

## The North Carolina Gold Rush

### Overview

Students will learn about America’s first gold rush, which took place in North Carolina in the early 1800s. They will then utilize their understanding of the gold rush and its affect on North Carolina by completing a creative writing assignment.

### Grades

4-8

### Essential Questions

- Who was Conrad Reed, and what changes did his family set in motion for the state of North Carolina?
- How did the discovery of gold in North Carolina affect the state’s people and economy?
- What changes occurred in North Carolina as a result of the gold rush?

### Materials

- The North Carolina Gold Rush, by Rebecca Lewis; article attached and available at <https://www.ncpedia.org/industry/gold-rush>

### Duration

45 minutes

### Procedure

#### Gold Fever!

1. As a warm up, ask students to imagine the following scenario, and write how they would respond on paper:
  - Imagine...On the way to school this morning, you stopped by the gas station. After you purchased a coke and a snack, you had exactly one dollar left in your pocket. You decided to spend it on a lottery ticket. Once you got to class, you sat at your desk and scratched off the boxes, one by one. When you got to the last one you realized: You’ve won\$500,000! What would you do? How would you feel? What would be your thoughts, knowing you just won half a million dollars?!? Take 5 minutes to write down your response.
2. Once students have had time to respond, allow a few students to share their thoughts with class. Finally, connect their feelings of excitement to the North Carolina gold rush. Project or hand out the attached *News Announcement of Gold Discovery* and explain that the people in North Carolina in the 1800s felt similar excitement when gold was discovered in our state, leading to “gold fever”! Ask students:
  - When you hear “gold rush”, what comes to mind? (*Most likely, students will mention the California gold rush.*)
  - Did any of you know that there was actually a gold rush in North Carolina, and that it was actually the first gold rush occurring in America? (*Allow students to share anything they night already know on this topic.*)

#### Little Meadow Creek, NC – The Birthplace of the NC Gold Rush

3. Explain to students that while the 1849 California Gold Rush is the one most people are familiar with, it was not the first gold rush. Project the attached image of **Little Meadow Creek**, and tell students that the first gold rush happened in North Carolina after a 12-year-old boy, **Conrad Reed**, found a 17-pound gold

nugget while fishing in Little Meadow Creek, located in **Cabarrus County NC**, in 1799! The Reed's, not knowing what this huge rock was, actually used the gold for a doorstep for three years! Finally, in 1803 the Reed's found out the value of the stone Conrad had found, and the German-immigrant family began panning Little Meadow Creek for more gold...and more they found! Thus, in 1803, the first gold rush had officially begun.

4. Hand out the attached article, *The North Carolina Gold Rush*, and tell students they will be reading about the discovery of gold in NC and the affects it had on the state. Instruct students to sketch at least three pictures as they read based on the information they learn ("picture notes"). Each picture should have a detailed caption and should represent different aspects of the information presented in the article. Once students have finished reading and sketching, discuss:
  - Describe the westerners living in North Carolina in the 1800s.
  - How do you think the community was affected by the news of gold in their area?
  - What discovery did **Matthias Barringer** make? What affect did this have on North Carolina?
  - How did the mining industry affect the **economy** of North Carolina?
  - What were the overall positive effects of the Gold Rush in NC? What were the negative effects?
  - How did the NC gold rush affect the rest of the world?
  
5. Other facts to share with students regarding the NC Gold Rush:
  - When gold was discovered in NC, it was inevitably on private or state property. There was no land were one could go and "stake their claim" as was later the case in the Georgia Indian lands or California.
  - Gold which lay in surface deposits along and in stream beds that could be mined with pick, shovel, and pan (**placer deposits** of gold), covered over 1000 square miles in North Carolina. Many farmers, who knew nothing about mining, suddenly became miners. Many would continue to farm during the growing season and then mine their streams and fields in the late fall and winter. They met with mixed results and many just ended up washing the topsoil essential to their farming efforts away causing more economic harm than gain.
  - Beginning with the first deposit of native mined gold from North Carolina at the **Philadelphia Mint** on May 25, 1804, newspapers throughout the country and Europe began reporting on the great gold finds in North Carolina. Each new mine opening, each new find of a large nugget, created new stories in the press which attracted speculators, entrepreneurs, mine operators, and miners to North Carolina like iron to a magnet.
  - Many farms were sold to speculators who had no designs on farming but who had visions of striking it rich as mine operators. Some farmers sold the mineral rights to their property to entrepreneurs who would mine for gold along the streams on their farm while the farmers stuck to their specialty - farming. Miners came from or were brought from all parts of the country, Mexico, South America, and Europe. There is documented evidence of some resentment and animosity towards these foreigners by the local population that sometimes resulted in violence. None the less, the "rush" was on!
  - By the peak in the 1830s and 1840s there were as many as 56 mines operating simultaneously in North Carolina. (Teachers can show the map of NC gold mines to students located at <http://www.waywelivednc.com/maps/historical/gold-mining.pdf>). There were also an estimated 25,000 people employed in the mining industry which led to the creation of many new "boom" towns in the state to support the growing industry. Until 1829 North Carolina was the only state producing domestic gold for our nation's coinage. Virginia and South Carolina made their first shipments of gold to the Philadelphia Mint in that year and Georgia followed in 1830. Still North Carolina remained the largest domestic producer of gold until surpassed by the new finds in California in 1848. (Source: [http://dboitnott.home.mindspring.com/Articles/nc\\_gold\\_rush.html](http://dboitnott.home.mindspring.com/Articles/nc_gold_rush.html))

