

**Documents: Gold Discovery**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Analyze the document and answer the questions.

**Background:** On 24 January 1848, while building John Sutter's sawmill next to the American River near Coloma, head of operations James Marshall found a gold nugget next to the river. Despite the best attempts by Sutter and Marshall to keep the discovery quiet, word soon made its way to the East Coast. In his State of the Union Address, President James K. Polk announced that gold had been discovered in California. That touched off a stampede of hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world into the gold fields. Having just acquired California from Mexico, the United States government was concerned about events unfolding in the territory. They dispatched Colonel Richard Mason to investigate.

**Official Report on the Gold Mines.**

Brigadier-General R. Jones, Adjutant-General,  
U.S.A., Washington, D.C

Sir,—I have the honour to inform you that, accompanied by Lieut. W. T. Sherman, 3rd Artillery, A.A.A. General, I started on the 12th of June last to make a tour through the northern part of California. We reached San Francisco on the 20th, and found that all, or nearly all, its male inhabitants had gone to the mines. The town, which a few months before was so busy and thriving, was then almost deserted. . . .

The discovery of these vast deposits of gold has entirely changed the character of Upper California. Its people, before engaged in cultivating their small patches of ground, and guarding their herds of cattle and horses, have all gone to the mines, or are on their way thither. Labourers of every trade have left their workbenches, and tradesmen their shops; sailors desert their ships as fast as they arrive on the coast; and several vessels have gone to sea with hardly enough hands to spread a sail. Two or three are

now at anchor in San Francisco, with no crew on board.

Many desertions, too, have taken place from the garrisons within the influence of these mines; twenty-six soldiers have deserted from the post of Sonoma, twenty-four from that of San Francisco, and twenty-four from Monterey. I have no hesitation now in saying, that there is more gold in the country drained by the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers than will pay the cost of the present war with Mexico a hundred times over. No capital is required to obtain this gold, as the labouring man wants nothing but his pick and shovel and tin pan, with which to dig and wash the gravel, and many frequently pick gold out of the crevices of rocks with their knives, in pieces of from one to six ounces.

I have the honour to be,  
Your most obedient Servant,

R. B. MASON, Colonel 1st Dragoons,  
commanding.  
Monterey, August 17, 1848

**Central Ideas.** A central idea is the overall topic of the entire piece.

1. What is the central idea in Colonel Richard B. Mason's report?
  - E. San Francisco is almost deserted.
  - H. A large part of the male population in Northern California have run off to the gold fields.
  - O. The gold rush can pay for the Mexican War.
  - Y. Gold is easy to find.

**Words in Context.** Define words based upon how they are used in the writing.

“Many desertions, too, have taken place from the garrisons within the influence of these mines....”

2. What does the word “desertions” mean as it is used in the quote above?
- E. dry conditions; lack of water
  - H. making money by selling military goods illegally
  - O. leaving the armed forces without permission
  - Y. joining the military for protection

**Facts vs. Opinions.**

**Fact:** A conclusion that can be proven true and/or is absolutely accurate to all people involved.

**Opinion:** Belief or preference about something that cannot be proven or accepted by all people.

Colonel Mason believes most of the male population in San Francisco has gone to the mines.

3. Is Colonel Mason’s belief something that can be proven? If yes, circle *fact*; if no, circle *opinion*.
- A. fact
  - N. opinion

**Textual Evidence.** Find evidence from the document and circle all that apply.

4. According to Colonel Mason’s report, how did the gold discovery affect people in California?
- E. Soldiers deserted their posts.
  - H. Rivers are draining tremendous amounts of gold.
  - O. Sailors have abandoned ships in the San Francisco Bay.
  - Y. The cost of living has dramatically increased in San Francisco.
5. According to Colonel Mason’s report, how much gold is in California?
- E. There is enough gold drained by rivers to pay for the Mexican war 100 times or more.
  - H. It is expensive to mine for gold because there is not a lot of gold to be found.
  - O. Miners are simply picking gold out of crevices.
  - Y. San Francisco is filled with people who laugh at the miners seeking to get rich.