In 1848, James Marshall was looking for lumber by the American River in California. He saw something glimmering—it was gold! Soon, everyone heard about the gold in California. By 1849, people were traveling to California to try for the new American Dream—to get rich quickly. These people were called “forty-niners.”

Many left their wives and children behind when they left to find gold. They came to California by wagon and by ship for the golden treasure. The trip to California from the East was very difficult. They had to travel by ship since there was no railroad. People got seasick, and the food on the ships became rotten. People from the central states traveled by wagon on the Oregon Trail.

Soon, there were many people in California looking for gold. They got the gold from streams and riverbeds by using simple methods. The most popular was called panning. Some people found gold often and got very rich. Others were not so lucky.

There were other ways to make money in California. Women had jobs cooking and cleaning. Chicken farmers could charge a lot of money for eggs.

Soon there were so many people looking for gold that most of the gold ran out. People who came late into the Gold Rush found disappointment instead of riches. The season of fast money was over. Many people went home, but some stayed in California and kept digging. A few of them found more gold, but most had broken dreams of unfound fortune. The Gold Rush was over.

Activity: Draw a picture of what the Gold Rush was like.