

The California Gold Rush

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The 1800's was a time of enormous expansion and growth for the United States. A great number of settlers wanted to try their luck by moving westward into uncharted lands. In 1787 the federal government established Northwest Ordinance, a set of rules governing settlement in the West. Assign students to quickly research this subject by browsing to the [History Channel](#) site. If they enter the phrase "Northwest Ordinance" in the search box several articles will come up. Students should explore these articles and note key information. What effect did the Northwest Ordinance have on westward settlement?

Virtual California Trail

One of the most exciting events related to westward expansion is the California Gold Rush of 1849. One of the best online resources for students learning about the Gold Rush is the [Virtual California Trail](#) sponsored by the Oregon-California Trails Association. The trail map students will see on the opening page is interactive; they can click on any location along the trail to see photos and learn more about the history of that place.

Direct students to begin at Independence on the far right, then explore the trail westward—just like the '49ers did. At the bottom of each page are links to continue along the trail, return to the big map, or quit and go home (back to the main OCTA site). Students will feel like they've traveled the trail in person after visiting all of the wonderful, historic places along the route.

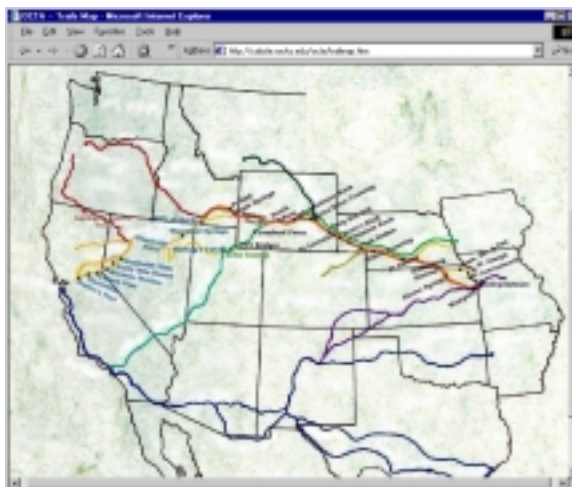
Oakland Museum of California

Another excellent Gold Rush Web site, sponsored by the [Oakland Museum of California](#), holds a wealth of information for both students and teachers. Students can click on several links dealing with various aspects of the California Gold Rush.

Curriculum Standard

- [TEKS: 113.24](#)
Social Studies, Grade 8

(8.6) History. The student understands westward expansion and its effects on the political, economic, and social development of the nation.



The California Gold Rush continued . . .

Students will enjoy taking the [virtual field trip](#) of a Gold Rush exhibit. The tour includes some great photographs along with some interesting facts and stories. By far the most exciting resource on the Gold Rush site is a multimedia experience called Lure and Legacy (requires the Shockwave browser plug-in). Get there by clicking [Experience Gold Rush!](#) Here students can hear tales of California and the move west.

The Gold Rush had an impact on many different cultural groups, including Native Americans, African Americans, Chinese, and California Latino populations. Students should devote some study time to learn how the Gold Rush affected each culture group. Click on [Natives & Immigrants](#) to learn more.



At the conclusion of this lesson ask students to complete the online quiz. Students can take this interactively, or teachers may print out a hardcopy for students to complete.

PBS Online

A third Web site with valuable resources on the California Gold Rush can be found at [PBS Online](#). This gold rush site is a companion Web site to the PBS documentary of the same name, but you don't have to watch the documentary to access a lot of useful information. Students should click [About the Gold Rush](#) for a concise history organized into ten topics. They should also read the [Fun Facts](#) page to learn some strange and unusual trivia about the move West.



The California Gold Rush continued . . .

If you'd like additional classroom materials to help you teach a unit about the Gold Rush, visit the [Classroom Resources](#) page. Many of the available materials relate directly to the documentary (watching the video as a class isn't a bad idea either). However, you will be able to use the vocabulary guides and many classroom activities whether you watch the documentary or not.

Reference:

History Channel

<http://www.historychannel.com>

Virtual California Trail

<http://calcite.rocky.edu/octa/trailmap.htm>

Oakland Museum of California

<http://www.museumca.org/goldrush/fever.html>

PBS Online Gold Rush

<http://www.pbs.org/goldrush/index.html>