



## **At-Home History**

### **Panning for Gold**

Cabarrus County is truly rich with history! Did you know that the first gold discovered in America was found right here in Cabarrus County? Below is a lesson on the discovery of gold in North Carolina and a fun activity you can do with your kids or grandkids in your own backyard or patio!

#### **Lesson**

49 years before gold was discovered in California, Cabarrus County became the site of the first great gold rush in the United States. In 1799, twelve-year-old Conrad Reed was fishing in Little Meadow Creek on the Reed family's farm. As he was fishing, he noticed something reflective in the water. He pulled it up to find a seventeen-pound shiny yellow rock. The boy brought his find home, and the Reed family used it as a doorstep for 3 years. A jeweler from Fayetteville identified the yellow rock as gold, and purchased it from John Reed (Johannes Reith) for \$3.50. John Reed knew more gold could be found and began operating his own gold mine in partnership with three other local men.

The discovery of gold brought people from all over to the North Carolina piedmont in search of their own treasure. Farmers became rich from finding gold, and soon gold-seekers went from panning for gold in creeks to digging deep mines to find veins of gold in the ground. By 1824 Reed and his partners had made over \$100,000 mining for gold in Little Meadow Creek.

The North Carolina gold rush was soon overtaken by the California Gold Rush that began in 1848, but gold was still mined at the Reed Mine until 1912.

Other NC Gold Mining history resources:

<https://historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/reed-gold-mine>

<https://www.ncpedia.org/industry/gold-rush>

### **Questions to Consider**

- Why did the discovery of gold bring so many people to North Carolina?
- What do you think it was like to be a gold miner in the 1800s?

## Hands-On Activity

### Panning for gold

What you need:

- Shallow plastic or tin pan – a pie pan works nicely!
- Gravel or rocks
- A stream or creek – find an area that's about 6 inches deep
- Small bag or bottle to hold your gold
- Drinking water
- Protective gear such as sunscreen and a hat, and gloves.

1. Fill the tin pan about  $\frac{3}{4}$  full of gravel and silt from the creek, then lower the pan into the water, just deep enough that it's just underwater.
2. Shake the pan from side to side and back and forth, but be careful not to knock the gravel out of the pan!
3. Swirl the pan in gentle, circular movements. This helps dissolve dirt and clay.  
You can pick out larger gravel rocks and any other materials and toss them downstream. Just be sure none of it is shiny!
4. Continue picking out larger rocks and swirling the pan until all that's left is heavy silt-like material in the bottom of the pan. This is called "black sand".
5. Raise the pan completely out of the stream, leaving some water in the pan.
6. Tilt the pan towards yourself and swirl the water in a circular motion to look for small gold nuggets or pieces you can pick out by hand. Gold will usually stand out against the darker sediment, but sometimes it's so tiny it's almost impossible to separate from the black sand.
7. Have fun with it! The chances of finding gold are low, even in an area where gold used to be. It's a great excuse to get outside and get dirty!

Don't have access to a creek, or have smaller children that want to "pan for gold" too? Here's a fun hand's on activity that's great for smaller kids and doesn't require leaving the house.

What you need:

- Small rocks
  - Gold spray paint
  - Plastic tub or bucket
  - Beach and sand toys from the dollar store
  - Play sand
1. Wash and dry the small rocks and spray paint them gold in a well-ventilated area. Let them dry completely.
  2. Fill the tub or bucket with play sand.
  3. Hide the golden nuggets (rocks) in the sand and cover them well.
  4. Let your kids "pan for gold" with their sand toys
  5. Proudly display the gold discovery in a water glass or bottle!