



# Gold Rush Student Activity

## Coming to California

After gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill on January 24, 1848, word began to spread and people from around the world rushed to the gold fields. The three main routes were Overland by wagon, around Cape Horn by boat, or across the Isthmus of Panama. Each route had benefits, but each route had its share of dangers.

**Read about each route. Pick which route you would take and fill out the accompanying activity sheet.**

### Overland Route

The greatest number of emigrants that ventured to California during the Gold Rush came overland by foot, wagon, stage, or horseback on the California Trail. The journey took emigrants across the northern Plains, over the Rocky Mountains, through the Great Basin, and finally over the Sierra Nevada Mountains into California. Miners risked sickness and accidents over their 2,000 mile journey to reach the gold fields.

This 1853 painting by William Ranney depicts a family going west.



### Isthmus of Panama

By 1850, the fastest and most popular sea route consisted of three parts: a steamship from New York to Chagres; overland across the Isthmus; and a steamship from Panama City to San Francisco. Over 6,000 miles and 33 to 35 days, travelers faced malaria, yellow-fever, and highway robbers.

This painting by Charles Nahl depicts some of the dangers faced by travelers trying to get to California. Many easterners encountered new plants, animals, and insects as they crossed the Isthmus.

### Cape Horn

The journey around Cape Horn was the easier and most widely used of the three sea routes to California in 1849. Most 49ers had never been on water before and diaries reported that many were seasick for the first week or longer. People traveling this route spent four to eight months on the 20,000 mile trip.

The clipper ship was a long, narrow vessel that traveled quickly and was valuable to the commercial trade industry. It was adopted for use on the Cape Horn route, but many ships were abandoned in San Francisco Bay when passengers and crew left for the gold fields.



*Ads like the one above provided dramatic and fanciful images of the long journey to California.*

## Coming to California Activity

Pretend it is 1851 and you just learned that there is gold in California. Your friends are all making plans to leave for California as soon as possible, and you want to join them. Fill out this activity sheet.

Based on what you just read, which route would you take and why?

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What would you pack? Remember, in a wagon you would need to make room for hundreds of pounds of food. On a ship you would have food but you might get bored. Across the Isthmus you would need to walk, ride a mule, and cross rivers.

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Imagine you were offered the chance to make millions of dollars today, but you had to move across the world. Would you leave, like those during the Gold Rush? And if you did, how would your journey look different in 2020 versus 1851? What transportation would you take and what might you pack?

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## Coming to California Activity



Gold miners used a variety of tools like gold pans, picks, long toms, and dynamite. Use this page to draw the tools you might have used if you were a miner. Or, get creative! Design your own special mining tool.