

LESSON PLAN

The Impact of the Gold Rush on Native Americans of California

SUBJECTS

- History
- Social Studies
- Language Arts

GRADE LEVELS

- 8–12

LESSON SUMMARY

In this Source Investigation, students will analyze primary sources to answer the following central question: *Do American actions against California Native Americans during the gold rush meet the United Nations definition of genocide?*

MATERIALS

- Introductory PowerPoint slides and introductory essay
- Copies of a graphic organizer
- Online access to sources or printouts of sources
- Pens or pencils
- Notecards or paper for exit ticket

Source Investigation Central Question

Do American actions against California Native Americans during the gold rush meet the United Nations definition of genocide?

Lesson Objectives

Skills:

- Analyze primary and secondary sources and evaluate the historical significance of those sources
- Construct arguments using primary and secondary sources for support

Content:

- Understand the devastating impact of the gold rush on the Native Americans of California
- Apply the United Nations (UN) definition of genocide to the treatment of California Native Americans during the gold rush era
- Evaluate whether the treatment of Native Americans during the gold rush can be classified as genocide according to the UN definition

Suggested Lesson Pacing

We suggest two fifty-minute class periods or one block class with a recommended extension for this lesson.

Teacher Tip: If it is difficult to explore eleven sources during the suggested time, consider the following options:

- Ask students to read two sources for homework either before or after the first class.
- “Jigsaw” the sources by grouping students and dividing the sources among the students in each group (click [here](#) for more on how to jigsaw).
- Limit the number of sources for review by choosing six to eight sources to analyze instead of eleven. To meet the UN definition of genocide, atrocities do not need to meet all of the criteria listed in the definition. It is important to note that the UN definition of genocide says, “genocide means *any* of the following acts committed with intent to destroy,” not *all* of the following acts. For example, killing members of a group with the intent to destroy a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group would constitute genocide. The other acts do not need to be present as well.

Lesson Introduction

PowerPoint Slides: Map Comparison and Background History

- A common misconception held by many students is that California was largely an empty wilderness before the arrival of American settlers during the era of westward expansion. This introductory PowerPoint seeks to correct that misconception by using maps to illustrate the diverse Native peoples in California before the arrival of European and American colonists. The PowerPoint then gives a brief historical overview of European colonization of California leading up to the gold rush and begins to illustrate the impact of the gold rush on the Native American population.
- See the “Notes” section of each PowerPoint slide for Teacher Tips.
- Consider emphasizing to students that although this lesson takes place during the gold rush, it is not about gold mining; instead, this lesson is about the wider implications of the gold rush across the state of California. Explain to students that the gold rush led to other events and political decisions that are important in understanding westward expansion and trends in U.S. history more broadly.
- Optional: Share the introductory essay written by historian Dr. Khal Schneider, a member of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria. This can also be assigned for homework before or after the lesson.

Instruction and Student Practice

Introduction of the Central Question

- Using the PowerPoint slides, introduce the central question for the lesson and share the UN definition of genocide.
- **Teacher Tip:** We recommend that teachers acknowledge to students that the study of genocide is difficult and can be emotional. Allow space for discussion and encourage students to ask questions and share their reactions to the challenges of studying this history.

Graphic Organizer and Inquiry Process

- Pass out the graphic organizer. Explain to students that they will analyze a number of different sources to answer the central question.
- To begin the inquiry process, ask students to complete the first section of the graphic organizer by writing their initial hypotheses to the central question in the first box on the organizer. This taps into students’ prior knowledge.
 - Remind students to let the evidence guide their thinking. They should make educated guesses based on their own prior knowledge. This is only a starting point. They will be testing their hypotheses using primary and secondary sources. Emphasize that students may end up coming to completely different conclusions at the end of the lesson.
 - Option: Have students share their first hypotheses by writing them on the board or reading them aloud.
- Next, introduce students to the sources (online or print). Explain that the sources are the different pieces of evidence that they will use to answer the central question. After analyzing a source, students will decide if it provides evidence for genocide by meeting *one or more* of the UN-definition criteria for genocide and then fill out the graphic organizer accordingly. Sources can meet more than one criterion. Students should consider whether the sources support, contradict, or modify their original hypotheses.
 - **Teacher Tip:** Some sources include graphic descriptions of violence. We recommend that teachers preview all sources before sharing with students.

