

Gold nugget

Q: I'm wondering if you can describe for us the gold nugget itself, sort of what it looks like scale—

Response: In a physical way?

Q: Scale, that sort of thing?

Response: Sure. [00:00:14] The first find gold nugget is about half the size of your little fingernail, roughly a quarter inch by three-eighths of an inch, very tiny fleck [00:00:23] of gold by gold standards. Weighs a tenth of a troy ounce. If you look at it strangely, you might not even see it as gold. Let me reword [00:00:37] that. The gold nugget is not even a nugget. It's a fleck of gold, a flake, a whisper of what it really stands for. To me, it's a piece of [00:00:48] a metal. It's a symbol of something really big, the California gold rush, but it's also a reminder that museum objects come in many forms, many sizes, many [00:00:58] packages and it's up to us to unwrap that package, to explore it, to understand why it's here, and where it can take us.

Q: What do you [00:01:09] want people to notice when they see the object? Has it been on display?

Response: The gold nugget's been on display several times, yes.

Q: Can you [00:01:16] start again because _____ you answered too quickly.

Response: Whoops, I'm sorry.

Q: _____ asking her question.

Q: And they don't need my questions.

Response: The [00:01:29] gold nugget's been on display several times over the years. Currently, it's not on display, but we hope to have it on display soon.

Q: What kinds of sort [00:01:39] of thematic displays? Has it stood by itself? Has it been in with other stuff?

Response: Typically, the gold nugget has been an aspect of California [00:01:47] history or the history of the west, but not really history of gold or gold mining although that's its central importance.

Q: Can you tell us how the nugget [00:02:00] came to be in the collection in the museum?

Response: The gold nugget is one of the oldest objects in the collections here. It arrived here in 1861. We have a very good paper [00:02:08] trail on it. We don't know who collected it here but we do know who gave it to us. There's a letter of transmittal from Captain [00:02:17] Joseph Folsom, a quartermaster in the U.S. Army and with it came the nugget. It's a letter of transmittal transmitting the first piece of gold [00:02:27] found in northern California, the piece of gold that kicked off the gold rush.

Q: So, it's found in California [00:02:36]. Where in California?

Response: Coloma, California.

Q: Which is where?

Response: It's in what we call today the Mother Lode. It's in the lower Sierra Nevadas Mountains, [00:02:45] south of Sacramento along the south fork of the American River.

Q: And can you tell us sort of the story of the discovery?

Response: Yes, yes. [00:02:55] The discovery of gold in California—in a sense, it's a simple tale of discovery and then panic and then a fever and then a rush, but [00:03:07] it's a much more complex tale of human emotion and the migration of peoples and the transformation of a continent, so in this little fleck of gold, about [00:03:16] a quarter inch wide, we have a huge story. In this particular case, it's the story of a first find. James Marshall, a traveler from New Jersey, sets [00:03:31] up a shop as a woodwright and a millwright in the hills of California knowing that the settlements there need lumber, need services like he offers. [00:03:41] He offers his labor to Captain Sutter, John Sutter, an immigrant Swiss businessman who set up a fort in a somewhat utopian village, a village [00:03:53] called New Helvetica near Sacramento. Sutter employs Marshall to build a sawmill on part of his land, land that he has in a sort of soft [00:04:05] way leased from the Mexican government in California. Keep in mind that in the early 1840s, there was no state of California. It was a part of Mexico. The [00:04:18] Russians had loose interests in it and, of course, the native Indian population occupied the land, multiple layers of ownership.

So, into this mix comes [00:04:28] Marshall and his sawmill and in January of 1848, while working on the sawmill, he inspects the work and through the rippling waters of the south [00:04:40] fork of the American River, he sees something yellow glimmering, a yellow morsel he calls it later. He stoops down to pick it up. He bites [00:04:52] it. He walks to the shore and pounds it between rocks and he determines that it's gold. James Marshall has found gold in northern California. He [00:05:03] carries this gold a few days later to his boss, to Captain Sutter, at Sutter's fort in Sacramento and they conduct further tests on this metal. [00:05:14] They use acids. They read up in little books that he has and it mushrooms from there.

