




Summary

A large map of the Pacific Ocean and the West Coast of North America, showing the route of Alexander Van Valen's journey from the East Coast to the West Coast. The map is in a sepia tone and includes a dashed line representing the journey's path.

This interactive project allows students to perform the work of a historian as they explore the journal of Alexander Van Valen, a 30-year-old New York man who set sail in 1849 to stake his claim in the California gold fields. The project provides a rich set of primary sources to investigate and analyze the gold rush era and the lives of “forty-niners.” It focuses on the questions, “Why did they go?” and “What was it like?”

The activity has two major components, [an interactive Web site](http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/) called Van Valen’s Gold Rush Journey (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/>), and [a student worksheet](http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/assets/pdf/goldrush_studentactivity.pdf) (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/assets/pdf/goldrush_studentactivity.pdf), which serves as both a companion guide and worksheet for students. Students will download the student worksheet, then use the primary sources on the Web site to answer historical questions about Van Valen’s journal entries/letters (there are seven entries in total).


The output of the project (the student worksheet) is a high-quality Adobe Acrobat PDF file that students can save, edit, and print for use as a final project for grading.

The project can be used as a tool to engage students in historical thinking as part of your unit on Westward Expansion.

Objectives

Students will be better able to:

1. apply historical thinking, analysis, and interpretation to answer historical questions.
2. understand the settlement of the West.



Time

Two class periods and project work at home

- ◆ Project Kickoff Class—50 minutes/ 1 class period
- ◆ Students Complete Entries 2 to 7—15-30 minutes per entry (home/lab work)
- ◆ Students Create Final Journal Entry—30 minutes (homework)
- ◆ Project Wrap-up Class—50 minutes/ 1 class period

Grade Level

6th – 12th grade

Vocabulary

A number of nautical terms are included in the primary source documents.


Here is a good basic resource for nautical terms: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_nautical_terms

Students should be encouraged to have a dictionary on hand to look up unfamiliar words as they analyze the primary sources.

Note: Van Valen's journal entries are direct transcriptions of his original words, spelling and punctuation, so there are numerous typographical and grammatical errors. In most cases they do not prevent clear understanding of a passage. Coach students to read aloud any sections with which they are having trouble. Van Valen's errors are quickly clarified when spoken aloud.

Materials

- ◆ Computer with Internet access ([Flash plug-in](#) & [Adobe Reader](#))
- ◆ [Van Valen's Gold Rush Journey Web Site \(http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/\)](http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/)

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- ◆ [Van Valen's Gold Rush Journey Instruction Sheet](#) (Appendix A)
 - ◆ [Student Worksheet PDF](http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/assets/pdf/goldrush_studentactivity.pdf) (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/assets/pdf/goldrush_studentactivity.pdf) (print or digital)
 - ◆ [Journal Entries Transcript](http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/assets/pdf/goldrush_transcript.pdf) (http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/goldrush/assets/pdf/goldrush_transcript.pdf)
 - ◆ Dictionary
 - ◆ Printer (recommended)

Preparation

Project Kickoff Class

- ◆ Visit the [Van Valen's Gold Rush Journey Web site](#) to preview it and download the [Student Worksheet](#). Print copies of the [Student Worksheet](#) for students to use as a guide and for note taking as you orient them to the Web site. The student worksheet PDF file is interactive, so students should be given the digital PDF file for producing their final projects.
- ◆ Print copies of the [Van Valen's Gold Rush Journey Instruction Sheet](#) for students (Appendix A)

Note: Teachers may want to review the "California by Sea" section of the main [On the Water Web site](#) to note the gold rush's impact on people and the land in the wider context of Westward Expansion. http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/exhibition/2_4.html

Project Wrap-up Class

- ◆ Plan to have the Van Valen's Gold Rush Journey [Web site](#) on screen for class discussion.
- ◆ Board or flipchart to record student responses.
- ◆ Ask students' to bring their completed [Student Worksheets](#) to class.
- ◆ Print [What Smithsonian Curators Learned About the Van Valens](#) information sheet for students (Appendix C)
- ◆ Print [Gold Rush Rubric](#) (Appendix B)



Standards

Era 4 - Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)

Standard 2E - The student understands the settlement of the West.

Standard 1: Chronological Thinking


- A. Distinguish between past, present, and future time.
- B. Identify the temporal structure of a historical narrative or story.
- C. Establish temporal order in constructing historical narratives of their own.
- D. Measure and calculate calendar time.

