INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING SERIES

The Gold Rush

How did the Gold Rush change Victoria?

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HTAV
HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION *of* VICTORIA

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COVER IMAGE: Artist unknown, *Mount Alexander Gold Diggers at Evening Mess*. From the *Illustrated London News*, 3 July 1852. nla.pic-an9093169, 1 print: wood engraving; 13.6 × 15.6cm. Courtesy National Library of Australia.

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Foreword

Inquiry-based learning is a major component of humanities teaching in Australia and abroad. The inquiry approach first emerged in the physical sciences and was applied to the humanities following work done by John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky and others on psychological and social development. The approach has been employed in various learning contexts by J.S. Bruner, Joe Exline, Dan Apple, Cornelia Bruner and the Education Development Center, among others.

In the Australian context, inquiry has come to form a major part of curriculum in History and other subjects. Historical inquiry involves the retrieval, comprehension and interpretation of sources, and judgement guided by principles that are intrinsic to the discipline. Inquiry yields knowledge that is based on the available evidence but which remains open to further debate and reinterpretation. The method fosters in students the ability to recognise varying interpretations of history and to determine the difference between fact and opinion.

The inquiry method is based on the proposition that learning should be structured around a series of relevant and targeted questions, often developed in partnership with students, rather than the traditional method of a teacher (expert) imparting an established set of facts to students (recipients). Good inquiry questions will be intriguing for students and teachers alike.

Inquiry units tend to encourage curiosity, imagination, detective work, interaction, physical movement and debate. In recent years some educators have combined inquiry and creativity tasks by requiring students to design their own models and constructions.

In the History classroom, the opening lesson of an inquiry unit often centres on a curious image or item which students are asked to speculate upon. The teacher might ask questions like 'What do you think is going on here?', 'When might this image have been created?' and so on. After some initial hypotheses and discussions, the teacher might explain the origin and significance of the image before introducing the main inquiry question. This is usually a broad, over-arching question that 'frames' the unit. This framing question (for our purposes, Inquiry Question 1) will be kept in mind throughout the study and completed in full at the end of the unit. The teacher also sets several other inquiry questions targeting specific points – these can usually be answered in one or two lessons each.

As they go through the unit, students examine a set of historical sources. These sources, comprising documents, images, statistics, news clippings or artistic works, are used as evidence with which to answer the inquiry questions. Through a range of enjoyable tasks, students respond creatively and form opinions of their own on the questions and issue raised.

Inquiry activities also require students to:

- form hypotheses
- conduct research
- analyse sources
- synthesise ideas
- understand context and chronology
- articulate and justify an argument.

The most important part of the process, however, is the sense of surprise and enthusiasm that is created when teacher and students set about solving a puzzle together.

I trust this series will give you many lively ideas for your classroom.

Ingrid Purnell, Editor

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Overview

How did the Gold Rush change Victoria?

Permanent European settlement of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales began in May 1835 with the arrival from Van Diemen's Land of two separate parties of settlers. One was led by John Batman and the other by John Pascoe Fawkner. Fierce rivals, Batman and Fawkner set up camps on opposite sides of the Yarra River, having arrived with the sole purpose of acquiring cheap land to expand their pastoral businesses. By 1835, suitable land for pastoral expansion in Van Diemen's Land was becoming scarce and overstocked and there were fortunes to be made producing wool for the British market.

Batman was one of the few European settlers to acknowledge Indigenous ownership of the land. Having drawn up a treaty, on 6 June 1835 he 'purchased' 600 000 acres of land from eight chiefs of the Kulin nation. This area of land included the present sites of Melbourne and Geelong. However, the New South Wales governor, Sir Richard Bourke, cancelled this agreement on 26 August 1835, arguing that all land belonged to the Crown and that the Aboriginal people were trespassers. It is now recognised that people of the Kulin nation have lived in the area known as Melbourne for at least 40 000 years.

European settlement proceeded rapidly because of the massive profits to be made producing wool and the ideal conditions for raising sheep. Land was literally free for the taking. Within ten years, settlers and their flocks of sheep had spread across the western and northern areas of what was to become the state of Victoria. These squatters gobbled up vast tracts of land and created an agricultural economy based on pastoralism.

A new aristocracy emerged, wherein a few wealthy landowners ran huge estates that were worked by large numbers of agricultural labourers. Land was acquired at little or no cost, often by way of land grants, and the workforce needed to run these huge properties was drawn from indentured assisted migrants (many of whom were ex-convicts or ticket-of-leave men). Between 1845 and 1850, Irish orphan girls fleeing the horrors of the Irish Potato Famine helped make up the numbers of female servants running these large estates.

In July 1850 the land south of the Murray River in the Colony of New South Wales was granted separation and Victoria began as an independent colony in January 1851. Charles Joseph La Trobe was appointed as Victoria's first governor. A census taken in March 1851 gives the population of the Colony of Victoria as 77 345 persons: 46 202 males and 31 143 females.[1] (These figures do not include Indigenous people, who were excluded from the census.)