A few days, a few weeks later, a man named Sam [00:05:23] Brennan waves a bottle of this yellow metal in the streets of San Francisco. Gold, he cries, gold from the American

River. Clearly, Sam has [00:05:35] an angle of some kind and he has a business angle, but, in fact, that cry kicks off what we know today as the gold rush.

Q: Great. And so if we think [00:05:45] about the gold rush and what this little flock of gold sort of started this massive migration, where are these folks coming from and whose sort [00:05:56] of your typical person who would participate? Is there one?

Response: Good question. Is there a typical gold miner? Is [00:06:04] there a typical what was called an Argonaut at the time? If there was a typical gold miner during the gold rush of the 1840s, it would be a man [00:06:17] or a woman who up and left their home, their place of business and headed for California, headed for the hills, headed for the diggings to find [00:06:26] that color in the ground in the belief that they not only could find gold but they could transform their lives. The gold fever, the gold rush [00:06:37] was a very personal journey for tens of thousands of people, between eighty and a hundred thousand people worldwide descended on northern [00:06:48] California in a matter of months. They'd heard about, they'd read about the riches, that you can pluck gold off the [00:06:55] streets, that you stooped down with a spoon and sift it out of the ground and you were rich.

So, a typical person could've been a banker or his [00:07:05] clerk, a lawyer, a sailor, blacksmith, a baker, a seamstress, a wife, a husband. They up and left in many cases and headed for [00:07:18] California. They took off over overland by train, by stagecoach, they left from the east coast by ship down around Cape Horn. Many traveled across [00:07:27] the Isthmus of Panama over land, a journey of many weeks, but they were questing for something, not just gold but for personal transformation.

Q: And they [00:07:40] get to California and they begin their morning journey and does it pan out, pardon the pun, the way that they would like it [00:07:45] to, for the most part?

Response: For many of the California 49ers it does. Initially, tens of millions of dollars was made in [00:07:55] finding the gold in California and years later dozens of millions of dollars. Many people became rich. Many failed. Many left miserably. Many [00:08:06] never made it all the way to the gold fields. Some were killed. Some died in route, but, in fact, the gold rush was a real gold rush for many [00:08:16] families. Many of the great estates and businesses of the late 19th century are a result of the creation of a gold fund established [00:08:24] in the hills of California.

Q: Are there particular industries that you associate with sort of growing out of this discovery?

Response: Well, there're many industries that [00:08:35] supported the gold miners. One of them we know of today as Levis. The Levi jeans. Levi Strauss was a [00:08:43] gold miner wanna-be in the 1840s who realized that, heck, gold is not the answer here, what people need are good work clothes. They need [00:08:53] something tough so he started making pants out of sail cloth from all the abandoned ships in San Francisco Bay.

Ships would come in [00:09:01] and the sailors would desert their ships and head for the hills leaving behind all these supplies on board, so Levi Strauss, an immigrant Jew [00:09:10] from Europe, decided to make a business out of it. In a similar way, equipment-makers from waterwheels to sluices to small engines produced a huge industry supporting [00:09:22] gold mining.

Q: When you think about— All right, so we've got all these people descending on California, some are coming across land, some are [00:09:32] coming by boat, are there particular non-U.S. citizen populations you associate with this movement?

Response: The gold rush was international in every way. Europeans, Chinese, [00:09:44] Russians, Mexicans, Indians. No group was exempted from the gold fever and they were equally accepted in the fields, at least initially, [00:09:55] until cultural differences began to get in the way. California became a global magnet for peoples all over the world. Come to California, the land of riches, streets [00:10:06] are paved with gold.

Q: So this is happening at the same time that we're having sort of burgeoning and sort of increasingly agitated sectional conflict. [00:10:22] Is there a way in which the north/south split also plays into this attraction to the west?