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- **Teacher Tip:** Analyze one or two sources and fill out the graphic organizer together as a class to model the process and scaffold for students new to source analysis. Then have students work alone or in pairs to analyze sources, revise their hypotheses, and complete the graphic organizer.
- **Teacher Tip:** To check for understanding, allow students to work on the graphic organizer for fifteen to twenty minutes. Then have the class pause, and ask students, “Based on the sources that you have analyzed so far, which source provides the most powerful evidence for genocide? Which source provides the least amount of evidence for genocide?” If students are struggling, model successful analysis by working together to analyze a source as a class.
- **Source Tip:** As students read sources and look at the map to pinpoint locations mentioned in the sources, be sure to note that much of the sustained violence happening because of the gold rush was in agricultural areas. Violence did not only occur around the mines. The impact of the gold rush was expansive and included the mass agricultural development of land that originally belonged to Native Americans. The exploding non-Native population of California had to be fed, clothed, and housed. The gold from the mines also had to be transported out of the mines to towns, cities, and ports.
- **Source Tip:** When reading **Source K**, Lucy Young’s “A True Indian Story,” if students call into question Lucy’s command of English, remind them that English was not her native language. English was her second language.

ASSESSMENT

- Once students have analyzed the sources and completed the graphic organizer, ask them to complete the summative assessment at the bottom of the graphic organizer. This can be completed as a class or individually (and can be assigned for homework completion).
 - Summative Assessment: Construct an argument (detailed outline or essay) that uses the evidence from the graphic organizer to answer the central question: *Do American actions against California Native Americans during the gold rush meet the United Nations definition of genocide?*

LESSON CONCLUSION

- Share the following [video clip](#) of Governor of California Gavin Newsom’s apology on behalf of the state of California “to all California Native Americans for the many instances of violence, maltreatment and neglect California inflicted on tribes.”
- Share Native Californian responses to Newsom’s apology. Note that despite facing horrific atrocities during the gold rush period, tribal nations persevered.
 - *Statement from California State Assemblyman James Ramos of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians:* “This is a history of genocide and oppression that so many Native American tribes share—under attack, families separated, culture stolen or destroyed, displaced from land.”
 - *Statement from Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria Tribal Chairman Greg Sarris:* “We’d like to dedicate this important moment to further ensure the life of California Indian peoples’ history and culture. We need to remember the shared history of our shared past and learn from its lessons, and find a path to a healthy, sustainable future for all.”
 - *Statement from Kristen Calderon, Kumeyaay from the San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians and an enrolled member of the nonfederally recognized Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation:* “His apology is just words . . . actions mean much more to us. . . . The

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government has shown time and again that their words cannot be trusted. Action, not words!”

- All statements quoted by Debra Utacia Krol (Xolon Salinan Tribe) in “California governor apologizes to California Indians,” *Indian Country Today*, June 19, 2019, <https://ictnews.org/news/california-governor-apologizes-to-california-indians>
- If time permits, discuss the following questions as a class:
 - What does justice look like today for California Native Americans impacted by the gold rush? What does justice look like if the perpetrators and victims lived long ago?
 - Where are the descendants of the survivors of these atrocities today? What will telling this little-known history of California do for the tribes and descendants of California Native survivors?
- Exit Ticket: Hand out notecards or paper to students and ask them to reflect on the following questions for the last five minutes of class: After learning about the experience of California Native Americans during the gold rush, what questions do you still have? What thoughts come to mind about this period in U.S. history?
- **Teacher Tip:** The exit tickets can be anonymous if anonymity will allow for more open reflection in your classroom. If using anonymous exit tickets, have students write their questions down in their notebooks as well as on the exit ticket so that they can access their questions for a future research opportunity in our recommended extension.
 - Collect tickets as students exit the classroom.
 - Review tickets to see how students grappled with the content and to tap into unanswered questions students have that could be addressed in the recommended extension if time allows.

Recommended Extension: Discussion, Research, and Taking Informed Action

The study of mass atrocities and genocide is complex, emotional, and difficult; yet it remains highly relevant in today’s world. After the class completes the inquiry lesson above, we recommend choosing one or all of the following extension activities to help students process the implications of what happened to the Native Americans of California during the gold rush era.

CLASS DISCUSSION

- Classroom Setup: Place desks in a large circle to facilitate discussion, or break students up into groups for small-group discussions.
- Acknowledge that the study of genocide and mass atrocities can be traumatic and emotional. Share a few responses from the exit tickets to begin the conversation.
- Suggested Discussion Questions:
 - **Teacher Tip:** Choose one question below to begin the conversation or, time permitting, discuss all of them. If students are working in small groups, teachers can assign a different question to each group and have groups share final thoughts aloud with the class.
 - The era of westward expansion in U.S. history is often taught as the perfect example of the American Dream—hard work, courage, and perseverance led to success and

