

Gold Rush Boomtowns

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/ Social Sciences



The discovery of gold in the California Territory sparked not only national interest, but even worldwide attention. California was not even a state yet when gold was discovered in 1848. There were few regulations on treasure hunting. Gold was there for the taking. The adventurous risked everything and came by the thousands. The cities of Sacramento, Stockton and San Francisco expanded from tiny little villages to huge, active towns almost overnight. A town that grows rapidly due to new business opportunities became known as a **boomtown**.

Towns grew increasingly larger as more and more settlers came to the area. People from all over the world came to San Francisco in particular. They brought a variety of goods and services with them, making San Francisco an international cultural center. People of the time compared it to London, England. Prices were very high, but goods from around the world were available.

Usually, boomtown populations were mostly men. Few women came to California in the early days of the Gold Rush. The men who came to find their fortunes believed they would quickly make lots of money to take back home to loved ones.

When it became clear that people were not going to become wealthy overnight, some miners returned to their home. Those who stayed began to send for their families. Women with skills like cooking, washing clothes and sewing were highly regarded. Men did not like to do these things for themselves. Women willing to travel to the West could make a very good living marketing their homemaking skills. If single women wanted to marry, they had their choice of hundreds of men.

Though gold is what attracted people to the boomtowns, few made their fortunes by finding it. Those who really struck it rich were the **entrepreneurs**. They took advantage of the opportunity to sell things to the large numbers of people around them. A good example of this is Levi Strauss. He invented and sold durable pants for miners. They caught on in a big way. We know them now as blue jeans. Today, you don't have to be a miner to wear jeans. Some discoveries endure over time.

Name: _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) What is a boomtown?

2) What is the name of one California boomtown? _____

3) What were some of the things that motivated women to come eventually?

4) What did an entrepreneur do during the Gold Rush? _____

5) Would you have wanted to go to California for the Gold Rush? Why or why not? _____

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Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

Actual wording of answers may vary.

1) What is a boomtown?

a town that grows rapidly because of new business opportunities

2) What is the name of one California boomtown? Either Stockton,

Sacramento or San Francisco

3) What were some of the things that motivated women to come eventually?

They came to join their husbands.

They could market their homemaking skills. They had many men to choose from for a husband.

4) What did an entrepreneur do during the Gold Rush? They sold things to people.

5) Would you have wanted to go to California for the Gold Rush?

Why or why not? students choice