Response: The gold discovery and the independence of California from [00:10:31] Mexico play a central role in the north/south conflict that led to the Civil War. California became a state in 1850 in part as a result of the debate over [00:10:46] whether California would be a slave state or a free state. Ultimately, the people of California voted to ban slavery. They became a free state, but [00:10:57] it was that question as to what the gold rush would do to California. Would it in fact become a slave state so that the slaves could mine the gold? A natural consequence [00:11:10] of the people in the south who thought they could abandon their plantations and go west with their slaves, mine the gold, [00:11:15] come home wealthy.

Q: . . . [chit-chat]. So, we've got the north/south thing going on. The other thing I'm sort of wondering about is how the sort of [00:11:36] ambiguity of control over California at this time, do you think that that sort of contributes to the successfulness of the gold rush, to the willingness of people [00:11:45] to sort of descend upon this place?

Response: California was an unknown. The west was an unknown for so many peoples and for religious reasons, for [00:11:56] economic reasons, it was perhaps a delightful thing that California was not a fully sanctioned part of the United States. It was this mysterious Russian Mexican [00:12:08] Indian far-away land full of riches, so I think it contributed to the wonderment of the Argonauts as they made plans to head west, this unknown [00:12:19] land, this potential state, this part of the United States and it really feeds into this notion of manifest destiny. Are Americans destined by some higher [00:12:29] power to head west, to rule the land from coast to coast, from ocean to ocean? Is the land opening itself up, all of its riches and wealth [00:12:41] to the American citizen? Very much like the fulfillment of some dream, so that, too, spurred them on.

Q: Is there sort of a marked reaction in the [00:12:55] east? How does news— We have the discovery of gold near Sacramento and sort of what the chain of events that brings this news to the east? [00:13:04]

Response: Communication is a big story in the gold rush. Keep in mind that the gold nugget we found, we have, that was the first find, appeared in January of 1848. [00:13:18] We think of the gold rush as the rush of the 49ers, a year later. It took that long for news to seep out. [00:13:27] Despite all the fervor and the panic and the hysteria in California, the west coast was a world away from the east coast. East coasters looked with [00:13:36] chagrin and disbelief on these words leaking out about some strange mysterious find out west. Was it true? That in part is the reason behind [00:13:49] why the gold is here in Washington, D.C. today. Our piece of gold was part of a shipment that left California in July of 1848. It traveled by [00:14:00] ship under special courier escort by the U.S. Army through Panama, up through Jamaica, to New Orleans and then [00:14:07] by stagecoach to Washington, D.C. as evidence of the gold find. President Polk learned of that. He was presented with the examples of the gold from California [00:14:19] and told Congress in December of 1848, yes, there has been gold found in California.

Q: I want to ask you particularly about what you feel like sort of the impact [00:14:39] of the discovery is on the land, on the peoples, those sorts of things. We're trying to build a before and after picture of [00:14:48] the discovery of this nugget in California.

Response: The size of our little California gold nugget, our first find nugget, found [00:14:54] by James Marshall, pales in comparison to the impact of gold mining on the land in California. It transformed the state, not just economically and politically [00:15:04] but environmentally. It's one of the most difficult stories to tell because so little evidence remains today. We can only imagine [00:15:14] it through the photographs we see, the decimated hillsides, the trashed rivers and ravines. Gold typically was found in alluvial soils, mixtures [00:15:24] of sand and soft rock and earth created by rivers and creeks and little streams. Northern California is filled with these, so when the gold was discovered [00:15:38] and the miners headed for the hills, they headed for the stream beds. They headed for the beds with picks and axes and shovels, but [00:15:46] also with hammer drills and with water canons and with dynamite and with thousands and thousands of people, all trashing the land, destroying trees, [00:15:58] forests, rivers, looking for the elusive gold metal. It had quite an impact.

