

Gold Nugget Plan

Flash Video-Images

- Folder of Images for the Flash Video
- Possible Introductory Quotes—"A mysterious, but all-pervading and powerful attraction, emanating from this wonderful point, has been felt in the remotest parts of the earth. Civilized, semi-barbarous, and savage—American, European, Asiatic, and African—feel it. The missionary and the gambler, the praying and the profane man, have all felt it. Drawn from the pulpit, the farm, the forum, the bench, they all rush—giddy, mazed—into this one vortex."
- Another possibility is "As each one steps his foot on shore, he seems to have entered a magic circle, in which he is under the influence of new impulses. The wills of all seem under the control of some strong and hidden agency. The city is every day newly filled, then emptied but to be filled again. The crowd ever presses on, elate with hope, excited by expectations, which it would be impossible to define or realize."

Curator's Introduction

- I want to use Shayt's description of the nugget itself. "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."
- I also like his discussion of the discovery of gold. "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 Helvetia 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.”

- Finally, Shayt sums up the importance of the nugget well. “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.” This section could also go under object, maybe.

Tour-this can be developed after we figure out the “Explore” section

Explore-We are going to mix helpful objects with curator clips in this section. Each of the sub-sections can have between 3 or 4 and 12 images or additional objects.

The Object: Shayt’s description of the object might fit in here better, as well as his description of its importance. Another thing that might be helpful is Sutter’s own description of the discovery of the object. I can’t seem to find the manuscript, but I have a transcription on the San Francisco Museum’s website. “Marshall arrived in the evening, it was raining very heavy, but he told me he came on important business. After we was alone in a private Room he showed me the first Specimens of Gold, that is he was not certain if it was Gold or not, but he thought it might be; immediately I made the proof and found that it was Gold. I told him even that most of all is 23 Carat Gold; he wished that I should come up with him immediately, but I told him that I have to give first my orders to the people in all my factories and shops.”

Context:

Object in History- the following are categories I have thought about for how to provide contextual information.

- Foreigners and Racial Problems-I have German and French posters advertising California, as well as a political cartoon about the “problem” of the influx of the Chinese.
- Sectional Tensions-I have a picture of the Compromise of 1850, which came about in part as a result of California’s request for statehood.
- Territorial Expansion-I have an image of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which gave the US the rights to California.
- California Idealized-I have a newspaper headline about how California is El Dorado, as well as some good quotes by Shayt about how the distance of California gave it a mythical quality and made it look like the land of opportunity.
- Environmental Impact-I have some pictures of the extreme measures taken by miners, as well as some discussion of the issue by Shayt.

- Spinoff/Resultant industries-this is good for those who are especially interested in material culture. We could present some of the different tools used by the miners, as well as the example of Levis. I also have some steam boat advertisements.

Museum- we need the museum's records of the object, especially the letter of transmission from Cpt. Folsom. We can also take anything else that is pertinent. Also, we can discuss the fact that the museum considers the nugget priceless and look at what that means, especially in terms of the context. We can also play the interview clips: Shayt discussing why it is priceless, how it has been displayed, how he would display it, and when he traveled with it.

Shayt Quotes: "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."

Outside the Museum-"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."

"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." Someone suggested that if we were to supply this "alternate object" it should reflect somehow the impact on the Indians of California, who lost a tremendous amount due to the gold rush.