Standard 2: Historical Thinking

- A. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative and assess its credibility.
- B. Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage.
- C. Identify the central question(s) the historical narrative addresses.
- D. Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations.
- E. Read historical narratives imaginatively.
- F. Appreciate historical perspectives.
- G. Draw upon data in historical maps.
- H. Utilize visual, mathematical, and quantitative data.

Standard 3: Historical Analysis & Interpretation

- A. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas.
- B. Consider multiple perspectives.
- C. Analyze cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causation, including the importance of the individual, the influence of ideas.
- E. Distinguish between unsupported expressions of opinion and informed hypotheses grounded in historical evidence.
- H. Hold interpretations of history as tentative.



Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

- A. Formulate historical questions.
- B. Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.
- C. Interrogate historical data.
- D. Identify the gaps in the available records, marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place.
- E. Employ quantitative analysis.
- F. Support interpretations with historical evidence.

Bibliography

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/info/webliography.html>



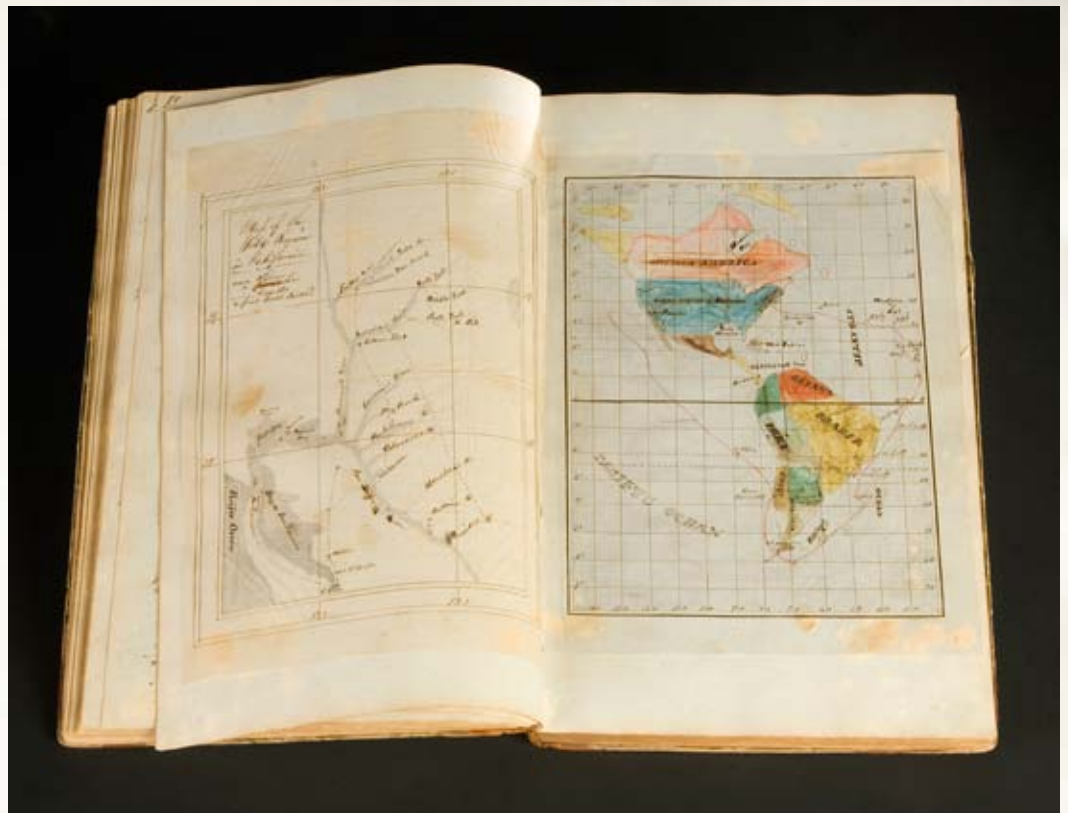
Project Kickoff Class

1. Introduce the topic and project to students
(See “Introduction” below)
2. Hand out copies of the [Instruction Sheet](#) and [Student Worksheet](#)
3. Walk students through the [Instruction Sheet](#) using the [Interactive Web site](#) to orient them to the Web site’s functions and layout
4. Model historical thinking while completing the questions for “[Day 1 of the journey](#)” together as a class, Students should write the answers for [Day 1](#) on their printed student worksheet
5. Review project requirements

Introduction

The gold rush drew wealth-seekers from around the world. More than a third came by sea.