Q: I also have like a whole host of questions about [00:16:10] how you approach the nugget as a curator, like perhaps if you were to create a display with it now, what sorts of things would you want to put [00:16:20] with it?

Response: Over the years I've collected some really big machines, some hard hats, some clothing, shoes, tools of all kinds, but nothing as [00:16:33] small, physically small as the gold nugget. It's been here under our care since the 1860s. It will be here long after. It's gold and yet it's [00:16:42] really tiny, so what to do. I think the best way I'd like to

display it would be in a dark case with the gold all by itself. We [00:16:56] have a tendency here to tell stories. The Smithsonian has become America's storyteller along with others, but here's a case [00:17:03] where we really have to abstract it for a moment because it can easily get overwhelmed by whatever's around it. A gold pan, a pick, a miner's hat, [00:17:15] even a photograph of miners. Compared to those, this nugget looks insignificant. I think we need to get it away from all of that. This nugget [00:17:23] deserves to sit by itself in a dark case.

Q: I was also really interested in your story of taking the nugget back to Sutter's fort and so I was wondering [00:17:36] if you could tell us about that and your experiences with that and also sort of your confidence in it being the first find.

Response: Since the 1860s, the Smithsonian's [00:17:45] first find gold nugget from the gold rush has never [00:17:47] left the Smithsonian and that's been our policy because it's so delicate, so important, so small, we've not agreed to any loans outside [00:17:58] the Smithsonian, let alone outside Washington, D.C., but in 1998, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the first find, January of that year, we relented. [00:18:14] Times had changed. Maybe our controls had grown stronger, but we relented and I escorted the gold nugget personally with an armed guard [00:18:25] by air to Coloma to the site, almost the very beach of its discovery. It was a thrilling moment in my career here to have that honor [00:18:36] to stand with the nugget, to sleep with the nugget in the hotel every night during its few days there. I kept it in a special case at my side [00:18:44] at all times until it was in its display case, a huge display case with this little yellow nugget in the center of it during the day right there [00:18:54] at the California State Museum in Coloma. What a thrill.

Q: And so I hear that there are competing claims to the first find nugget.

Response: Well, as with a [00:19:04] baseball star, there's always a contender, always a pretender to want to question the true authority. We have an immaculate paper [00:19:16] record of our nugget's lineage, its history, its provenance. However, there are other nuggets. Many pieces of gold were found in those [00:19:26] heady first days of January 1848 after Marshall had picked up this nugget. Other nuggets were found by his workmen, a Mormon cook, an assistant of [00:19:39] Marshall's. Others found their first nuggets. So we believe there are other qualifiers for that first generation of first find nuggets, first discovery [00:19:53] era, first discovery period, but ours is clearly the supreme first.

Q: ... [chit-chat] So, I'm sort of wondering and I think you had a really [00:20:09] good answer for this on your survey is trying to put yourself in the place of, say, a 17-year-old history student. What is the most exciting thing about— [00:20:18] What's the most interesting thing about this object?

Response: About the object?

Q: Yeah.

Response: Well, I think it is a reminder that— This gold [00:20:28] is a reminder that really big stories come in really small packages. Don't judge something by just looking at it. Look through it. Look beyond [00:20:41] it, because through this little gold window, a quarter-inch by three-eighths of an inch, is a whole world, a world of California, a world of Americans trying [00:20:53] to surpass their meager lives, including teenagers. Remember that young men and young women in the 1840s were regarded as young adults in [00:21:05] most every way. There was more than a few teenagers who left the east coast heading for California as miners, as gold miners, with or without [00:21:12] their families. I think it's a reminder that transformation can occur [00:21:18] at many levels. You can turn your life around, change your life, improve your life, or destroy your life, based upon your emotions. The gold nugget, [00:21:28] the gold rush, is a story of emotion, in some ways, emotion run wild, so for me, it's a wild story of abandon, of discovery, of riches, of poverty, [00:21:42] all wrapped up in this little tiny nugget.