**Creative Writing: Participating in the North Carolina Gold Rush**

6. Hand out the attached creative writing assignment and go over it with students. Let them know the appropriate due date, and whether they will have class time for working on the assignment. Also let students know if they will be reading their work in front of classmates. If time permits, allow students to begin brainstorming their assignment. On the due date, allow your students to share their writing with classmates, either in small groups or in front of the class. Ensure students participate in a positive feedback session (“What I liked...”) after each reader. Students can also reflect on what they have learned about the NC gold rush after the readings.

## News Announcement of Gold Discovery



*Newspaper article announcing the discovery of a 22-pound gold nugget at the Reed Mine. Image courtesy of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC. Source: <http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/nc/ncsites/reedcree.gif>*

## Little Meadow Creek in Cabarrus County, North Carolina

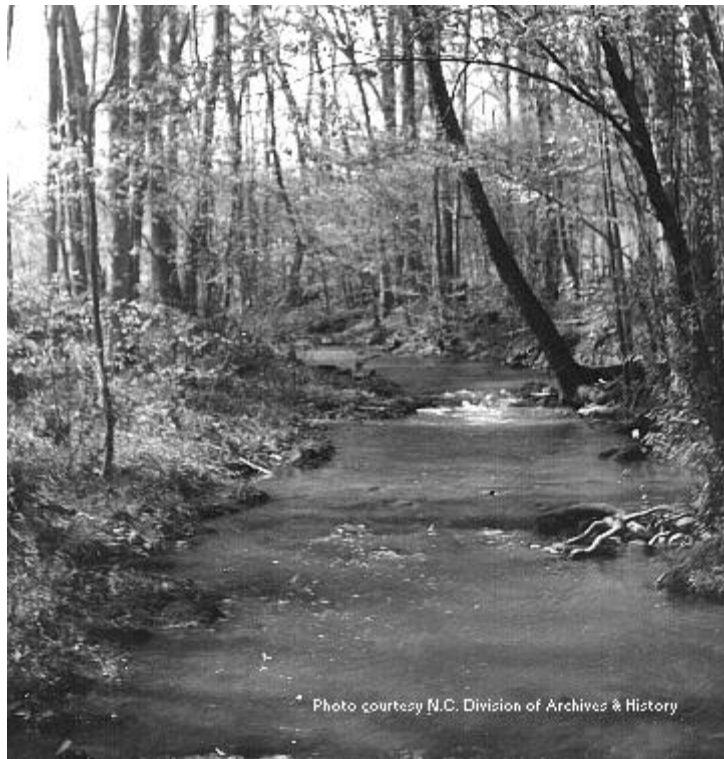


Photo courtesy N.C. Division of Archives & History

Source: <http://statelibrary.dcr.state.nc.us/nc/ncsites/reedcree.gif> (source link not working)

## The North Carolina Gold Rush

By Rebecca Lewis | From *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 45:2 (spring 2006).

What would it take for you to leave your family and home behind and venture to a new country? People migrate for many reasons, but basically they are trying to get away from some place that is undesirable or trying to get to a place that is more desirable. In 1799 an event occurred in the southern Piedmont that made North Carolina a very desirable place to live—the discovery of gold!

Twelve-year-old Conrad Reed was fishing in Little Meadow Creek on his family's farm in Cabarrus County one day in 1799 when he found a seventeen-pound gold nugget. More gold was found in and along the creek, making Conrad's father, John Reed, a very wealthy man. News of gold in Cabarrus County spread quickly. Soon gold was being found in neighboring counties—Montgomery, Stanly, Mecklenburg, Rowan, and Union—and people anxious to find gold of their own began moving into the area.

In the mid-1700s, the western portion of the southern Piedmont was a scarcely populated backcountry. Governor Arthur Dobbs visited the area in 1755 to survey land located in present-day Mecklenburg and Cabarrus counties that he had purchased ten years earlier. He found seventy-five Scots-Irish and twenty-two German families living there. He described these pioneers as "industrious people," with most families having five to ten children. They raised livestock and crops such as corn, wheat, barley, rye, and indigo, and traded primarily with Charleston, South Carolina, some two hundred miles to the south. Charlotte, the state's largest city today, was merely a dusty little village.