Glittering rumors of gold for the taking spread from California around the globe beginning in 1848. Tens of thousands of people left homes and families to chase the dream of quick riches. For most of the world, the ocean was the only way to reach California. For Americans, it was the fastest way. In 1849 alone, 42,000 Americans headed west over land; 25,000 took to the waves. Why did they go? What was it like?



A Gold Rush Journal

This journal was written and illustrated by Alexander Van Valen of New York, who set sail in January 1849 to join the California gold rush. Van Valen and four partners formed a company to dig gold, financed by two other New Yorkers. Leaving behind his wife Susan and four daughters, Van Valen planned to be gone for two years.

The group booked passage on the bark *Hersilia*, which reached San Francisco later that year. Van Valen's experience was typical of many East Coast adventurers. But his account of the voyage and his observations of San Francisco and mining operations are remarkable in their detail.

We are going to follow Alexander Van Valen's journey and discover the stories of people who experienced the gold rush (and its effects) firsthand.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who made this journal and when was it made?

This journal was written and illustrated by Alexander Van Valen of New York, who set sail in January 1849 to join the California gold rush. He kept the journal throughout his long voyage to San Francisco.

Is this the actual journal Van Valen wrote?

Yes. It is now part of the collections at the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. It was on display in the Museum's On the Water exhibition which opened in May 2008. After about a year, the journal must return to storage in order to protect it for future research and exhibitions.



How did the Museum get the journal?

The 85-page journal was part of a California gold rush archival collection purchased in November 2006 at a public auction. In addition to the journal, there were 38 letters and three photographs.

Review Instruction Sheet

Hand out and review the Instruction Sheet with students.

Review of Project Requirements

Review rubric, due date, and any other project requirements with students.



Project Wrap-up Class

1. Lead a discussion of the project in class asking students to recall primary source references to explain their conclusions/theories. What was life like on board the *Hersilia*? Why did Van Valen go to San Francisco?
2. Poll students to see how many created a final journal entry in which Van Valen stayed in California vs. how many created an entry in which he headed home.
3. Record students' supporting evidence for staying or leaving within a column chart (see fig.1 on next page—at this point you will only be completing the row labeled "Class").
4. Hand out [What Smithsonian Curators Learned About the Van Valens](#) information sheet (can be read aloud or silently in about 3–4 minutes).
5. Label the row of the chart containing student input as "Class" and add a new row labeled "Curators." Ask students to identify information that both students and curators found, and to point out additional evidence found by curators.
6. Collect completed [Student Worksheets](#) (printed or electronic) to grade using the [Gold Rush Rubric](#) (Appendix B).


Stay or Go Chart- Figure 1

	Evidence for Staying in California	Evidence for Going Home to New York
Class		
Curators		

Note: It is expected that most of the evidence will appear in the "Going Home to New York" column, however, there are a few clues such as the fact that Van Valen's company did find gold, the expectations of family/friends, and the daunting prospect of traveling home that are important to talk about.



Teachers' Guide



This section provides teachers with a quick reference to information contained within the primary sources.

Day 1 _____

Questions

Based on the careful examination of Van Valen's journal and supporting primary sources:

Q1. Where was Van Valen headed and what was his purpose?

A1. Van Valen's journal entry states, "Monday Jany 22ts, 1849 Left the Port of New York in Bark Hersilia Capt Baxter, with 84 passengers & Crew Bound for San Francisco Cala. 9 am left Pier 6 North River in Tow of the Steam Boat Suffolk." He mentions "gold" and "gold fever" in the opening paragraphs of his entry.

Q2. Who were the members of the "Company" traveling with Van Valen?

A2. Van Valen's journal entry lists, "Alex Van Valen, Mathew Van Siclan, Stephen P. Clarke, William Byxber, & Rich c J. Paulison all of the City of New York."

Q3. How long after the discovery of gold at John Sutter's Coloma, California, sawmill did Van Valen depart on his journey?

A3. The information for the gold nugget states that January 25, 1848, was the date gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill. Van Valen's entry states he left New York on January 22, 1849,

almost exactly one year from the Sutter's Mill find. Discover the story behind the nugget and how it came to the Smithsonian by using the [On the Water online collections tool: http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/collection/CL_135%281861%29.01.html](http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/collection/CL_135%281861%29.01.html).

Q4. What were the main sources of information Van Valen might have used to decide to take this journey and what he should bring?

A4. Van Valen's entry lists newspapers, journals, private communications (i.e. letters), and government dispatches. The latter seems to have been his final proof that the claims of vast gold deposits were true.

