

The Great Oklahoma Gold Rush

About this lesson

Grade Level: Upper Elementary/Middle School/High School

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Time: One to two class periods

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Abstract/Introduction Students will explore how gold seekers, Native Americans, and the United States Cavalry stationed at Fort Sill interacted with each other in the 1895 Oklahoma Gold Rush.

Background Read Attachment 1 – Background for The Great Oklahoma Gold Rush.

Economic Reasoning The scarcity of gold makes the hunt for it more precious. People make choices which cost them financially and personally in order to hunt for gold or other treasure because they believe the benefits will outweigh those costs. They often spend a fortune looking for gold only to find their money gone and no treasure located.

Goals/Objectives

Students will:

- explain why scarcity of a resource makes it valuable.
- examine why white settlers wanted the Indian reservations opened.
- explain why the soldiers from Fort Sill had so much trouble with the settlers, gold seekers and the Native Americans.
- identify the incentives which guided each group's behavior.

Standards

This lesson could be taught from fourth to twelfth grade. It meets PASS standards in:

Social Studies

Grade 4: Standards 4 and 5

Grade 5: Standard 7

Geography

Grade 7: Standards 2, 5, and 6

U.S. History 8th Grade

Standards 8 and 9

Oklahoma History

Standards 4, 6, and 8

High School Economics

Standards 4.1, 6, and 7.1.

Materials

A period map of southwestern Oklahoma
Gold-colored “kisses” candy wrappers

Procedure

Part I – Activity

1. Divide the class into three groups. Two students will act as soldiers; half of the remaining class members will be gold seekers and the other half will be Native Americans confined to the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation.
2. Place a few neatly stacked (representing the virgin environment) golden kisses candy wrappers (gold) on a table in the middle of the room.
3. Explain to Group One - the Native Americans - that they own the land (desk) on which the “gold” is located because it is on their reservation. The wrappers are worthless to them, however. What they really want is to get to their traditional hunting lands (the water fountain and/or restroom).
4. Explain to Group Two - The Gold Seekers - that they are entering the reservation in search of gold nuggets which can make them rich. They are not legally allowed to take the wrappers; BUT if they can grab one or two and get away before the soldiers see them, they may spend the gold. (Make sure there are not enough gold wrappers to go around to Group Two.)
5. Explain to the two soldiers that they are only a few against the many, and there will be no re-enforcements. They must do two things:
 - One, they must keep Group One - the Native Americans - from leaving the room (Reservation) to go to the restroom or the drinking fountain (the traditional hunting lands); and
 - Two, they must keep Group Two - the Gold Seekers - from getting the candy wrappers (gold) by confiscating any they are able to sneak and grab. The soldiers may not hover around the gold and must patrol the two groups.
6. Allow about 20 seconds as a practice and repeat the instructions as needed. Then let the activity continue for one minute.
7. Discussion:
 - What resources were scarce? (gold and soldiers)
 - What cost was involved in the choices? [If Group One got caught trying to leave the reservation, they were sent back. If Group Two got caught taking gold, the soldiers confiscated it.]
 - If the neat stack of gold wrappers represents the environment, what happens as Group Two tries to steal the gold? [The land is disturbed.]
 - What were the incentives?
 1. Group One - The Native Americans. They could return to their homeland if they could sneak away; therefore, they tried to sneak out.
 2. Group Two - The Gold Seekers. They could spend any gold they could capture, therefore they tried to steal gold.
 3. Soldiers. Their jobs were on the line if they did not keep both groups in order. However, there were only two soldiers, so it was hard to maintain control.

Part II – Geographic Orientation

1. Orient students to the location of the Wichita Mountains.
2. Use a map of Oklahoma showing the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation.
3. On a current map of Oklahoma, locate the Wichita Mountains Forest Service, Medicine Creek, and Meers.

Part III – Read the “Background for The Great Oklahoma Gold Rush” and discuss the following questions:

1. Why were white people not allowed to legally enter the Wichita Mountains? [The mountains were part of the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache reservation.]
2. Why were illegal whites moved from the Wichita Mountains into Texas? [Texas was the closest border with Indian Territory.]
3. What were the incentives for whites to enter the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation? [Gold. Intruders believed gold abounded in the mountains.]
4. What was the cost to the first Wildman settlement? [After entering illegally and setting up a town, citizens lost most of their belongings when the Fort Sill soldiers destroyed the settlement and escorted its occupants over the border into Texas.]
5. What were the incentives for Native Americans to seek the removal of white Intruders? [If Intruders were allowed to remain on tribal lands, more would have come; and eventually, the Native Americans would be overrun.]
6. What rules had been created which influenced choices for:
 - a. Native Americans: [They had been forced onto reservations by rules from the US Government.]
 - b. White Intruders: [The rules said they could not enter an Indian reservation. Therefore, Intruders chose to become law breakers in order to get into tribal lands.]
 - c. Fort Sill Soldiers: [There were so few soldiers they could not patrol the Reservation regularly or adequately. Gold seekers pushed into the Wichita Mountains and set up camp so they could look for gold. The Native Americans just wanted to return to their homes farther west. The soldiers did escort miners out of Indian Territory as often as possible.]

