



## Boom and Bust

Exploring Bannack, Montana's Colorful Past

By: Shelly Turk

Grade Level: 7-8

Time Allotment: Two 45 minute class periods

Overview: In the summer of 1862, some 56 years after Lewis and Clark traversed the area, John White and William Eades discovered gold in Grasshopper Creek. A large influx of miners rushed to the area to stake a claim, and Bannack was born. A lively gold rush town, Bannack later became the first territorial capital and the location of the first successful dredging operation in the U.S. Using Internet sites and video, students will discover how Bannack was established, what life was like there, and why it eventually died and became a ghost town. The lesson also includes an interactive panning for gold activity.

This lesson may be used in conjunction with "Hanging the Sheriff", an NTTI lesson plan on Bannack's famous sheriff, Henry Plummer.

Subject Matter: MT History/Social Studies

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify who discovered gold in the Bannack area.
- Locate Bannack, MT on a map.
- Articulate what life was like for early settlers in Bannack.
- Describe important buildings in Bannack.
- Explain why Bannack died and became a ghost town.
- Determine Bannack's accessibility today.



Standards:

From the Montana State Standards for Social Studies:  
(Available on-line at [www.opi.state.mt.us](http://www.opi.state.mt.us))

Standard 1: Students access, synthesize and evaluate information to communicate and apply social studies knowledge to real world situations.

Standard 3: Apply geographic knowledge and skills (e.g., location, place, human/environment interactions, movement, and regions).

Standard 4: Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships.

Media Components:

VIDEO

*Bannack: A Window in Time.* Narr. Tom Schell. Montana State Parks. Great Falls, MT: North Country Media Group, Inc., 1996.

WEB SITES (in the order sites appear in the lesson)

*Bannack Mining District.* Montana Department of Environmental Quality.  
<http://www.deq.state.mt.us/AbandonedMines/linkdocs/techdocs/4tech.asp>.

This site details the history of Bannack and the first gold rush and describes the Placer Mining Era. It also gives background on the development of lode mining and dredging operations in the area.

*Edwin Purple's Gold Rush Country Map. The Vigilantes of Montana: 1864 Revisited* site. [http://www.yanoun.org/mont\\_vigi/revisit/purpmap.jpg](http://www.yanoun.org/mont_vigi/revisit/purpmap.jpg).

This map shows trails connecting early gold rush mines in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah.

*Welcome to Bannack State Park.* The Bannack Association.

<http://www.bannack.org/index.htm>.

This site gives historical background on Bannack, has a well-labeled photo tour, and has a picture quiz on interesting items found in Bannack. It also gives details on Bannack Days and visitor information.

*Ghost Town Gallery—Bannack, MT.*

<http://www.ghosttowngallery.com/htme/bannack.htm>.

This site contains beautiful photos featuring the exterior and interiors of Bannack's old buildings.

*Montana's State Parks—Bannack.* State Parks and Recreation from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. <http://www.fwp.state.mt.us/parks/quiz/quizreport.asp?sitenum=3501>.

This site lists details for visiting Bannack State Park today.

*How to Pan for Gold.* ExploreNorth. <http://www.explorenorth.com/library/howto/ht-pan.htm>.

This site lists steps for how to pan gold and tips for success.

*How to Pan for Gold.* Robin C. Hale.

<http://www.state.tn.us/environment/tdg/PISeries/goldpan.pdf>.

This pdf file contains a detailed article on panning for gold and drawn diagrams of panning techniques.

#### Materials:

One Montana map

Bannack Mining Educational Trunk (see Prep for Teachers) OR

3 pans with sloping sides (not Teflon)

2 bags sand and/or gravel (Can be purchased at a hardware store.)

Small gold nuggets or flakes

Running water

#### Prep for Teachers:

- Prior to teaching this lesson, bookmark the sites used in the lesson on each computer in your classroom.
- Prep the video so that it is at the desired location for the video portion of the lesson. See cues under Step 4 in Learning Activity.
- Gather the gold panning materials if you are using your own materials and prepare a work area, or order the Bannack Mining Educational Trunk from Bannack State Park, 4200 Bannack Road, Dillon, MT 59725, or call (406) 834-3413. The cost is return postage via UPS or U.S. Mail only. This trunk includes equipment, activities and artifacts depicting the gold mining history in Bannack. The activities cover hard rock mining, placer mining, and the lives of miners and prospectors.

When using media, provide students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, a specific task to complete and/or information to identify during or after viewing of video segments, Web sites, or other multimedia elements.