Primary Sources

Journal Entries Transcript

Gold from Sutter's Mill, 1848

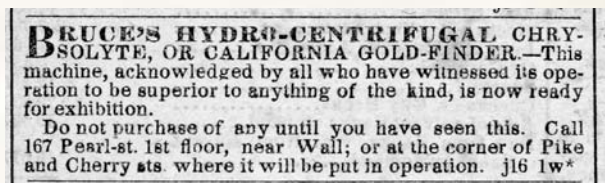
James Marshall found this tiny piece of pure gold in the tailrace of John Sutter's Coloma, California, sawmill on January 24, 1848. This is the actual nugget that sparked the rush for California gold.



Note: The nugget is small enough to fit on the tip of an adult's finger.

California Gold-Finder

Gold finders, gold washers, and other spurious devices were advertised widely to lure gullible gold-seekers.



New York Daily Tribune, January 18, 1849, Courtesy of the Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center

Miner's Gold Pan

The most basic tool in any gold miner's kit was a pan. A handful or two of sandy river gravel was dumped into some

water, and the mix was swished around. The lighter sand and gravel rose to the top; the heavier gold flakes and nuggets sank to the bottom, where they could be picked out.



Gift of George W. Sims

Day 20

Questions

Based on the careful examination of Van Valen's journal and supporting primary sources:

Q1. How many crew and how many passengers were aboard the Hersilia?

A1. There were 77 passengers, 11 Officers and Seamen, and 8 Cooks and Stewards. There were no women on board.

Note: You will observe a discrepancy between the number of passengers noted by Van Valen on Day 1 and Day 20. While we do not know the reason for this difference, you might take this opportunity to discuss the possibilities with your students. Perhaps, in the excitement surrounding their departure, Van Valen miscounted his fellow passengers on the first day of their voyage. Did he mistake several members of the crew for fellow passengers? Since the crew would not have been wearing uniforms, it's possible, although not likely. By the 20th day, Van Valen had ample time to meet everyone on the voyage, and he began to have access to the ship's log and passenger list, which would make the Day 20 figure more reliable.

Q2. How did the conditions on board compare with those promised on the clipper cards?

A2. Van Valen's journal entry mentions crowded conditions, "no ventilation" and cabins filled with oil lamp smoke as well as "blast furnace" heat. A later paragraph describes the

passengers bathing by grouping together on deck and having buckets of water thrown on them. This is a stark contrast with the Clipper Cards, which use romantic imagery and advertise their ships as “elegant” and “first class.”

Q3. Do you think Van Valen sailed on a clipper ship? Which pieces of evidence support your theory?

A3. The *Hersilia* in fact was not a clipper ship, but a bark. It was smaller and did not have the speed of the extreme clipper ships. Conditions were certainly not “elegant” or “first class.”

Primary Sources

Journal Entries Transcript

Crew and Passenger List for the gold rush Ship *Hersilia*, 1849

At the beginning of his daily journal, the ship passenger and forty-niner Alex Van Valen wrote up a list of everyone aboard the bark *Hersilia*. The crew, which consisted of the captain, mates, seamen, cooks and stewards, managed the ship and all its passengers. There were no women aboard the *Hersilia*; the crew and passengers were together for a 199-day voyage around Cape Horn from New York to San Francisco Bay from January to August 1849.

Clipper cards, 1850s and 1860s

Merchants used mythical, romantic, and patriotic imagery to attract customers to their ships. In the early 1850s, the immensely valuable trade with China for spices, tea, and other high-profit cargoes put a premium on speed, even at the cost of cargo capacity. British and American shipbuilders answered with clipper ships—long, narrow vessels with towering masts and clouds of canvas. They were the fastest commercial sailing vessels ever built.



Questions

Based on the careful examination of Van Valen's journal and supporting primary sources:

Q1. What news does Van Valen hear from the gold mines and how does this affect his "Gold Fever?"

A1. Van Valen notes that the U.S. Sloop of War *Dale* brought news from California. He states that the news was "... flattering, and confirmed the most exaggerated accounts before given, our hopes in regard to the future prospect of obtaining wealth from the Gold mines in California were strengthened, and we were anxious to resume our voyage as soon as possible."

Q2. What was Van Valen's impression of the prices for supplies and labor in Valparaiso?

A2. Van Valen's entry remarks at the high prices in Valparaiso and supposes that they are caused by the increased number of ships ferrying people and supplies to California.

Here are two Web sites you can use to help get a sense of what things cost in the 1850's.