The map of pastoral holdings in the Port Phillip District in 1851 shows just how rapidly Europeans occupied the Colony of Victoria. It also shows that European settlement favoured the areas suitable for grazing sheep. It took just sixteen years, from 1835 to 1851, for the traditional owners to be dispossessed of almost all their lands; they were replaced by squatters, many of whom controlled vast estates.

One such property was Ercildoune, originally comprising 400 square miles of grazing land between Mount Buninyong and Beaufort. Settled by Scottish-born brothers Thomas and Somerville Learmonth in 1838, the first Ercildoune homestead was a simple wooden

cabin built over a sturdy stone cellar, where the brothers could retreat in the event of an attack from the 'natives.' Once profits from wool began to roll in, an imposing stone homestead was begun in 1839. With its baronial-style exterior it resembles a stately English or Scottish manor.

Ercildoune was typical of the properties established during the squatting era. These huge pastoral estates were virtually small townships. By the mid-1850s Ercildoune had 125 workers living on the property and a team of gardeners maintaining the elaborate and extensive pleasure gardens. Many of the workers were ex-convicts or indentured labourers.

Ercildoune, between Mt. Buninyong and Beaufort, Victoria. Photograph by the author.

Thus, by 1851 Victoria was developing into a community that in some ways mirrored the British social system. A small number of 'lords of the manor,' in this case wealthy squatters, held a significant economic, social and political advantage over the majority of the population, mainly made up of workers on large estates. (What we would call the 'middle class' was small at this stage.) Due to low levels of literacy it was deemed unnecessary to grant these workers political rights, including the vote. Since workers were dependent on employers and had heavy physical demands placed on them, few had the opportunity or inclination to pursue political reform.

This all changed, however, with the discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851. Assisted immigration, it seemed, became redundant overnight, as the goldfields of Victoria became a magnet attracting miners from many countries. The new immigrants were largely middle-class – they could afford to purchase the £8–14 ticket from Britain to Australia. Predominantly male, they were young, adventurous and energetic. Most were literate, idealistic, and socially and politically aware. Some had been involved in the movements of Chartism and Liberalism in Britain in the 1840s. These newcomers swamped the pre-1850 settlers and altered forever the social framework of the society. Suddenly, literate middle-class Victorians were in the majority.

The Gold Rush was a pivotal point in Victorian, and Australian, history. It ushered in a long period of prosperity. Within ten years of the first discoveries, Ballarat, Bendigo and Castlemaine had emerged as substantial urban centres, and several smaller towns and settlements continued to grow and flourish until the 1890s. 'Marvellous Melbourne' boomed as a result of the wealth pouring in from the goldfields; by 1901 the city was Australia's principle industrial centre and was chosen as the nation's first capital.

On the goldfields, many social divisions disappeared. A person's socio-economic and educational status, or class, was no longer a determinant of success, since anyone could become wealthy overnight. For the first time in Australia, people from all backgrounds mixed together, worked together, lived together and dressed alike. Suddenly you could not tell a gentleman from a shopkeeper or farm worker by his dress. To a large extent people faced similar obstacles and triumphs.

In the early years of alluvial mining, men worked individually or in small groups and came to enjoy this new-found freedom from authority. They called each other 'mate' or 'digger.' By 1854 there was mounting recognition that many people would not return to their countries of origin. Here was a land of opportunity, open space, mild climate and abundant food – this was a place to call home. Thus people began to look for local business opportunities and to take more interest in the nature of the new government being created in Victoria.

In Ballarat, local grievances added to existing anger over the unjust licence system. The deep-lead mining practices unique to Ballarat meant that the community was relatively stable (non-transient) for a gold town; thus, discontent


Inquiry Question 3

How was daily life on the Victorian goldfields?

ACTIVITY 1: A RANGE OF DIGGERS

1. Examine Source 7 (*Forest Creek Diggings*), Source 8 (*Mount Alexander Gold Diggers*) and Source 9 (Charlie Fun Chung) (p. 24–6).
2. With a partner, discuss the nature and reliability of the three sources as historical evidence.
3. Create a poster that shows Source 7 and 8 annotated according to the following questions:
   - *Who* are the people?
   - *What* are they doing?
   - *When* was the image created?
   - *Where* did the events occur?
   - *Why* might the artist have chosen this subject matter?
4. Using books and the internet, find out more about Chinese people on the Victorian goldfields. How typical was Charlie Fun Chung's story?
5. With your class discuss what the three sources tell you about life on the Victorian goldfields.

ACTIVITY 2: THE NATIVE POLICE AND THE LICENCE FEE

The Native Police Corps, comprising Indigenous policemen, was charged initially with keeping order on the Victorian goldfields. Established in 1849, the Corps was used to introduce a highly unpopular licence fee to raise revenue for the government. In August 1851, diggers in Ballarat were advised that they would need to pay a monthly licence fee of thirty shillings, and similar fees were applied to other diggings. This led to confrontations with the Native Police.