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- riches. Why do you think Native American experiences are not included in this narrative?
- Standard U.S. history education leaves out the treatment of California Native Americans during the gold rush. Why do you think that is?
 - Follow-Up: Why do you think most U.S. history courses and textbooks cover the genocide perpetrated by Nazi Germany but do not cover what happened to California Native Americans during the gold rush?
 - In “The Idea of America,” Nikole Hannah-Jones writes, “The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie.” What do you think she means? How might that relate to the gold rush?
 - **Teacher Tip:** If students are struggling to understand the reference to an ideal and a lie, remind them of the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Consider asking them how the treatment of Native Americans during the gold rush challenges those ideals.
 - If genocide was indeed committed by Americans in California in the 1850s, why is that important and relevant to us today? Why is it important for us to study this chapter of history?
 - Knowing what you do now about the treatment of California Native Americans during the gold rush, what do you suggest we do to change the national memory of the gold rush? How can we create a more inclusive historical narrative?
 - Consider the gravity of the series of choices made by Californians at the local, state, and federal levels during the gold rush and the ensuing devastating repercussions for Native Americans of California. How do you feel about what happened in California during the gold rush? How can we work to understand the long-term effects of those decisions and to prevent similar events from happening again?
- **Teacher Tip:** Consider putting your questions on PowerPoint slides and projecting them one at a time for visual learners.

RESEARCH

One critical aspect of inquiry as a lesson plan model is to allow students to generate their own questions to investigate. Give students the opportunity to research one question that they still have about the treatment of California Native Americans during the gold rush era. Students should choose only one question to investigate. We recommend using our “Recommended Resources” section to help with further research. Ask students to write a reflection, based on the evidence they find, about the process of their research, what they discover in their research, and any areas of further research on the topic they might want to pursue.

- **Teacher Tip:** Use the exit tickets from the previous day to spark research-topic ideas.
- **Teacher Tip:** Keep in mind that true inquiry is messy. It is difficult to predict where it will take students. Inquiry is about actively discovering information and looking for new understandings and conclusions.
- Recommended resources for further student research:
 - Online Archive of California: <https://oac.cdlib.org/>
 - Calisphere Gold Rush Era: <https://calisphere.org/exhibitions/t3/gold-rush/>
 - Digital Public Library of America: <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/california-gold-rush>
 - Library of Congress Primary Source Set: <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/usa-california/>
 - California State Library: <https://www.library.ca.gov/california-history/gold-rush/>

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NK360° FRAMEWORK FOR TAKING INFORMED ACTION

To help students understand their own agency as well as the issues from the inquiry lesson in a larger context, give students the option to work through the NK360° Framework for Taking Informed Action.

- Begin by sharing the first two paragraphs of the press release from California Governor Gavin Newsom’s apology or his executive order from June 2019.
 - Press Release: <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2019/06/18/governor-newsom-issues-apology-to-native-americans-for-states-historical-wrongdoings-establishes-truth-and-healing-council/>
 - Executive Order N-15-19: <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/6.18.19-Executive-Order.pdf>
 - Truth and Healing Council Website: <https://tribalaffairs.ca.gov/cthc/>
- Ask students what actions the governor is taking to try to right the historical wrongs of his state. Next, consider asking students what they would do if they were the governor to right the historic wrong(s) as identified in the governor's apology.
- Share the NK360° Framework for Taking Informed Action with students.
 - **Teacher Tip:** This can be completed by each student, in pairs, or as a class, depending on time constraints.

Recommended Resources for Teachers

TO READ

- Heizer, Robert F., ed. *The Destruction of California Indians*. Introduction by Albert L. Hurtado. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press / Bison Books, 1993.
- Johnston-Dodds, Kimberly, and John L. Burton. *Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians*. Sacramento: California State Library, California Research Bureau, 2002.
- Lindsay, Brendan C. *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846–1873*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012.
- Lowry, Chag, and Rebecca Huff. *Northwest Indigenous Gold Rush History: The Indian Survivors of California's Holocaust*. Arcata, CA: Indian Teacher and Educational Personnel Program, 1999.
- Madley, Benjamin. *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Madley, Benjamin. “Understanding Genocide in California under United States Rule, 1846–1873.” *Western Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2016): 449–61.
- Rawls, James J. “Extermination.” In *Indians of California: The Changing Image*, 171–201. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984.
- Teaching for Tolerance. *Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education*. Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/TT-Critical-Practices-for-Anti-bias-Education.pdf>.

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NATIVE KNOWLEDGE 360° Education Initiative | TEACHER MATERIALS

- Teaching Tolerance. *Let's Talk: Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students*. Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020.
<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk>.
- Trafzer, Clifford E., and Joel R. Hyer, eds. *Exterminate Them: Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native Americans during the California Gold Rush*. Foreword by Edward D. Castillo. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999.

TO WATCH

- Benjamin Madley. Hammer Museum, 2017. <https://hammer.ucla.edu/programs-events/2017/02/benjamin-madley>.