Q: You [00:21:46] mentioned the Mormon cook who found another gold flake. Is that exactly what it is?

Response: He found a nugget, yes, an actual [00:21:56] nugget.

Q: Most folks don't know that the Mormons are there working with James Marshall so I was wondering if you could say something about [00:22:05] that for folks?

Response: I'll try. The Mormons like the Chinese, the Russians, the Indian population, the Europeans, California became a United Nations in so [00:22:18] many ways, of religions and peoples, ethnicities, African Americans were there, but the Mormons were recent arrivals. In the mid-19th century, Brigham Young [00:22:29] led his Mormon host, his Mormon followers, over the mountains from the midwest to Zion, to Salt Lake. Some of his Mormon followers [00:22:41] continued on to the west coast, to the ocean, to form their own settlements. Many of these were independent knowledgeable skilled craftsmen working [00:22:53] in wood and stone and felling trees, farmers. They found work, though, working with people like Sutter, establishing their own settlements [00:23:03] and when Sutter needed some workmen to accompany James Marshall to build the sawmill in Coloma, he sent his Mormon workers, so a small [00:23:11] Mormon encampment appeared and the Mormons continued to mine along with everyone else, all swept up in the rush.

Q: Excellent. [00:23:22] I know you've done a ton of research on this topic and these areas and these sorts of things and I was wondering if you could say a little [00:23:27] something about as a curator, sort of how your process of research works.

Response: As with so much at the Smithsonian, we're driven by [00:23:37] agendas, our own and the Smithsonian's agenda. Research often happens— Excuse me. . . . [chit-chat] We're driven by many agendas at the Smithsonian, our [00:23:54] own and the museum's agenda. We have our own research topics. We have exhibit needs. We have

public inquiries to respond to, so any period [00:24:05] of sustained research has to be sort of tucked in between our other obligations day to day. The gold nugget story I found time to sort of mine in my [00:24:14] own way, to pick at, if you might say, read a book here and there, follow a trail of letters, study the object, and through that, through the sesquicentennial [00:24:24] in 1998, I found time to read enough books and follow enough letters to become really knowledgeable about the history of this nugget. It took obviously [00:24:35] personal passion on my part, an awareness that no one had really has done this before for the 130 some years this nugget had been here. We [00:24:45] just trusted the story. We have the letter of transmittal from Folsom. We have the nugget. What more do we need? But I found there [00:24:54] was a lot more to learn, so I think it takes a passion, it takes some commitment and, of course, it takes the support of your employer.

Q: That's true. [00:25:03] That is certainly true. The other question that I've sort of asked everyone who's sat in that chair is if you were sort of faced with [00:25:14] a group of visitors and you're looking at a display of the gold nugget, sort of what are the historical themes that you would like them to focus on and [00:25:26] with the knowledge that they walk away with from the exhibit.

Response: The gold nugget is a really beautiful example of the layers of meaning than an [00:25:33] object can have. Typically, there may be five or six meanings for a hat, for a chair, for an earring, for an automobile. There's the story [00:25:44] of manufacture and design, the story of sales and marketing, the story of the materials the object is made from, the story of ownership and usage, [00:25:54] and then the story of the broader issues [00:26:00] an object brings up. In the case of the gold nugget, they're stark. They're absolutely stark. We have a vivid example here [00:26:05] of metallurgy. Gold is a metal. What are its properties? Why is it precious? Why do we care about gold? Why are coins made of it? What [00:26:16] about antiquity? The gold nugget for us opens up that story. It allows people, teenagers, families of all kinds, to start thinking seriously about [00:26:29] why does gold matter, why do any metals matter? Gold certainly isn't the most useful metal. It's not the most plentiful. Steel is a [00:26:39] great metal. So's iron, copper. What's up with gold, so I'd love, on one hand, to talk about gold, its distinction from the Egyptians to the [00:26:51] present day, but on the other hand, there's the gold rush. This is a catalyst for the gold rush. This kicks it off and so many stories, where to begin, [00:27:02] where to end involving the peoples of North America, the state of California, the state of the United States, and of course, all the folks who tried and succeeded, who tried and [00:27:13] failed, to become gold miners, so many— many layers of stories.

