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THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH:

A Letter Home

by Catherine Quirin



Genre	Comprehension Skills and Strategy
Historical fiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Realism and Fantasy• Draw Conclusions• Prior Knowledge

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Josh rushed through the doorway. “Ma! Pa!” he yelled. “I’ve fetched a letter from Uncle Zach. He’s looking for gold in California!”

“Read the letter, Pa,” said Ma.

Pa started to read. Josh wanted to hear all about life in the California gold fields.



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October 1850

Dear Family,

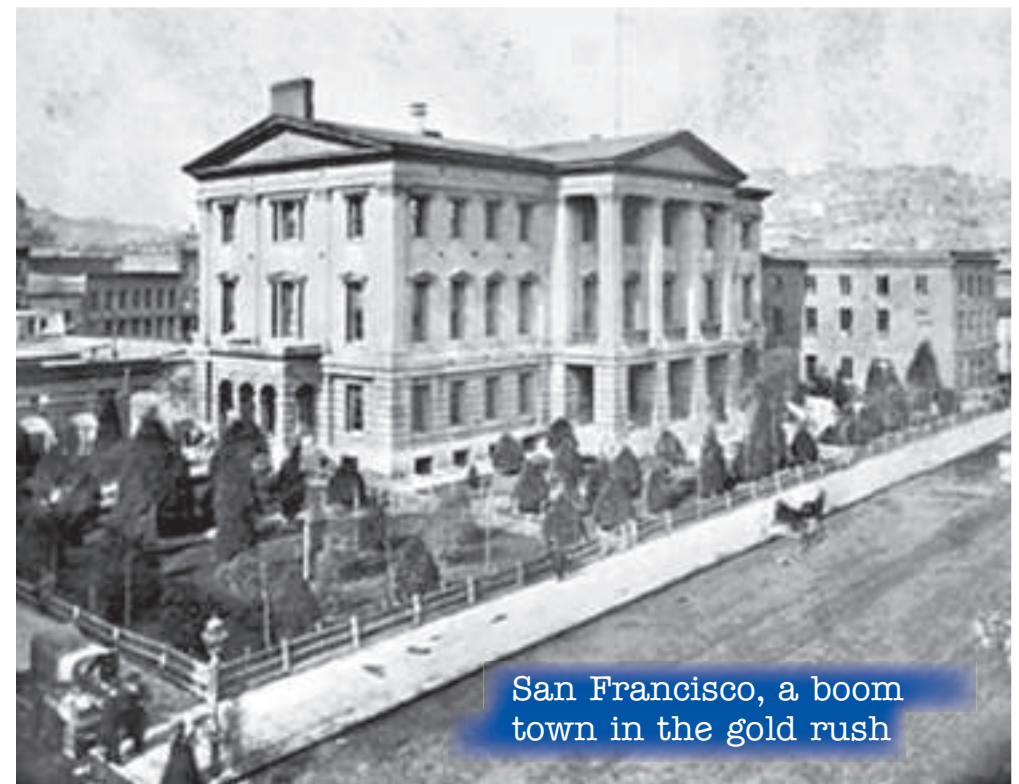
I met two men named Matthew and Peter while on the trail going west. We became friends. We decided to travel together for safety. Our trip was long. We were mighty happy to cross the mountains into California!



We claimed a spot along the American River. Then we went into San Francisco to buy tools to pan for gold.

San Francisco is a busy boom town! New houses are being built. Businesses are opening everywhere we look. There are people here from all around the world.

Gold seekers crossing the mountains



San Francisco, a boom town in the gold rush



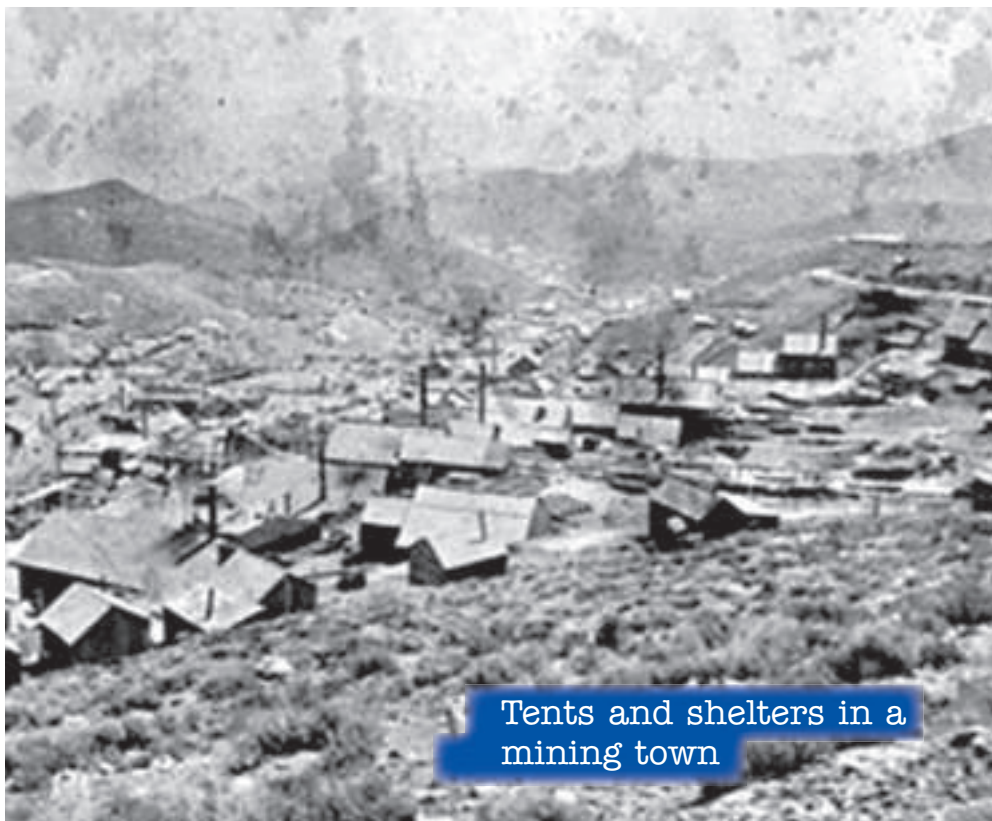


We each bought a pick, a shovel, and some pans. This cost us most of our coins.