<http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppowerus/result.php>

<http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/col51.html>


Primary Sources

[Journal Entries Transcript](#)

The Independent Gold Hunter on his Way to California

N. Currier, of the famous printmakers Currier & Ives, produced this ca. 1850 satirical print of what a well-equipped gold hunter needed for a casual transcontinental stroll from the East to





the gold mines of California. The drawing mocks the exaggerated reports reaching the East of how easy it was to collect the precious metal. In fact, this gentleman would scarcely have lasted a day on his journey to the California gold fields, tricked out in this ridiculous costume and gear.

Note: This drawing would have been hilarious to 19th-century readers.

The California Mutual Gold Mining Company, 1848

In December 1848, a group of five young men from New York formed a company to sail to California and seek their fortunes in the California gold rush. Two other New York speculators financed the expedition, which was to last for two summers, or digging seasons. They developed a contract for their company that laid out the terms and duties of the company members. The financiers invested \$2,500.00, in exchange for 25 percent of any future revenues from the gold fields.

Day 130


Questions

According to Van Valen's journal entry and supporting primary sources:

Q1. What was life like for sailors and ship passengers at sea in the 1840s? List at least two words or phrases from each primary source that support your conclusion.

A1. Van Valen's journal entry talks about the wind, weather, and difficulties of moving around on deck during rough seas. Towards the end, he claims that a "sailors life is a dogs life" only to go on to say that a dog's life is actually better! The song "A Hundred Years Ago" expresses loneliness, freezing weather, and wild winds. The singers feel as if it was a hundred years since they were home and safe.

Note: There is enough room in the answer box for students to draw a picture in addition to listing evidence.



Primary Sources

[Journal Entries Transcript](#)

Transcript and audio recording of “A Hundred Years Ago”

http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/pdf/transcript_a_hundred_years_ago.pdf

http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/exhibition/3_7.html#SeaSongs

This tune mentions the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay and may derive from the Baltimore clipper era in the early 19th century. Its short lyrics also embrace a love story and a passage around Cape Horn on a whaling voyage. This blend reflects the improvised nature of sea chanteys, which were localized by every crew.

Performed by Ewan MacColl, A. L. Lloyd, and Peggy Seeger

Day 142 _____

Questions


Q1. How long had Van Valen been away when Susan’s letter was written?

A1. 142 days

Q2. How did Susan and Van Valen feel about being separated?

A2. In her first paragraph Susan admits she is worried for Van Valen’s health and safety and wishes she were with him. “I am afraid that you really suffered for the necessaries of life, and fear you will yet have to encounter many hardships. O if it were so that I could only be with you to prepare your food to share with you your trials and difficulties, I feel as if I would be willing to endure any hardship if I could add to your comfort.” She repeatedly states she is lonely, but her words are strong and she remains dutiful in supporting her husband’s decision to seek his fortune

In his journal entry from the same day, Van Valen’s simply wrote a poem expressing his growing melancholy during the



long journey. He uses words like “weary,” “lonely,” and “sadness” to convey his feelings at this point in the journey.

Q3. What is Susan doing to help with the family’s expenses while Van Valen is away?

A3. In the third paragraph, Susan states that she is taking in sewing work to earn money.

Q4. What is happening in New York City that makes Susan plan to go to Poughkeepsie (upstate New York)?

A4. In the third paragraph of Susan’s letter, she states that there have been “35 cases of Cholera yesterday, and 11 deaths.” There was a severe cholera epidemic in the United States in 1849 and New York City with its dense population, was particularly hard hit. More information about the epidemic in New York can be found here: http://www.virtualny.cuny.edu/cholera/1849/cholera_1849_set.html

Primary Sources

Journal Entries Transcript

Letter from Susan Van Valen to her husband Alex Van Valen, June 13, 1849

Communications between persons on the East and West Coasts in 1850 was extremely slow, and very unreliable. It took months for letters to travel from New York or Boston all the way out to California via sea or land. It was common for people to actually send off several copies of each letter, to make sure that at least one reached its destination. In this letter, Susan confesses her loneliness and talks about her health and that of her two sets of twin toddler girls, whom Alex left behind for the California gold fields.

Susan Van Valen (1823–1853)

Born in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., Susan was married in 1844 to Alex Van Valen at the age of 20. A year later, the couple had their first set of twin girls. The couple had another set of twin girls in 1846, less than two years before Alex left New York for

a two-year trip to the California gold fields. Susan gave birth to two more girls in 1851 and 1853. She died less than three weeks after the birth of her sixth child, just a few days after her 30th birthday. It is not known when this portrait was created, but it appears to have been closer to her 30th birthday rather than before Alex left for California.



