

Name: _____ Date: _____ Hour: _____

GOLD RUSH PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

Directions: Read through your primary document and talk to the text. Be ready to share your document with someone near you. When talking to the text, make sure you underline/highlight important facts, questions you may have, and anything that you feel looks important. Be ready to share with your partner and the whole class.

1. What was the theme of the primary document about the Woman's Account of Events during the Gold Rush? Describe what the document was about.
2. What was the theme of the primary document about the Account of a Male German Immigrant on Life as a Forty-niner? Describe what the document was about.
3. What did the documents have in common or how were they similar?
4. How were the documents different?
5. What questions do you have related to the primary document about the woman?
6. What questions do you have related to the primary document about the male German?

Excerpt from a Woman's Account of Events During the Gold Rush

When we reached Sacramento [California] again we became undecided whether to go on toward the bay or to remain there. In the meantime we took possession of a deserted hotel which stood on K Street. This hotel was tenanted only by rats that galloped madly over the floor and made journeys from room to room through openings they had gnawed in the panels. They seemed to have no [fear] of human beings and came and went as fearlessly as if we had not been there. At that time Sacramento was infested with the horrible creatures. They swarmed from the vessels lying at the wharves into the town and grew into a thriving colony which neither flood nor fire could subdue . . . As it grew dark they came out by scores, and my husband threw a little barley on the ground in the back yard to see how many would collect there. It was not many minutes till the yard was covered with rats; they seemed piled three deep in their ravenous hunger for the grain; when my husband fired into them with a shot-gun, he killed thirty-two. A second shot killed twelve, and I believe if he had continued his curious sport he might have killed hundreds. From every corner they glared at us with their round, bright eyes. They snapped at our heels as we passed. They bit at each other, and gnawed the legs of chairs where we sat. At night I put the bedding upon the tables, lest in our sleep the fierce creatures would be tempted to make their raids upon our bodies. I listened with perfect horror to their savage wrangling over bits of discarded food which had been left lying about. Even rat-terriers and ferocious cats came off second best in their encounters with the pests.

[The couple later moved from Sacramento to a town that would become Vacaville, California.] For a good many years after we came to Vaca Valley there were not enough families in the immediate [area] to induce a doctor to settle there. Although the climate might safely be called the healthiest in the State, people once in a great while would get sick. A physician who made a desperate effort to make a living there and failed, left his medicine-chest in [payment] of his long-standing board bill [at our hotel], and thereafter I came to act as general practitioner and apothecary for the neighborhood, and my judgment on diseases was accepted with as much faith and my prescriptions followed with more readiness than is now often accorded to the most learned members of the medical fraternity . . . I don't think I ever killed anybody, and I am quite sure I cured a good many of my patients. Indeed, they grew so accustomed to my [care] that, even after a good physician settled among us, the sick people used not infrequently to ask me if they should take the medicine that he prescribed; and I believe that if the matter had come to an actual choice, they would have followed my advice in preference to his.

Luzena Stanley Wilson, '49er; memories recalled years later for her daughter Correnah Wilson Wright. Introduction by Francis P. Farquhar, illustrations by Kathryn Uhl, Mills College, Calif., The Eucalyptus Press, 1937. Library of Congress. Web.

Excerpt from an Account of a Male German Immigrant on Life as a Forty-Niner, 1918

On March tenth, 1850, a period of fair weather set in. I broke camp with bag and baggage and transported everything to the South Fork . . . result was again nil [nothing], absolutely nil. The place swarmed with people; all of whom were occupied in building dams and digging canals in order to change the course of the river. . . . I packed up and crossed the mountains diagonally in order to get to the Middle Fork . . . I had to be my own beast of burden. I carried about eighty pounds, leaving the rest for my sons. The journey over the steep mountains was a severe trial. Although my life had not been a bed of roses, still this seemed to me to be the hardest burden that fate had as yet imposed upon me.

Those who came in the first period after the discovery found something and we dug up that which they had not considered worth while . . . Thousands of disappointed gold seekers pursue this task because they cannot find anything else to do. They would go home if they had the necessary funds.

Here I worked three weeks, and picked up a few hundred dollars. But the luck did not last long. My eldest son and I fell ill of scurvy and I was in such a serious plight that I had to remain in bed for five weeks. My son cured himself by eating sliced potatoes soaked in vinegar; but my scurvy was of a more malignant kind and necessitated a doctor's attendance. Three of them did not seem to understand enough about medicine to . . . treat a human being. However, they knew how to get at my purse.

In the mountains and along the rivers, thousands of miserable adventurers have fallen a prey to one sickness or another. Truly you can see more misery than happiness in this much-praised gold region! . . . I left all my utensils [tools] here . . . My companions were all in the same plight, for it would have cost more than they were worth to transport these utensils to another mine.

Zimmermann, Margaret Hoff and Erich W. Zimmermann. *Scharmann's Overland Journey to California, from the Pages of a Pioneer's Diary*; from the German of H.B. Scharmann. 1918. Library of Congress. Web.