Around 1805, only a few years after Conrad's discovery, newspapers began reporting on gold-mining activities and people coming into the area to search for gold. William Thornton, of Baltimore, Maryland, designer of the United States Capitol, was one of these seekers. After learning of the gold, he purchased thirty-five thousand acres of land in Montgomery (now Stanly) County and formed the North Carolina Gold Mine Company. By 1806, investors in this company included a former governor of Maryland and the treasurer of the United States.

Most of the people coming to North Carolina to find gold were not as notable as Thornton and company. There is not much detailed information about those who first came seeking gold. Of course, initially, local landowners did most of the mining. The first newcomers to arrive were probably from neighboring states and somewhat resembled the people already living in western North Carolina. But then, as luck would have it, another event occurred that would greatly increase the numbers, and diversity, of people migrating to the state's gold fields.

In 1825 Matthias Barringer discovered that gold could be found in veins of white quartz, and by following these veins of quartz into the ground, one could recover more gold. Prior to this discovery, all of the mining conducted in North Carolina had been aboveground, or "placer," mining. With Barringer's discovery of "lode," or underground, mining, the rush to North Carolina was on. People came from far and wide to make their fortunes.

Many of the most important lode mines were located in or around Charlotte. In 1828 J. Humphrey Bissell, of Charleston, bought part of the McComb Mine and brought with him not only new technology but also "men experienced in South American mining." At one Charlotte mine that employed almost a thousand workers, thirteen different languages were spoken. Count Vincent de

Rivafinoli, an Italian aristocrat and experienced mining engineer, was one of the most cultured and flamboyant foreigners in Charlotte. As head of the Mecklenburg Gold Mining Company, he brought in as many as eighty expert miners from England, Germany, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Switzerland, Italy, and France.

Among the European workers, miners from Cornwall, England, had the greatest influence on North Carolina mining culture. The Cornish miners had developed techniques for lode mining over several centuries, extracting tin and copper from their native land. They shared their knowledge and expertise in North Carolina. These miners taught proper and safe techniques for lode mining and were also experts in the process of milling gold ore and the use of steam technology. The use of steam engines soon spread from gold mining to other North Carolina industries, such as textile mills.

Many of the immigrants who came to North Carolina during the gold rush were single men—young or middle-aged, ambitious, and hardworking. Unaccompanied by women or children, they were able to move freely from one mining area to another. When gold was found in other southern states and then in California in 1848, many moved out of the area. The Cornish miners, however, had often moved with their families. They were known to be “skilled, superstitious, clannish,” and strongly Methodist. Unlike the single prospectors who followed the gold to California, the Yukon, and beyond, many of these Cornish miners and their families stayed in North Carolina, in the lode mining centers of Charlotte and especially Gold Hill in Rowan County.

The Cornish culture is a unique culture within Great Britain, much like the Welsh or Scottish, with its own dialect and customs. But because the Cornish also spoke English, they and their descendants quickly melded into American life, and their cultural influence is not easy to pinpoint. The influence that they had on North Carolina’s emerging industries, however, is unmistakable. In the early 1800s, North Carolina acquired the nickname “The Rip Van Winkle State,” because so little progress was made that the state appeared to be asleep like that character from literature. The gold industry that the Cornish helped build influenced other developments in industry, commerce, and infrastructure that helped North Carolina lose this reputation. Today’s leaders in industry, research, and banking have indirectly benefited from the foreign miners and investors of the nation’s first gold rush.

Source: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/4374>

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

### Creative Writing: Participating in the North Carolina Gold Rush

**Assignment:**

Based on what you have learned regarding the North Carolina gold rush, choose one of the following options to show your understanding in a creative way.

Assume the persona of...	Write...
Conrad Reed	A first person account of discovering the nugget while fishing, realizing 3 years later that it is gold, panning for more, and the affect of all of this on your family and your daily life
Matthias Barringer	A first person account about your discovery, its affect on North Carolina, and your feelings about and experience in the NC gold industry
Humphrey Bissell or Count Vincent de Rivafinoli	A first person account detailing your position as a mine owner
Miner	A first person account of your day to day life working in NC mining/panning for gold
Newspaper reporter	An article detailing the NC gold rush in 1800s NC; this can include "quotes" from North Carolinians you "interview"
Artist	A sketch book of artwork and detailed captions (at least 10 pictures and captions) illustrating and describing the NC gold rush
Narrator	A story about the NC gold rush; this can be fictional or non-fiction, but your story must show your understanding of the NC gold rush
Choose any of the characters above (at least 2 or more)	A play about the NC gold rush; this can be fictional or non-fiction, but your story must show your understanding of the NC gold rush in a dramatic scene
Creative author	A "tall tale" set in 1800s North Carolina that is about the NC gold rush

**Regardless of your choice, your writing must:**

- Contain facts regarding the North Carolina gold rush, showing your understanding of its affect on the people, economy, and geography of the state.
- Be creative and well organized (beginning, middle, and end)
- Be at least 5 paragraphs or 2 pages in length.
- Use correct mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, etc.)

**First draft due:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Final draft due:** \_\_\_\_\_