Day 199

Questions

Based on the careful examination of Van Valen's journal and supporting primary sources:

Q1. How many miles did Van Valen sail and how many days did his voyage last?

A1. Van Valen's journal entry states "Land Ho!" on August 8th but it is on August 9th, 1849, 199 days from his departure from New York on January 22nd that he steps ashore and heads directly to the Post Office to pick up and mail letters. He also states that he has traveled a total of 20,579 miles.

Q2. What was Van Valen's physical condition upon arrival in San Francisco?

A2. The first paragraph of Van Valen's January 18th letter to his brother states, ". . . it was a verry fatiguing journey for persons no better prepared than we were for the undertaking, having been confined for near 7 months on board of a Small Vessel, with little chance for exercise, and no manual labour to harden us." He also mentions that his company is so exhausted they skip making dinner and sleep right on the sand of the river's shore.

Q3. What were some of Van Valen's initial impressions of San Francisco and the gold fields?

A3. In his January 18th letter, Van Valen describes deep ravines and rocky ledges. When he awakens in the morning

he sets out to “. . . take a little walk around and see if I could see any Gold Lumps laying around loose, I would pick them up of course. the first thing that met my eye and allmost my head (as I came near stumbling in) was a deep hole, another and another and so on, till it had more of the appearance of a lot of opened graves in a grave-yard.” It seems he was not the first miner to expect to find gold lying around or near the surface.

Primary Sources

[Journal Entries Transcript](#)



Abandoned vessels in Yerba Buena Bay, San Francisco, 1853

In April 1850, a harbormaster's estimate counted 62,000 people from across the globe arriving in San Francisco by ship in the preceding 12 months. Hundreds of ships lay abandoned, their passengers and crews out searching for gold.

Alex Van Valen Letter to his Brother, 18 January 1850

Van Valen wrote a letter to his brother six months after his arrival in San Francisco. Much of it copies his daily journal entries, but Alex also shared many personal feelings and lifestyle details that for various reasons he did not want his wife or partners back in New York to know. For example, he described how hard things really were, and how naïve he had been upon arriving in California. He describes the mining machinery that his company used, along with the climate and topography of the mining region.

Handwritten Journal Entry

After 199 days and 20,579 watery miles aboard the bark *Hersilia* crowded with more than 90 passengers and crew bound from New York, Alex Van Valen and his fellow



travelers finally saw San Francisco Bay on 8 August 1849. The first thing he did after reaching the shore was visit the post office, where a large packet of letters from back East awaited. Then he began to write in his journal his first impressions of his destination.

Day 414

Questions

Q1. How much gold did Van Valen and his partners find and how long did it take them to gather this amount?

A1. Van Valen stopped keeping his journal after arriving in San Francisco, but described his experiences on land in a number of letters to his wife Susan, relatives, and business partners back home.

When students click “Journal” on day 414 of Van Valen’s Gold Rush Journey, they see a letter he wrote to Susan in March of 1850. In the letter he expresses his regrets at taken this adventure and in the very last two paragraphs he says his company has “. . . on hand 8 pounds, and we have done better than average.”

Q2. Gold was worth \$20.67 per ounce in 1849. How much was their total amount of gold worth in dollars?

Pound to ounce conversion (1 lb = 16 oz.)

A2. $\$20.67 \times 128 \text{ oz.} = \$ 2645.76$ for over a year’s worth of effort

Bonus Question

Q1. Over a year in the California gold rush, a company of gold miners collected 8 lbs. of gold, which was valued in 1849 at @ \$20.67/oz. The original company of prospectors numbered five, but two left the group in California and were not paid.

The two financiers back in New York City who had bankrolled the prospectors got \$500 from the gross take, against their original investment of \$2,500. They then got 25 percent of the remainder, leaving the remaining miners to split what was left over after these deductions.

How much was each miner able to take home for his year's labors? Each investor back in NY?

A1. Students will need to examine the miners' agreement carefully to extract the data needed to perform the calculation.