1. Examine Source 10 (*Black Troopers*) and Source 11 (Native Police) (p. 27–8).
2. Write a paragraph in your own words describing the incident that occurred on 21 September 1851 and the role played by the Native Police. Why might the Indigenous policemen have been resented by the diggers? In your response refer to both sources.
3. With a partner, identify the type of evidence represented by Source 10 and Source 11, commenting on strengths and limitations of each in understanding relations on the goldfields in 1851.
4. Referring to Source 7, Source 10 and Source 11, write a paragraph about the experiences of Indigenous people on the Victorian goldfields. In what ways did they contribute and struggle, and to what extent did they have authority as members of the Native Police Corps?

ACTIVITY 3: TOPSY-TURVY?

Back in Britain some people viewed the social upheaval caused by the Victorian gold rush with alarm. Cartoons appeared in British journals warning readers that the goldfields were not a place for respectable people since they were characterised by 'topsy-turvy'[1] (upside-down) social relations.

1. Examine Source 12 (*Topsy Turvey*) (p. 29).
2. Note down examples of 'topsy-turvy' interactions in the etching. How accurate were these?
3. With a partner, discuss why the inclusion of a sign reading 'Regent Street' might have alarmed a Londoner at the time.
4. Discuss the meaning of the full title of the etching and the publication it first appeared in. What was the likely audience and message of the etching at the time?

ACTIVITY 4: WOMEN ON THE GOLDFIELDS

1. Examine Source 13 (women on the goldfields) (p.30).
2. Research the following women, who either lived on or visited the Victorian goldfields: Caroline Chisholm, Mrs. Charles Clacy, Martha Clendinning, Sarah Davenport, Lucy Hart, Lola Montez and Emily Skinner.
3. Drawing on Source 13 and your other research, create a poster or presentation about one or more of the above women and present it to your class.

ACTIVITY 5: ASSESSING LIFE ON THE DIGGINGS

Drawing on Sources 7–13 and your own research, write an essay of 600–800 words responding to **one** of the topics below. Include an introduction, topic sentences, paragraphs supported by evidence, a conclusion and a bibliography.

Topics:

- 'Every hard worker had the same chance of reward on the diggings.' Do you agree?
- 'The Victorian goldfields were a crucible of social and racial tensions.' Is this correct?
- Contrast the story of an underdog with that of a successful digger – what do these stories tell us about the Victorian goldfields?

1 Note variant spelling of this phrase in the source.

Sources

Distribute these sources to your class as required. You may photocopy from this booklet, or print directly from the CD provided.

SOURCE 22

Population of Victoria, 1851–61.

DATE	FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL PERSONS
2 March 1851*	31 143	46 202	77 345
26 April 1854	80 911	155 887	236 798
29 March 1857	146 432	264 334	410 766
7 April 1861	220 076	321 724	541 800

* *Excludes Aboriginal people*

Government of Victoria, census figures 1851–61.

SOURCE 23

Some impacts of the Gold Rush.

The fabulously wealthy alluvial goldfields (stream and river deposits) at Ballarat and Bendigo turned Victoria into a magnet for immigrant adventurers, who came in their hundreds of thousands – literally. The Australian gold rush would transform the British colonies, eventually into a nation. In 1851 the population of Victoria stood at around 80 000, and a decade later it had risen to over 500 000. The total population of Australia increased threefold from 430 000 in 1851 to 1.7 million in 1871.

[Although] deposits were also uncovered in other states ... Victoria was the epicentre of the Australian gold rush.

The huge influx of population [*sic*] threatened to collapse the administration of the fledgling state, exacerbated by the fact that a large part of the civil service and police of Melbourne – including the city's most senior government officials – abandoned their posts and flocked to the gold diggings. It seemed as if a plug had been pulled. Businesses lost their workers and schools emptied. Ships' crews deserted and headed inland in droves. Fathers left their families to dig for gold, and whole families travelled the short distance from the city to set up camp on the goldfields. Mining camps appeared seemingly overnight with each new find, then moved on when the gold ran out to set up elsewhere.

The Australian gold towns grew quickly as the state of Victoria convulsed with gold fever. Ballarat was proclaimed a township in 1852, a municipality in 1855, a borough in 1863, and a city in 1870. Bendigo – known as Sandhurst until 1891 – was proclaimed a city in 1871 and introduced trams in 1890. The Forest Creek diggings at Mount Alexander proved to become the finest alluvial goldfields in the world, where the town of Castlemaine was proclaimed a municipal district in 1855 and a borough in 1863.

Gold placed the financial viability of Victoria and New South Wales beyond doubt, and Britain no longer had any excuse for withholding self-government from its Australian colonies. A long economic boom followed, spurring the development of state infrastructure, local legislatures, and land policies.

Prepared by Patrick Taylor, 2010; go to *www.patricktaylor.com/australian-gold-rush*. Reproduced with thanks.

SOURCE 24

The Girls the Diggers Left Behind.

William Strutt, *The Girls the Diggers Left Behind, and What they Had to Do*, pencil and watercolour sketch, 1851. From *Victoria the Golden* (sketchbook). Strutt's painting illustrates the unusual predicament the women of Melbourne found themselves in shortly after gold was discovered in October 1851. Without men around to perform traditional male tasks, the women filled their shoes and chopped wood, fetched water and mended houses as required. Reproduced with the permission of the Victorian Parliamentary Library.