Q: You mentioned earlier manifest destiny and I'm wondering if you have a sense [00:27:28] of how pervasive that theory was— There's not really an average miner, but folks who are coming to California, folks who are already in California, do you feel [00:27:41] like— Is there evidence that people who are promoting the gold rush are pushing manifest destiny as a reason or sort of actively mobilizing [00:27:51] this idea?

Response: There're plenty of parties who had it in their own personal best interest to see the miners take off for California. Certainly what we would [00:28:01] call today travel agents, people booking passage head for California, steamers setting sail from the ports along the east coast certainly promoted [00:28:13] the glory and the ideal of a perfect experience in the west. Land of riches. All you need to do is get on board and do it now. Manifest destiny [00:28:26] was both a personal calling and a national creed. It was a theory, but it was also a strong belief that people not only should but [00:28:36] ought to be out west seeking their personal fortunes, their personal manifest destiny but also in a sense, from the political angle, from [00:28:45] the news accounts they read, from the advertising a national responsibility to travel the country, to civilize it, to make it their own, so it's a very [00:28:58] important time for that; 1845, before the gold rush, this notion of manifest destiny emerges but there's nothing like the gold rush to really make it appear to [00:29:08] be a reality.

I'm reminded of the fact that it continues, this notion of manifest destiny. President Reagan said that he believed that the United States is [00:29:22] the last best hope of man on earth. If that isn't manifest destiny, I don't know what is, so this idea that we are somehow ordained [00:29:31] to manage this land for the sake of the world, to take our place in it and our piece of it is perhaps undying.

Q: Do you have any sense from the [00:29:44] folks who are in Coloma from Sutter or Marshall or any of those folks that there's a sense of sort of self-reflectiveness about their [00:29:54] relationship with the native peoples there?

Response: In later years, both Marshall and Sutter had occasions to reflect on what the gold rush did to them and what their [00:30:07] fates would've been otherwise. Their treatment of the native peoples I don't believe was among that. The native populations of [00:30:16] California were subjected to various levels of cruelty and dismissal. Certainly they were treated with a different kind of care by the Spanish missions [00:30:28] in the early 19th century, late 18th century until 1833 when the mission system was broken up. It caused trauma and dislocation among [00:30:37] many of the west coast Indian populations. Who were they to believe in? Who were they to trust? And along comes the gold rush, something [00:30:50] they didn't understand.

It's important to remember that gold was not first found in 1848. The native peoples, the Mexicans knew that there was gold here and there [00:31:00] around the state. It had been found since the 16th century by the Spanish, so gold was nothing new to them. What was new was the rush. All [00:31:10] these strangers, all these immigrants, these foreign peoples pouring into the land. What should they do? Should they fight them? Should they [00:31:15] work for them? Should they work with them? Should they somehow start mining their own land for gold? So it became a very tangled time for [00:31:26] native populations along with everyone else. Sadly, the dislocation continued, certainly spurred by the mining camps, the devastation [00:31:34] of the land, the loss of their hunting territory and their farms, so that is one of the sad consequences of the gold rush, what became [00:31:44] of the native populations of California.

Q: Can you say something about sort of what money town culture seems like, what it feels like? What [00:31:59] those towns sort of took shape as?

Response: The mining camps emerged as settlements, little accumulations of tents, dirty tents along dirty paths [00:32:08] where miners would get together and share their claims, perhaps share supplies, congregate during blizzards, and they emerged as small [00:32:21] towns, unruly, unregulated, messy small towns and they gradually emerged as bona fide communities. Coloma had existed before the gold find, but so many [00:32:33] of these new camps, from Volcano to Gold Mountain to Sutter's Creek, little towns that hardly existed before but gradually [00:32:44] became centers of service for miners, perhaps a sawmill, a bakery, a church, sheriff's office, the makings of civilization. ... [chit-chat] [00:33:08] So, you need more breaks, okay.

