

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

### The Impact of the Gold Rush on Native Americans of California

#### SUBJECTS

- History
- Social Studies
- Language Arts

#### GRADE LEVELS

- 8–12

#### LESSON SUMMARY

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?*

#### RECOMMENDED PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Students should have a general understanding of United States westward expansion and the California gold rush.

#### Instructional Method

For each NK360° Source Investigation, we provide a lesson plan featuring a structured inquiry method.<sup>1</sup> Students use sources as evidence to help answer a central question. Each lesson includes background history and taps into prior knowledge by asking students to formulate a hypothesis to answer the central question. Students go through a process of hypothesis revision as they uncover evidence contained in each source. We provide a graphic organizer to scaffold this investigation for students as they analyze sources and tackle challenging historical questions.

#### Rationale for Lesson

This Source Investigation offers students new insights into a little-known but vitally important aspect of one of the most iconic events in American history—the California gold rush. Knowledge of the gold rush’s effects on California’s Native Americans provides students with a more complete understanding of their nation’s history. The inclusion of this content adds a long-omitted piece of American history to the traditionally taught gold rush narrative and provides an opportunity for the acknowledgement of and healing from atrocities committed against California’s Native peoples during this era. Rationale for this lesson includes:

- To shed light on a chapter of California history that has been omitted from the standard U.S. history narrative
- To share first-hand accounts of the California Native Americans’ experience during the gold rush
- To reflect on the roles and responsibilities of individuals, groups, the state, and the federal government in facilitating and confronting human-rights violations and genocidal acts
- To illustrate that the decimation of California’s Native American population was not inevitable
- To analyze the cost of nation building on land that was already home to an extensive and diverse population of Native Americans of California
- To act as a bridge between the most recent scholarship on the mass atrocities associated with the California gold rush and the secondary-education classroom
- To acknowledge the gold rush as an important period in the history of California that has relevance to the many tribes that are in the state today who are sovereign nations and survivors of genocide

<sup>1</sup> This source investigation uses a general inquiry approach. Other NK360° resources borrow from the Inquiry Design Model (IDM), which implements the C3 Inquiry Arc and the C3 Framework Dimension Standards.

## 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 United Nations (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 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 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

## Before You Begin

Learning for Justice’s [Let’s Talk](#) and [Critical Practices for Social Justice Education](#) documents contain strategies to plan discussions and to facilitate critical conversations with students. Consider reviewing these resources before you begin, especially the “Culture and Climate” and “Family and Community Engagement” sections of *Critical Practices*. Please see the Recommended Resources for Teachers section for links to these materials.