#### Introductory Activity:

Break your class into four groups. Have the groups each log on to *Bannack Mining District* at <http://www.deq.state.mt.us/AbandonedMines/linkdocs/techdocs4tech.asp>. Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, asking Group 1 to find out the five things Bannack did or was first, Group 2 to find out what Lewis and Clark had to do with the discovery of the Bannack area, Group 3 to find out who actually

discovered gold in the Bannack area and why the creek they panned in was named Grasshopper Creek, and Group 4 to find out the quality level of the gold that was taken from the Grasshopper Creek diggings. When the groups are finished, have each report their findings to the class. (*Answers: Group 1—Bannack was the site of the first major gold discovery in the Montana Territory; it was the first territorial capital; it was the first county seat of Beaverhead County; it saw the first lode mining in Montana Territory and it was the location of the first successful dredging operation in the United States. Group 2—Fifty-six years before the Bannack gold rush, Lewis and Clark traveled through the Grasshopper Creek area. They originally named Grasshopper Creek “Willard’s Creek”. Group 3—John White and William Eades found color in the creek on July 28, 1862. They named the creek Grasshopper Creek because of the profusion of the insects along the banks. Group 4—The Bannack gold was assayed at 99% pure—some of the purest gold found anywhere in the world. Most of the gold was essentially in a chemically pure state.*) Tell the students that Bannack was obviously important to Montana history, and that the next step is finding where Bannack actually is on the map.

#### Learning Activity:

Step 1. Ask the groups to log on to *Edwin Purple’s Gold Rush Country Map* at [http://www.yanoun.org/mont\\_vitilrevisit/purpmap.jpg](http://www.yanoun.org/mont_vitilrevisit/purpmap.jpg). Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, asking the groups to find Bannack on the map and point it out to you. Ask them what other towns were nearby on the Gold Rush Trail. (*Answer: Virginia City, Deer Lodge, Fort Limhi*)

Step 2: Now ask the students to find Bannack on your current Montana map. (*Answer: SW by Dillon, MT*)

Step 3: Ask the four groups to log on to *Welcome to Bannack State Park* at <http://www.bannack.org/index.htm>. Have them click on “FAQ’S”. Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, asking Group 1 to find out how Bannack got its name, Group 2 to find out how big a mining claim was and what kind of mining was done, Group 3 to find out what the peak population of Bannack was, and Group 4 to find out if gold panning is still allowed at Bannack. Check for comprehension by asking each group to report its findings to the class. (*Answers: Group 1—The town was named for the Bannock Indians. It is believed that the town received its change in spelling when the post office was established in 1863; when the name was submitted to Washington D.C., the “O” was inadvertently taken for an “A”. Group 2—A mining claim was one hundred feet up or down the creek and as far out on each side as the pay dirt extended. One had to work the claim every day when water was available. An absence of 3 days meant a claim could be jumped. If one was sick, the claim was protected. Group 3—The peak population of Bannack was approximately 3000 people in the spring of 1863 with as many as 2,000 more people living down the creek. Group 4—No, panning is no longer allowed in the Bannack area.*)

Step 4. Ask the students what they thought the miners and their families encountered when they first arrived in Bannack, specifically, first impressions, living conditions, food, supplies, and companionship. (*Answers will vary.*) Insert the video *Bannack: A Window in Time* into the VCR. Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, asking them to check their ideas about life in Bannack against the information on the video. START the video in “The Rush” section just after the horse and tepee and the bearded man are pictured, and after the narrator says, “Those who enlisted in Fisk’s later expeditions had high hopes for the overland route becoming a great thoroughfare of immigration from St. Paul to Bannack City—the new El Dorado of the North.” Play the tape through into “The Mining Camp” section. STOP the tape after the picture of the woman writing a letter and the female narrator says, “I want you to remember us, and how much good a letter will do for us in our exile from friends and religious privileges...and I might almost say, from civilization--Emily Meredith.” Check for comprehension by asking the students if their predictions were correct, and if they were surprised by conditions in Bannack. (*Answers: First impressions were that travelers had to cross difficult terrain to get there, Bannack was small and unattractive, and shelters were small and inadequate, including tents, shanties, caves, wagons, and crude cabins. The weather was very cold, and snow brought sub-zero temperatures, even inside the cabins. Supplies were scarce and expensive; fresh commodities were rare, and staples included bacon, beef, bread, wild game, and fish. There was little milk. They longed for companionship; many were lonely, and there were few females. They often felt cut off from civilization.*)

Step 5. Ask the students to log back on to *Welcome to Bannack State Park* at <http://www.bannack.org/index.htm>. Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, asking them to click on “Fun Stuff” on the left, then writing down their guesses as to what each pictured item is. They can then write down the correct answers at the end of the “quiz” and see how many they guessed correctly. Ask the students how they would like to operate a vacuum with a hand crank or wash clothes with the equipment pictures. (*Responses will vary.*)