- $\$20.67 \times 128 \text{ oz.} = \$2,645.76$ (calculated value of 8 lbs of gold)
- Financiers' Expenses = \$500 (fourth paragraph)
- Financiers' Investment = \$2,500 (preamble and third paragraph)

The Financiers

$\$2,645.76$ Total Gold - \$500 Financier Expenses = $\$2,145.76$

$\$2,145.76 \times 25\% =$ Financiers' Share of $\$536.44$

The Financiers end up with a total of $\$1,036.44$

The Financiers' total investment was $\$2,500$

Total Investment @ $\$2,500$ - $\$1,036.44$ gold = A loss of $\$1,463.56$

Loss of $\$1,463.56 / 2$ Financiers = $\$738.78$ loss per Financier

The Miners

$\$1,609.32$ remains after Financiers' take their share

$\$1,609.32 / 3$ remaining miners = $\$536.44$ per miner

Note: According to the Measuring Worth Web site, in 1850 \$536 had about the same purchasing power as \$15,190.47 in the year 2009. (<http://www.measuringworth.com/calculators/ppowerus/result.php>)

This Web site can give students a sense of what things cost. It shows the cost of living in Philadelphia in 1851. (<http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/col51.html>)

Primary Sources

Journal Entries Transcript

The California Mutual Gold Mining Company, 1848

In December 1848, a group of five young men from New York formed a company to sail to California and seek their fortunes in the California gold rush. Two other New York speculators financed the expedition, which was to last for two summers, or digging seasons. They developed a contract for their company that laid out the terms and duties of the company members. The financiers invested \$2,500.00, in exchange for 25% of any future revenues from the gold fields.

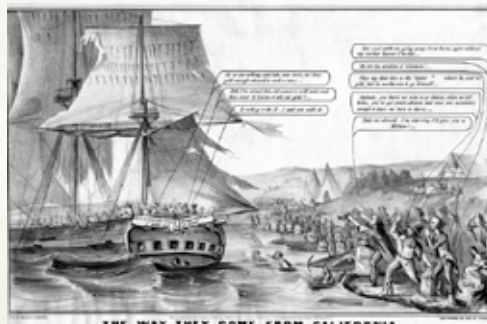
Map of the Gold Regions in California, 1850

In the back of his 1849/50 gold rush journal, Alex Van Valen drew a map of the California gold fields. [FYI: He sent one to Susan back in N.Y. as well] San Francisco Bay is in the lower left; the original find by James Marshall at Sutter's Mill is marked with an asterisk. Van Valen's company worked mostly along the "Meckelemus" (Mokelumne) River in the middle of the map, figuring it was as productive as any of the other mining areas.



The Way They Come from California

N. Currier, of the famous printmakers Currier & Ives, produced this 1849 fanciful print of a big ship laden with huge quantities of gold and passengers returning from the California gold rush to New York to cash in their loot. Passage



aboard the ship was "10,000 ounces of gold not found." One of the prospectors left behind on the shore is offering one million ounces for his return passage, saying he is starving.

Student Writing Assignment

Question

Q1. What happened to Alexander and Susan Van Valen?

A1. Based on their reading of Alexander Van Valen's journal and carefully examining the supporting objects and documents, students will put themselves in the place of Alex Van Valen and create one final entry explaining his reason for either staying on in California to continue mining or returning to his family New York.



Students should be encouraged to go back and review their own student worksheets, Van Valen's writings, or other evidence as needed, and to match the type and amount of detail Van Valen includes in most of his writing.



Note: Teachers can use [What Smithsonian Curators Learned About The Van Valens](#) to get a sense of what is known about the fate of Van Valen and his family.



APPENDIX A- Van Valen's Gold Rush Journey Instruction Sheet



1. Open the Van Valen's Gold Rush Journey Web site and click "Enter" to go to the Van Valen's Gold Rush Journey introduction page.



2. Download the student worksheet. Then click the arrow next to the ship to proceed.



3. Click on “Questions” to review the historical questions you need to answer.
4. Click on “Journal” to read Van Valen’s actual journal entry for that day. You should note any important information on your student worksheet.
5. Click on each of the “Supporting Primary Sources” at the bottom of the screen to discover information that will help answer the questions. Use the zoom and drag functions to get closer views of the supporting primary resources.
6. Open the student worksheet pdf you downloaded and type your answers into the empty blocks. You will turn in this document as your final project. Save the file as “yourlastname_goldrush.pdf” to identify the project as your own.



