



# Death Valley Characters



## Death Valley National Park

Mining: Death Valley Characters Lesson Plan  
45 minutes

**Essential Question:** What impact did mining have in Death Valley?

### **Standard(s):**

California History Social Science Content Standards:

3.3.3 Trace why their community was established, how individuals and families contributed to its founding and development, and how the community has changed over time, drawing on maps, photographs, oral histories, letters, newspapers, and other primary sources.

3.5.1 Describe the ways in which local producers have used and are using natural resources, human resources, and capital resources to produce goods and services in the past and the present.

Nevada History Social Science Content Standards:

SS.3.22. Explain how human settlements and movements relate to a location's physical geography and natural resources.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards: Reading: Literature:

RL.3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events

RL.3.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

RL.3.6 Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards: Speaking & Listening:

SL.3.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to:

- Explain a character's point of view
- Analyze different character's point of views on similar topics

### **Overview:**

This lesson is part of a cross-curricular mining unit focused on the impacts of miners on the Death Valley community and environment. This is the second lesson in the unit which provides students opportunities to explore the people within the Death Valley mining towns. Students will role-play characters and answer questions based on their character's perspective.

## Teacher Background Information:

Since the 1848 discovery of gold in California, Death Valley experienced over 140 years of boom and bust mining. From the 1880s to the early 1900s, mining was limited and sporadic in the Death Valley region. In the mid-1900s, open pit and strip mines became popular. Legislation and Death Valley's changing status to a national monument and then a national park put an end to most mining activity. Billie Mine was the last active mine which closed its doors in 2005.

Towns popped up and disappeared just as quickly around Death Valley based on where mining claims were somewhat successful. Populations in these towns ranged from 400 to 10,000 people. Some were simple tent camps while others had infrastructure and accommodations like saloons and hotels. Rhyolite, Skidoo, Greenwater, Harrisburg, and Chloride City were examples of these bustling temporary towns that are now infamous ghost town sites.

While ghost towns now, these sites were full of people with different personalities and reasons for relocating to Death Valley. Prospectors looked for ore veins in the mountains and miners worked the land. Not everyone in these towns were prospectors or miners though. Towns needed supplies, schools, food, mail, transportation, and safety. People came west fulfilling these needs and hoping to get a share of the western riches and adventure.

## Materials:

- Internet connectivity to display the article
- Mechanism to display the article to the class
- Character Sheets
- Questions for the Board

## Lesson Hook:

Display the online article [Land of a Thousand Voices](#) on a class projector. Ask student volunteers to read each paragraph about different cultures who settled in Death Valley at different time periods. Be prepared to briefly discuss the information in each of the paragraphs. At the end of the article, instruct students to share with a classmate near them. Set a timer for 1 minute for one student in each pairing to share of which culture in the article they are most interested and why. When the timer buzzes, classmates switch roles and the other partner shares for 1 minute. OPTIONAL: Ask for student volunteers to share their classmate's interest.

## Procedure:

1. After the lesson hook, tell the students today's lesson is about the people in the Death Valley mining camps. People of many different cultures and social status came west and had to discover a new way to live.
2. Divide the class into 7 groups. Each group will get a character sheet of a single person who lived in a Death Valley mining camp. Each student within a group needs a copy of the same character sheet. Each group is a different character.
3. Each group reads their character sheet and engages in a discussion about this individual. Describe this person. How is this person related to mining? Where did this person live? What was this person's job?
4. Teacher writes the following Character Questions on the board:
  - a. Q1- Who are you?
  - b. Q2 – Did you travel far to get to Death Valley?
  - c. Q3 – How did you earn money in Death Valley?
  - d. Q3 – What is one thing you struggled with in the mining camp?
  - e. Q4 – What is one thing you enjoyed in the mining camp?
5. When everyone in the group understands their character, the group should answer the questions displayed on the board. The answers need to come from their character's point of view. Students are encouraged to take notes about the answers discussed.
6. When each group is finished, inform the class they will be switching groups now. Students should get their Character Sheet and their notes and prepare to move. Ask the students to count off from 1-7 in their groups.

All the 1s are now a group, all the 2s are now a group, etc. There should be at least 1 of each different character in every new group.

7. Once the new groups are settled, instruct the students to go through the questions on the board again. This time the student should take the perspective of their character. I.e: "My name is Shorty Harris. I came to Death Valley because I heard there was gold." Every character in the group should answer number 1, then everyone should answer number 2, etc.

### **Extension Questions or Activity:**

- Write a first-person point of view essay answering the questions from the student's character's perspective.
- Click on and read the link for a specific cultural group in the [Land of a Thousand Voices](#). Create at least three questions you still wonder about with this cultural group and their relationship to mining. Share and discuss your questions with a partner.

