

Springboard^{into} Comprehension 5

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Coral Reefs

Compare and Contrast
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Prejudice on the Goldfields

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RA 11.5–12.5



Information Report

Prejudice on the Goldfields



Written by Sarah Edwards



Prejudice on the Goldfields

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Gold Rush!



During the 1800s, the words “gold rush!” sent thousands of people dashing around the world. People from all walks of life left their families and jobs. They rushed to goldfields in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. They hoped to find their fortune and followed the promise of a better life.

The sudden rush of people to the remote goldfields sparked the growth of new communities. There, these gold-rush miners, or **diggers**, as they were known, carved out new identities and lives for themselves. They created new societies and social standards. People from different cultures tried to live together.

At first, the goldfields buzzed with excitement. People expected to strike it rich as soon as they arrived. However, the easily accessible gold soon dwindled. The dream was shattered for many gold-diggers. Their days were filled with hard, often unrewarding labour. Many lived in poverty. They made their homes in dirty tents or roughly built shacks. They competed for land and gold. They endured crime and exploitation. They battled disease and misfortune.

The new goldfield societies also endured tensions from **jealousy and inequality**. Differences in skin colour, work ethic, and language caused cultures to clash. People often faced unfair treatment because of their race, gender, or religion. This **discrimination** fuelled tensions that erupted in violence. Women struggled against **inequality**. They fought to find their place in the new society. **Inequality between** wealthy and poor people caused tension. In the end, **gold fever paved** the way for a history of prejudice on the goldfields.

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For just a few dollars, you can sail to a new and prosperous life. With just a little hard work, you too can become a millionaire.



Shipping companies used posters like this to attract people to the goldfields, and travel there on their ships.

Gold Fever in Victoria

Gold fever struck Australia in 1851, when Edward Hargraves found gold at Ophir, New South Wales. Six months later, people found gold at Ballarat and Bendigo Creek, Victoria. Word spread quickly to international gold-seekers. They heard tales of a sunny land filled with huge gold nuggets. Soon, thousands of people boarded ships bound for a new life, dreaming of wealth and success. People who come to a country from another country in this way are called **immigrants**.

The population of Victoria exploded as people flooded into the colony. This kind of sudden increase in the population and economy of a place is called a **boom**. Most of the immigrants came from the United Kingdom. The discovery of gold had changed the view of Australia that people had in the UK. Instead of a land of terrible punishment, they saw a land of opportunity. People from other European nations, and from North America, also risked the dangerous journey. Some people travelled from New Zealand and other Pacific nations. Thousands of Chinese people made their way to Australia, too. These gold-rush miners changed the face of Australia.



This painting from 1851 shows Edward Hargraves.

First Gold Finds in Australia



- Key
- Ophir
 - Bendigo
 - Ballarat

Where Most Gold-Seekers Came From

The goldfields were a place in which people from various cultures lived together and slowly blended into a community, a so-called cultural melting pot. In some places, the melting pot was a recipe for racial tension. Each immigrant group brought its own religious and social customs from its home country. Some of these groups separated themselves from others. Language barriers often caused problems. The different groups were unfamiliar with each other's ways of life. They brought existing prejudices with them. This often led to hatred between people of different races, or **racism**. In other places, however, people tried to put their differences aside in their mutual quest for gold. Many managed to live together more or less harmoniously.



This engraving from 1873 shows racial tensions as Europeans in Victoria protest the arrival of workers from China.



Some of Australia's gold-rush immigrants returned home as the gold in Victoria dwindled. Others moved on to goldfields in other countries. However, many stayed and played an important part in the development of Australia. They are known as the "golden generation."

"...a happy-go-lucky German tailor, a brawny English smith, a slightly-built French cook, a Polish Jew, an American or Dutch sailor, watchmaker, confectioner, a Swiss hat-maker, an impoverished Spanish hidalgo, a brown Hindu face or the olive countenance with slanting eyes of a 'child of the sun' and many others sit together. They amuse themselves with conversation about their countries of origin and its habits and describe events they have experienced, because every one crossed many lands and many a sea before arriving in Australia."

"This very large society comprises men from all parts of the world, all countries and religions, varying dispositions and education all mixed into one society, all dressed similarly, all forced to forget their previous habits, learnings, customs, manners and occupations. All forced to follow their new occupation and to live the monotonous lives of the miners."

-Seweryn Korzelinski, a miner from Poland

Gold-Rush Immigration



Immigration to Australia between 1851 and 1861

