



# Coming to California

## 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

### Duration

Activity: 20-30 minutes

### Standards

History-Social Science  
Content Standards  
4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.4.2 & 3

### ELA

RI.4.1, 3, 9  
W.4.1, 2, 9

### Supplies

- Worksheet
- Pencil
- Clipboard (optional)

### Vocabulary

Gold Rush  
Prospector

## Concepts

- During the Gold Rush, 1848–1855, people from all over the world used various modes of transportation to travel to California in search of gold.
- Historical sources, such as artifacts and photographs, can help us better understand the lives of people from the past.

## Objectives

- Students will explore and identify transportation methods used to travel to California.
- Students will imagine what a miner might have needed to survive while searching for gold in a new place.
- Students will learn about the personal journey of one migrant who came to California in search of riches.

## Outline

- 1 Before the activity, students will read the background information about the Gold Rush provided in this lesson.
- 2 Students will be instructed to learn about artifacts related to the Gold Rush and will draw connections between information provided and the objects in the museum's collections.

## References

- Los Angeles A to Z: an Encyclopedia of the City and County, by Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- [Ducommun website](#)





## Reading





Read the following out loud with a group or to yourself:

In 1842, Francisco Lopez discovered gold in Placerita Canyon in Los Angeles. While a significant discovery, it did not bring many people to California in search for gold. Instead, the movement known as the **Gold Rush** is marked by the discovery of gold in Northern California at Sutter's Mill. James Wilson Marshall, a carpenter at the mill, found gold on January 24, 1848. This particular discovery brought thousands and thousands of people from around the world in search of gold in California. Examine the map of California below to identify the location of these two gold discoveries.



**Legend for map**

-  Sutter's Mill
-  Placerita Canyon



People who traveled to California in search for gold were called prospectors or 'Forty-niners' since many of them arrived in California in 1849. Thousands of people came to California from other parts of the United States as well as from other countries. About half of these Forty-niners traveled by sea on ships such as the *Flying Fish*. Others arrived on covered wagons, like in the image below, or even on foot.

Photograph of painting, entitled "The Covered Wagon," by George Woodworth, in 1850.  
From Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County





## Coming to California

Think about how people traveled to this new territory in the mid-1800s. What do you think it would have been like to travel through U.S. territories at this time? Why? Discuss and list some ideas below:

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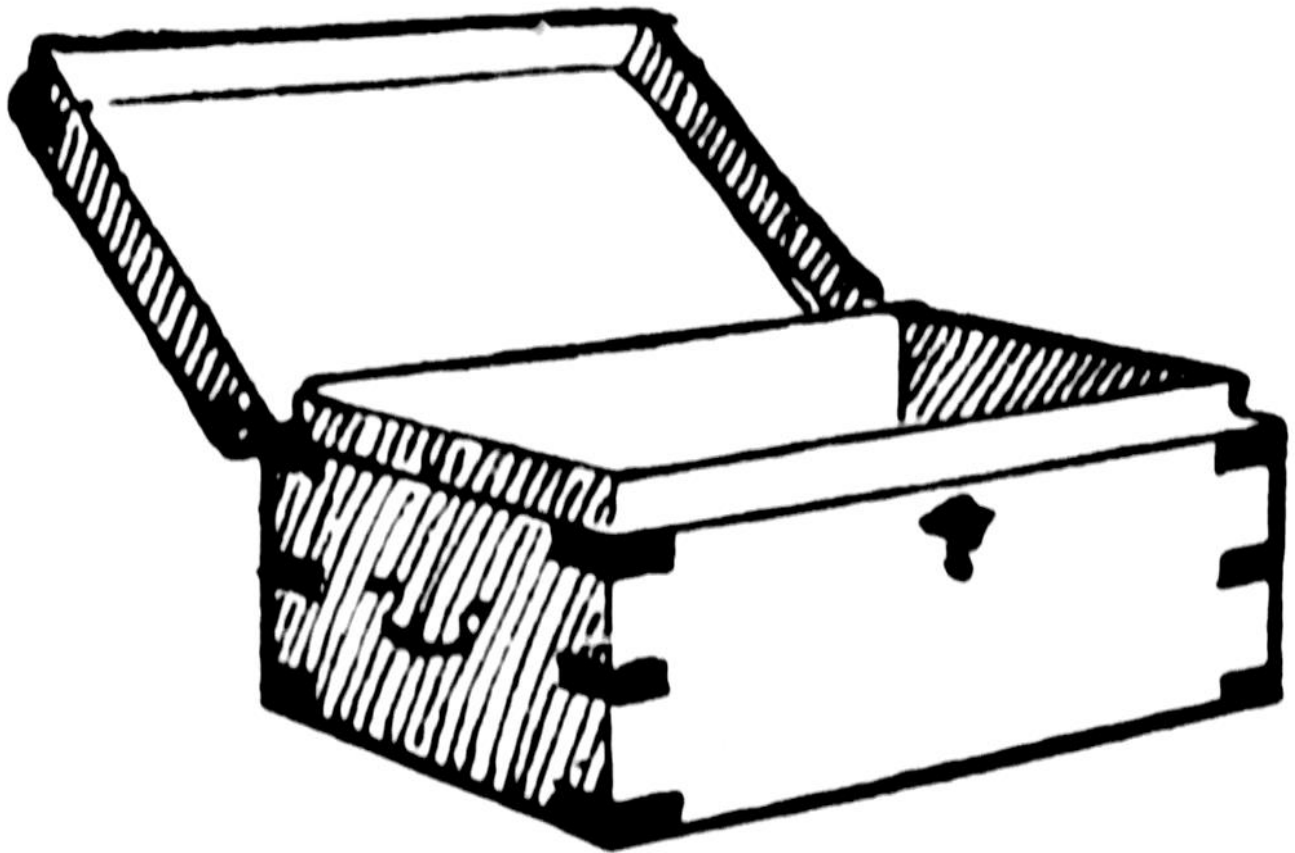
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Imagine you are coming to California in a covered wagon in search of gold. You can only bring one trunk full of your personal items. What would you need to survive the journey in a new place? Draw and label what you would pack.





## Coming to California



### *Understanding Life in the City Before the Gold Rush*

Before the Gold Rush, not many people lived in what is now California. Smaller towns did not have many stores and services. Places that we think of today as being “big cities,” like Los Angeles and San Francisco, had many types of stores, such as general stores, post offices, hospitals, blacksmith shops, churches. People in smaller towns could not easily buy things that would be necessary to survive in a new city. Newcomers, like the Forty-niners, would need to travel to bigger cities like Los Angeles if they needed certain goods and services.

Below is a picture of Los Angeles in the 1860s:



Picture of Main Street in Los Angeles taken from the U.S. Hotel circa 1860s.  
*From Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County*

How would living in Los Angeles in the 1860s be different from your life in Los Angeles today?

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## Coming to California

Now let's take a closer look at the story of one person, who traveled to California in search of riches.



Charles L. Ducommun was an immigrant from Switzerland that traveled overseas to the United States and landed first on the East Coast. After hearing the news of the gold strike in California, he headed to the West Coast on foot. He carried a shotgun as protection during his difficult journey. After failing to find gold, Ducommun moved to Los Angeles, California in 1850 and set up a small watch repair shop, as he was originally a watchmaker by trade.

Here's a picture of Los Angeles in the 1860s with Ducommun's store in the front left:



Picture of Commercial Street in Los Angeles in 1875. Ducommun's building is in front left, marked by the white, circular object (a clock).  
*From Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County*



## Coming to California

The journey to California and the search for gold was not easy. Only a few people struck gold while many did not and struggled to survive. After failing to find gold, many people came to Los Angeles and needed goods and services to make a new life in a developing city. Ducommun soon realized this and turned his small watch repair shop into a general store with different types of items to meet the needs of traveling prospectors.



What do you think he might have sold in his store? (List some ideas below)

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Create your own advertisement below:

C. DUCOMMUN,

### *The Legacy of Charles L. Ducommun Lives On...*

Ducommun's store is now known as Ducommun Incorporated. It is thought to be the oldest continuously-operating business in Los Angeles. Today, Ducommun headquarters can be found within Los Angeles County in the city of Carson. The company now provides products that help the aerospace and defense industries by supplying products and support services.