Step 6. Now ask your student to click on “Photo Tour” at the same site. Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, asking them to write down the main buildings and sites in Bannack. Tell them they may use the same paper they used for Step 5. (*Answers: Visitor Center/George French’s home, Assay Office/Drug Store/Butcher’s Shop, Beaverhead County Courthouse/Hotel Meade, gallows, Bannack Cemetery, Roe/Graves house (first frame house), Methodist Church, Hendrick’s Mill, Brown Bakery & Saloon/Gauthier Boarding House, Gibson rooming house/temporary school, Masonic Lodge/Lucia Darling’s schoolhouse, Sydney Edgerton’s home.*) Check for comprehension by asking students to tell you buildings on their lists, or have them hand their lists in to you.

Step 7. Ask students to log on to *Ghost Town Gallery* at <http://www.ghosttowngallery.com/htme/bannack.htm>. Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, telling them to take a further look at the old

buildings in Bannack, and to particularly look at the interior shots. While students are perusing the pictures, fast forward the videotape to the next cue for Step 8.

Step 8. Ask your students what theories they have as to why Bannack died and eventually became a ghost town. (*Answers will vary.*) Tell the students that a major reason that many miners were lured away was new findings of gold in creeks in other areas. However, there were other reasons that Bannack dwindled. Insert the video *Bannack: A Window in Time* into the VCR. Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, asking the students to determine the other reasons that Bannack died as a town. START the tape at the section titled “Moving Into the Twentieth Century”. There is no narration at this point. STOP the tape at the black and white picture of the old car parked in downtown Bannack and the narrator says, “Although mining continued, the town’s business and social community virtually disappeared by the late 1930’s, and few people remained.” Check for comprehension by asking the students for the reasons Bannack declined. (*Answer: Agriculture replaced mining, the railroad bypassed Bannack for Dillon, Bannack was no longer the capital, and Bannack lost the county seat to Dillon, where the population was booming.*)

Step 9. Tell your students that Bannack is open for public viewing in the present time. Ask your students to log on to *Montana’s State Parks—Bannack* at <http://www.fwp.state.mt.us/parks/quiz/quiz/report.asp?sitenum=3501>. Provide your students with a FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION, asking them the following questions. What year did Bannack become a state park? (*Answer: 1954*) How many acres was set aside in the park? (*Answer: 1254*) When is it open to the public? (*Answer: All year.*) What are the day use fees? (*Answer: Adults/\$3 and Children 6-12/\$1*) Is there camping in the area? (*Answer: Yes*) Can you take pets? (*Answer: Yes, on a leash.*)

### Culminating Activity:

Step 1. Show students the pans, sand/gravel, and water. Tell them they are going to take turns panning for gold to see what it was like. Warn them that they won’t get to keep the gold at the end of the project!

Step 2. Follow the educational trunk instructions for panning, OR, if using your own materials, have the students log on to ExploreNature’s *How to Pan for Gold* at <http://www.explorenorth.com/library/howto/ht-pan.htm> and follow the 15 steps for panning. If students have trouble getting the angle of the pan correctly, have them log on to *How to Pan for Gold* by Robin C. Hale at <http://www.state.tn.us/environment/tdg/PISweries/goldpan.pdf>. This detailed article includes diagrams of panning techniques.

### Cross-Curricular Extensions:

#### ENGLISH

Read *Strength of Stone: The Pioneer Journal of Electra Bryan Plumer, 1862-1864*, a novel by Diane Elliott. The book is available through Barnes & Noble Booksellers. Write fictional journal entries as though you were homesteaders in early Montana or a ghost story featuring Bannack.

#### EARTH SCIENCE

Study substances commonly mined in Montana including gold, copper, coal, and plutonium.

#### MEDIA

Take pictures of old buildings in your area and display a photo montage in your school library.

#### MUSIC

Learn to sing or play early American songs written in the late 1800's. You may wish to look at *Melody Lane: Timeless Music that Never Dies* at <http://www.melodylane.net/>. The site contains public domain sheet music, acoustical recordings, and beautiful custom graphics of old songs including folk songs, hymns, music hall, operettas, choral, standard, and Christmas music. There is a \$20-25 one-time fee to register and use this site.

### Community Connections:

- Go on a field trip to Bannack, MT if it is near your school.
- Ask a Fish, Wildlife, and Parks ranger to visit your class to talk about state parks and conservation.
- Ask a miner to visit your classroom to discuss mining techniques.