3) If you found a gold-colored rock, how would you test it to see if it is gold?

Every morning, James Marshall, who lived and built saw mills in the Mexican territory known as California, walked along the millrace and studied the wheel of the sawmill he had constructed. He wanted to be able to tell the mill's owner, John Sutter, when the water in the race was deep and swift enough to turn the mill's wheel.

On the morning of January 24, 1848, Marshall noticed something unusual in one of the deep pools along the bank. Under the clear water lay a yellow lump: a gold-colored, chewed-up piece of rock, sitting on top of a smooth and flat rock. He reached into the cold water and snatched up the strange rock. Then he stood by the bank, pondering what his next step should be.

Was it really gold? James Marshall knew several tests for gold, but only one such test could be conducted there by the riverbank. Marshall decided to perform this one simple test. He laid the stone on a smooth rock, and then he picked up another rock that he felt would make a good hammer. He hammered at the gold-colored lump. He noticed that it did not break, but careful inspection showed that it had changed shape.

He put the lump in his pocket and took it to the mill. There the mill crew conducted another test. They placed the lump on an anvil and beat it with a hammer. When the lump flattened but did not become fragmented, the mill crew knew that the lump was not iron pyrite, also known as fools' gold.

Three more tests were used in order to ascertain the exact composition of that gold lump. The mill cook threw it into a kettle of lye, where it was boiled for a day. The prolonged boiling did not change the lump's color: it remained the color of gold. John Sutter, the mill's owner, was shown the lump on January 28, 1848, five days before his land became part of the United States. He performed two different tests on the gold-colored lump. After the first test, John Sutter observed that nitric acid did not damage the lump's appearance. Then he placed the lump on a scale. Its weight showed that it was much denser than silver.

John Sutter and James Marshall were then sure that they had in their possession a gold nugget. They decided to keep the find a secret, and they told the mill crew to keep quiet about the news. However, one mill hand wrote to his friends about his own efforts at gold mining. A storeowner overheard another mill hand bragging about a piece of gold he kept in a small buckskin bag.

When a deliveryman got a look at a handful of gold dust, shown to him by a small boy at the mill, the arrival of a California Gold Rush was almost unavoidable. Its occurrence was made a certainty with the publication of a San Francisco news headline reading "GOLD MINE FOUND." Over ninety percent of the people in San Francisco took off in the direction of Sutter's Mill.

ascertain-to find out or learn for a certainty
buckskin-made from the skin of a buck (a male deer)
certainty-something that is fixed or settled
composition-manner of being composed, as to style or elements
denser- having its parts more massed or more crowded together; more compact

fragmented- broke into small detached fragments
millrace-the canal in which water goes to a mill wheel
pondering-weighing in the mind; deliberating
possession-act or state of being the owner or holder

Name _____ Date _____

Review questions

1. Where was Sutter's Mill located? _____
2. In what year was gold first found in the territories west of the United States? _____
3. In what city was the discovery of gold first made public? _____
4. What is one test for gold that requires little extra equipment? _____
5. The first gold nugget found in California was lying in a _____.
6. John Sutter tested the nugget with nitric _____ and with a _____.
7. A news headline in _____ announced the discovery of gold.
8. News of the discovery had leaked from comments made by the work crew at Sutter's _____.
9. Gold is more dense than _____.
10. What do you think? What changes took place in California after the discovery of gold leaked out?

Multiple Choice:

1. Which of the following is a test for gold?
 - a) weigh object on a scale
 - b) hit it with a hammer
 - c) drop nitric acid on it
 - d) all of the above
2. Which of the following would not break apart if hit hard with a hammer?
 - a) Iron pyrite
 - b) glass
 - c) gold
 - d) fools' gold
3. Which of the following did not help spread word of the discovery of gold?
 - a) letter to a friend
 - b) bragging in a store
 - c) secrets shared with a deliveryman
 - d) none of the above

Matching:

John Sutter	worked for John Sutter
James Marshal	territory in which gold found in 1848
nitric acid	owned mill at which gold was found
anvil	used to test for gold
California	used to shape metals

ANSWERS

1. California
2. 1848
3. San Francisco
4. hammering it
5. pool
6. acid, scale
7. San Francisco
8. Mill
9. silver
10. answers will vary

1. d
2. c
3. d

John Sutter
James Marshal
nitric acid
anvil
California

owned mill at which gold was found
worked for John Sutter
used to test for gold
used to shape metals
territory in which gold found in 1848