We set up tents in a mining town near our claim. Some miners don't even have a tent. They have to sleep on the ground.



We stand in the river all day to pan for gold. We use picks to loosen dirt and rocks from the bottom of the river. Then we shovel the rocks and dirt into pans and wash away the big pieces. If we are lucky, we find gold in what's left!



Tents and shelters in a mining town



Miners sifting through dirt, hoping to find gold





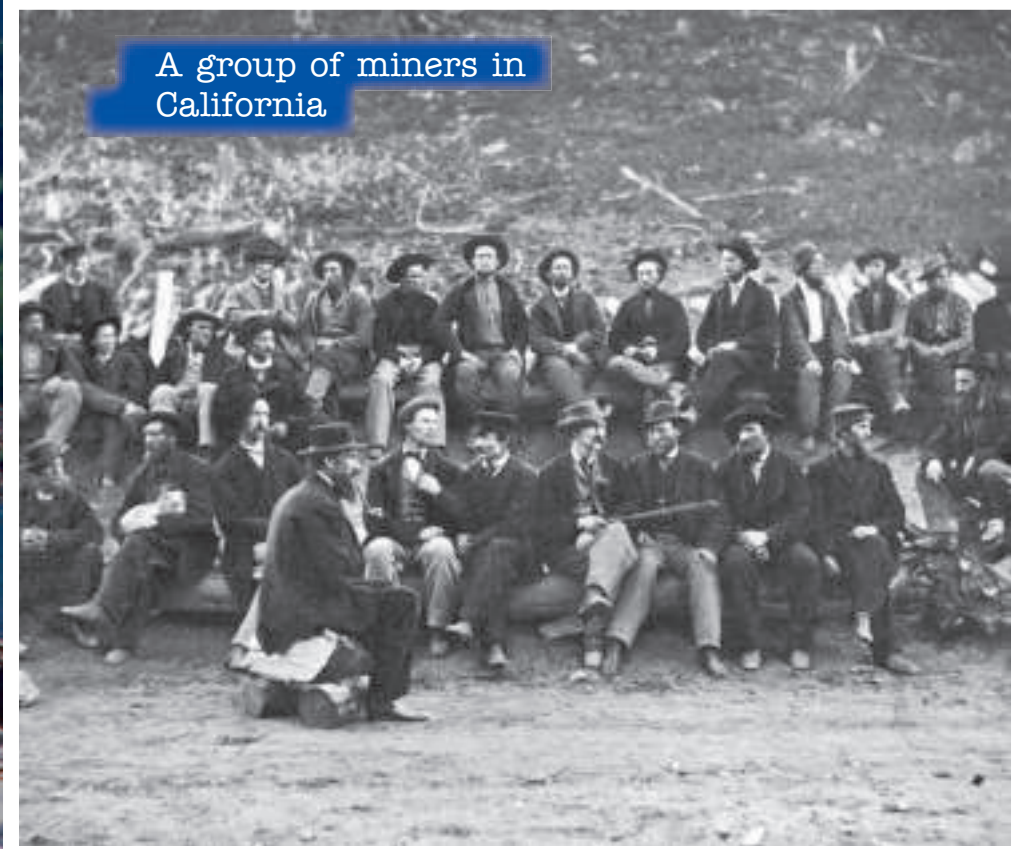
We had no luck at all until we bought a gold cradle. To work the cradle, one person shovels rocks and dirt into it while another rocks the cradle back and forth. Water is poured over the dirt. Finer sand and gold are washed through a screen and trapped on the floor of the cradle.



On Sundays all the miners take a rest. Many men write letters home. Sunday is also a good day to do laundry and mending. I sure miss the food at home! Here we cook salt pork in a skillet over an open fire.



A gold cradle



A group of miners in California





I'm sure you're wondering if we've had any big gold strikes. We haven't. In the spring our group will split up. Matthew is going to stay. Peter and I will head home.

See you in the spring,

Zach

Workers at a mine



Pa finished reading the letter. Everyone sat quietly. Josh had been hoping to join his uncle for an adventure in California. Now he couldn't wait for Zach to come home.





The Gold Rush

About eighty thousand miners arrived in California in 1849. Because of this, they were nicknamed the “’49ers.” At the very beginning of the gold rush, gold was easy to find. It could be panned right out of the rivers. This gold was called surface gold. All the miners needed were a pick and a pan. Sometimes all they had to do was look down into the water to find a very shiny nugget!

As more people came to hunt for gold, the surface gold was claimed. That meant that the miners had to work harder to find gold. Some began to work together with equipment such as the cradle, or rocker.

The California Gold Rush lasted about ten years.



Reader Response

1. Is this a realistic story or a fantasy?
2. What did you know about the gold rush before you read this book? What did you want to know? What did you learn?

<div style="text-align: center;">K</div> What We Know	<div style="text-align: center;">W</div> What We Want to Know	<div style="text-align: center;">L</div> What We Learned

3. Look up the word *boom* in a dictionary. Write a sentence using a different meaning from the one used on page 5.
4. Do you think Zach was glad that he went to California to hunt for gold? Tell why or why not.