### **Support for Struggling Learners:**

- Instead of breaking into second groups, ask student volunteers to act out the different character's answers in front of the whole class. Teacher and other students from the character's group can support the actor with appropriate responses.

### **Vocabulary:**

- Grub – A slang term meaning food - It is taken from another meaning for grub which is to dig. Pigs and other animals often grub for their food. Cowboys began to use this term for their food as well.
- Prospector – A type of explorer who looks for mineral deposits in the ground
- Miner – A person who extracts (takes out) minerals from the ground.
- Talc – A mineral which crushes to a white powder used in baby powder, paint, cosmetics, and many other items
- Dysentery – An infection of the intestines causing diarrhea and dehydration
- Slate Board – A hard, thin piece of material made from slate rock and used for writing
- Postmaster – The person in charge of an individual post office

## Assessment:

### Group Work Rubric

	4	3	2	1
Group Cooperation	All members work well together all of the time; assist others when needed.	Members work well together most of the time.	Members work well together some of the time. Some teacher intervention needed.	Teacher intervention needed often to help group cooperate..
Group On-Task	Team is on task all of the time. Does not need any teacher reminders.	Team is on task most of the time. Does not need any teacher reminders.	Team is on task some of the time. Needs teacher reminders.	Team needs frequent teacher reminders to get on task.
Perspective	It is very clear whose perspective you speaking from. You played a bit with the character so they really come alive.	You've really attempted to share your character's perspective.	You've shared your character's perspective, by simply reading the card.	You don't share your character's perspective accurately.
Ideas/Content	The information is relevant and telling details go beyond the obvious.	The information is somewhat relevant and all details are accurate.	The information is somewhat relevant but some details are inaccurate.	The information is not relevant to the character and 3 or more details are inaccurate.

## References:

- [Mining in Death Valley – Death Valley National Park](https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/nature/mining-in-death-valley.htm) - <<https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/nature/mining-in-death-valley.htm>>
- [People – Death Valley National Park](https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/historyculture/people.htm) - <<https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/historyculture/people.htm>>
- [Frank “Shorty” Harris – Legends of America](https://www.legendsofamerica.com/nv-shortyharris/) - <<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/nv-shortyharris/>>
- [Frank “Shorty” Harris – Death Valley National Park](https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/historyculture/shortharris.htm) – <<https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/historyculture/shortharris.htm>>
- [The First Timbisha – Desert Gazette](http://desertgazette.com/blog/tag/mojave-desert/page/2/) - <<http://desertgazette.com/blog/tag/mojave-desert/page/2/>>
- [Louise Grantham - Death Valley Journal](https://deathvalleyjournal.wordpress.com/2009/05/10/louise-grantham/) - <<https://deathvalleyjournal.wordpress.com/2009/05/10/louise-grantham/>>
- [Warm Springs – Backcountry Explorers](https://www.backcountryexplorers.com/warm-springs-camp-death-valley.html) - <<https://www.backcountryexplorers.com/warm-springs-camp-death-valley.html>>
- [Death Valley Scotty – Death Valley National Park](https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/historyculture/death-valley-scotty.htm)- <<https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/historyculture/death-valley-scotty.htm>>
- [Death Valley Scotty – DesertUSA](https://www.desertusa.com/desert-people/death-valley-scotty.html) - <<https://www.desertusa.com/desert-people/death-valley-scotty.html>>
- [History of China Ranch](http://www.chinaranch.com/category_s/25.htm) - <[http://www.chinaranch.com/category\\_s/25.htm](http://www.chinaranch.com/category_s/25.htm)>
- Caluthers, W. (1951). [Loafing Along Death Valley Trails: A Personal Narrative of People and Places](https://books.google.com/books?id=4S5BDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT121&lpg=PT121&dq=Quon+Sing+china+ranch&source=bl&ots=euAxqNmEcb&sig=ACfU3U3TahGTGiDOsaBly4UMoQDn2c8BNq&hl=en&ppis=e&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwidp4CVt-). Ch. 11 <<https://books.google.com/books?id=4S5BDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT121&lpg=PT121&dq=Quon+Sing+china+ranch&source=bl&ots=euAxqNmEcb&sig=ACfU3U3TahGTGiDOsaBly4UMoQDn2c8BNq&hl=en&ppis=e&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwidp4CVt->>

[joAhURK30KHXtPBE0Q6AEwAnoECAoQMw#v=onepage&q=Quon%20Sing%20china%20ranch&f=false>](#)

- Nevada Historical Society Quarterly. (1972). [Memoirs of E. Louise Presser, Rhyolite, 1906 – 1908](#). Pg 45-51. - <<http://epubs.nsla.nv.gov/statepubs/epubs/210777-1972-2Summer.pdf>>