Bibliography

<http://www.treasure.fish.com/oklahoma%20metal%20detecting.htm>

Taylor, Ethel, “Kiowa County Prospectors,” <http://rebelcherokee.labdiva.com/kegold.html>

Weaver, Bobby, “Gold,” <http://www.okhistory.org/enc/Gold.htm>

Assessment

1. Which of the following statements best reflects the principle that peoples' choices are influenced by incentives:
 - A. Native Americans were forced to live on reservations.
 - B. Soldiers hunted gold seekers to remove them from Indian Territory.
 - C. Settlers sought to build new town in the Wichita Mountains.
 - D. Prospectors broke federal law in order to search for gold.

Answer: D

2. Which of the following statements most accurately explains why Wildman ceased to exist while Meers continued to be a small community?
 - A. Wildman was too deep in the mountains to be a success.
 - B. Meers was settled by farmers as well as gold seekers.
 - C. Wildman was settled by people trying to make money quickly.
 - D. Meers settlers planned to be there to move the town north.

Answer: B

Extension

- Search archives of *The Oklahoman*
“Gold in Them Oklahoma Hills? U.S. Taking New, Long Look,” by Robert Allen. May 5, 1968, page 21
“Thar’s Gold in Oklahoma Hills,” by Jim Etter, November 11, 1979, page 1
- Have students research the price of gold and graph those changes. Discuss the reasons that gold has value.

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Attachment 1

Lesson Background

Legends of gold in Oklahoma go back to the 1500s when Spanish explorers opened numerous shafts in the Wichita Mountains. In the 1700s, Mexican miners combed the mountains looking for old Spanish mines. They left their own mining evidences behind when they returned home.

By the 1800s, mining promoters were scouting the Wichita Mountains which were located in the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation. Finding the sluices, tunnels, and shafts left by the Spanish and Mexicans, the promoters went to work. Newspaper headlines of “Gold in them thar hills” spread over Oklahoma Territory, Indian Territory, and nearby states. Although Fort Sill soldiers patrolled and attempted to protect the Kiowa-Comanche-Apache Reservation, estimates are that as many as 5000 miners pushed past Fort Sill and the Indian Encampments in order to reach the Wichita Mountains.

Several gold camps sprang up almost over night with populations of 500 or more complete with wives, children, dogs, and tents.

The town of Wildman was established on the headwaters of Otter Creek in Jackson County. In addition to miners and prospectors, there were gamblers, thieves, and outlaws. The original Wildman was burned by Fort Sill soldiers and the inhabitants escorted into Texas. In 1901 when the reservation was opened to settlement, many of the original Wildman residents returned and re-established the town. In its heyday, Wildman had a hardware store, saloons, gambling houses, two grocery stores, two blacksmith shops, a café, and drugstore, four assayer offices, a smelter and mining offices, an \$8000 two-story hotel, a doctor, a dentist, and a two-room school which doubled as a church.

Meers was another gold rush town. A group of illegal white Intruders set up camp north of Fort Sill. After a settler found a gold nugget lodged in the claw of a chicken being cleaned for Christmas dinner, gold seekers began to pour into the budding town. Meers alternately flourished and declined for the next decade. In addition to the kinds of stores extant in Wildman, Meers also housed a newspaper. Its greatest population was about 500.

When President William McKinley created the Wichita Forest Service in 1902, Meers lay inside the Reserve. In order to keep their town, the citizens of Meers dismantled their homes and businesses and moved them a couple of miles away to the north shore of Medicine Creek, just out of the Reserve.

In 1905 a report by an Oklahoma University geologist spelled the end for Meers as a viable community. Ore samples he assayed showed there was too little gold to justify mining efforts, and people and businesses started drifting away. Meers continues today with the main attraction being the Meers Café serving fresh buffalo burgers.

Bibliography

<http://www.treasure.fish.com/oklahoma%20metal%20detecting.htm>

Taylor, Ethel, “Kiowa County Prospectors,” <http://rebelcherokee.labdiva.com/kegold.html>

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