Q: I think I've covered most of my very specific questions. I'm sort of wondering [00:33:23] if I feel like you've been thinking about the gold nugget for a long time. Has your interpretation of it changed over time? Has your [00:33:33] relationship to the object changed over time?

Response: The gold nugget hits people different ways. I guess typically you see it and you say, oh, gold rush, [00:33:42] wow, Marshall found that. Neat. Cool. And you move on to the next object. Visitors average two seconds in front of each object [00:33:53] in our museum as they go from object to object. I've had a little more time to think about the gold nugget, to study it, and over the years as I've studied [00:33:59] it more carefully, I see new things. I see what look like bite marks in the side of it. What looks like something hit it and, [00:34:12] in fact, that— what I'm seeing is evidence of its testing by Marshall and by Sutter. He describes picking up a little nugget the [00:34:20] size of a pea, of a green pea, and biting it and hitting it between rocks and taking it to Sutter who tested it further.

I believe [00:34:34] that what we have here is evidence of its malleability. Gold is a soft metal and what he was doing was testing to see if it was in fact [00:34:44] gold. Marshall and Sutter knew enough about gold to do these things, so for me, it's the best evidence you can find. That's why [00:34:52] I have such exquisite close-up photographs made of both sides of it and I guess with enough effort, we could perhaps find James Marshall's [00:35:03] resting place. I happen to know where he's buried and, you know, teeth endure a long time and we could perhaps match up one of his molars with [00:35:12] the marks on this nugget, just as a final test.

Q: That would be great. This was excellent. Your answers have been so great and succinct. Let [00:35:21] me just ask for one second if the peanut gallery over here has further questions. Anything?

Q: Maybe you asked this already, but [00:35:31] _____ what other objects and if _____ other objects to put with it.

Q: Sort of in a larger—

Response: Yeah. One other thing I'd like to say, a question that [00:35:42] might arise among viewers. We don't assign a value to this. Gold is equivalent to money, you know, we think about gold in the same thought as we [00:35:52] think about what's the price of gold on the market today, what's a dollar worth. The Smithsonian doesn't assign monetary values to their objects, [00:36:03] this one especially. Chances are it's priceless.

Q: That's great.

Response: Your other question was what else would it—

Q: Sort of [00:36:11] in a larger display. You've got the dark case with the nugget. Other things that you would sort of at a distance display it with.

Response: Right. Well, [00:36:21] the natural instinct to surround this nugget with would be gold mining apparatus and scales and [00:38:24] other things of the gold rush but I don't think I [00:36:31] would do that. I think I would like to find something that had to do with its antithesis, what the lack of gold meant. Many families couldn't [00:36:41] afford to send a son or a daughter or a husband or a brother out to the gold fields in California. They were farming in Ohio or fishing in Massachusetts and they [00:36:54] said, no, don't follow these fantasies or many went and found nothing, nothing but ruin, so what would it be? Would that be an [00:37:02] empty pocket? Would that be a ripped up steamer ticket? Perhaps a sense of loss. I think the gold nugget is powerful enough [00:37:16] to stand on its own to represent the drama and the trauma of the gold rush, but what's that other thing that represents everything else. I don't [00:37:25] know.

Q: Maybe a debtor's note.

Response: What?

Q: Maybe a debtor's note.

Response: A debtor's note. Yes, that's right, that's right, or perhaps a [00:37:35] one of many sorrowful letters sent back home saying My dear, I didn't want to have to tell you this, but I'm destitute. I have nothing and [00:37:47] I am nothing and I don't know if I'm coming back to you, so there're many letters like that.

Q: All of those collections.

Response: Yes, that's right. [00:37:59]

Q: ... [chit-chat]

Response: Oh, I see. So, you're going to build more of a site around this object.