

Activity 14: Panning for Gold!

Activity Description:

Set up stations; Make "gold nuggets" by pounding lead shots so they are slightly flattened. Pour the sand into the shallow, broad bottomed container (plastic storage boxes which are approximately 3'x2'x6" work well). Mix gold nuggets into the sand. Fill the container with water, leaving at least an inch of water over the top of the sand.

1. Announce:

Guess what? An old-timer who is disgusted with his prospects has offered to give us half of his claim. It seems like a pretty good offer. The best part is he's been digging all winter long and has a pile of paydirt to pan. He thinks it is worthless, but I say we should give it a try.

2. You'll want to demonstrate how to pan for gold.

3. While students are waiting to pan for gold, lead a discussion about what makes something valuable:

The miner's offer to sell his claim for some flour and some bacon is historically accurate. There is documentation of a miner making such an offer. Once we arrived in Dawson we heard of people paying \$18 for a dozen eggs. Back in Seattle we could have purchased 9 suits of underwear for \$18. There are stories of people paying \$1 just to hear a weeks old newspaper read aloud and of miner's using gold nuggets to pay for drinks and to tip the dance hall girls. Can you imagine?! In Seattle the gold nuggets could have purchased fine clothing, vehicles, or expensive jewelry, in Dawson it is paying for a single drink. What is going on?

Allow for student response. Guide the discussion so that students begin to see that what is considered valuable depends on what is available and plentiful versus what is wanted or unavailable (supply and demand). The following questions may help:

Why are miner's using gold nuggets to pay for things and not paper money?

Why was gold considered so valuable in Seattle and other parts of the nation yet treated very casually in Dawson?

4. Wrap up the lesson by having the class create a statement about supply and demand (using their own words, of course) to explain the phenomena they discussed.

OBJECTIVE: To experience gold panning; To provide a fun culminating experience; To introduce the concept of "supply and demand."

MATERIALS:

1. Lead shots that have been pounded flat and spray painted gold.
2. Wide, shallow, water tight container.
3. Sandbox sand
4. Metal pie pans (to work as gold pans).