APPENDIX B- Gold Rush Rubric


Category	Outstanding!	Good Job	Good Effort	Revise/Redo
Answering the Questions	All questions are answered in full and use complete sentences	Most of the questions are answered in full and use complete sentences	Some of the questions are answered in full and use complete sentences	None of the questions are answered in full and use complete sentences
Primary Source Evidence References	All responses include relevant quotes or facts from primary sources	Most responses include relevant quotes or facts from primary sources	Some responses include relevant quotes or facts from primary sources	No responses include relevant quotes or facts from primary sources
Student Writing Assignment, "What happened to Alexander and Susan Van Valen?"	Response includes all of the following: references to people, objects, events, or feelings expressed in Van Valen entries, employs style and tone of Van Valen journal entries, demonstrates creativity and imagination	Response includes most of the following: references to people, objects, events, or feelings expressed in Van Valen entries, employs style and tone of Van Valen journal entries, demonstrates creativity and imagination	Response includes some of the following: references to people, objects, events, or feelings expressed in Van Valen entries, employs style and tone of Van Valen journal entries, demonstrates creativity and imagination	Response includes none of the following: references to people, objects, events, or feelings expressed in Van Valen entries, employs style and tone of Van Valen journal entries, demonstrates creativity and imagination
Grammar & Spelling <i>(excluding direct quotes from Van Valen Journal)</i>	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content



APPENDIX C-

What Smithsonian Curators Learned about the Van Valens


Alexander (1819–1869) and Susan (1823–1853) Van Valen

A large map of the Pacific Ocean and the California coast, showing a dashed line representing the journey route from the East Coast to the West Coast.

Alexander Van Valen was born on 15 June 1819 in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He and his wife Susan Maria were married on 16 April 1844. Twelve months later they had twin daughters Catherine and Sarah on 3 June 1845. On 26 August 1846, Susan had a second pair of twin daughters named Hester and Louise.

Gold was discovered in California in January 1848, and Van Valen decided to join the gold rush. He and four friends formed a partnership, the California Gold Mining Company, financed by \$2,500 from two New Yorkers. Van Valen was Treasurer and Correspondent for the company, which committed to spending “two Mining or Summer Seasons” in California. In exchange for bankrolling the venture, the two New York financiers were to receive 25 percent of any profits. Anyone deserting the company before returning to N.Y. was subject to a \$500 fine or forfeiture of any interest in the company proceeds.

Leaving his 25-year-old wife Susan and two sets of young twins (just three and two years old respectively) behind in New York City, Alexander and his four partners booked \$150 passages to California on the three-masted bark *Hersilia*. Built in Duxbury, Mass. in 1840, *Hersilia* was 180 feet long and weighed 309 tons. Her captain for the voyage was Alexander Baxter of Duxbury, also a part owner of the bark. On 22 January 1849, *Hersilia* cleared New York for California with a crew of ten and 85 passengers. Van Valen kept a detailed



journal of his voyage, and as corporate correspondent, he sent frequent letters to his backers, his wife, and his brother.

Hersilia arrived in San Francisco 199 days later on 8 August 1849. Van Valen's last journal entry was on 15 August 1849, just a week after arriving. However, his letters to New York continued through 18 August 1850, providing details of his life and work in the California gold fields.

Van Valen and his partners began mining along the Mokelumne River, a few miles south of John Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California, where the original James Marshall nugget had been found in a tailrace. They stayed in the southern mines area through 1849 and 1850, presuming it to be as good as any other for finding gold. By August 1850, two of the five partners had left the company for other enterprises, at which point the amount of gold collected by the firm was slightly over 8 lbs. At the time, gold was officially valued at \$20.67/oz., so eight pounds yielded a total of \$2,645.76. Subtracting \$500 off the top for expenses and 25 percent of the remainder for the capitalists netted \$2,145.76, of which each of the three miners received 1/3, or \$536.44 for his labors. The heirs of any partners who died were entitled to a little extra, but none of the three are known to have died before payoff, so this does not apply. Relative to his share, Alex had sent two small amounts of gold (coin) to Susan while he was away. Susan sewed for a living, and occasionally received advance money from the two financiers of her husband's company. Generally, she was able to keep between \$25 and \$75 in her savings account.

In his last letter home to his wife, dated 18 August 1850, Van Valen mentions that he is in the eleventh hour of his venture, and that he plans to leave as soon as it is healthy at the Panama Isthmus. However, it is not yet known exactly when or by what means he returned to New York.

Nevertheless, he must have returned around or slightly before the end of December 1850, for his fifth daughter was born nine months later on 30 September 1851. A final child—a sixth daughter—was born to the Van Valens on 8



April 1853. There may have been some birth complications, because Susan Van Valen died 18 days later on 26 April, just 17 days after her 30th birthday. According to her obituary in the *New York Times* for 27 April 1853, she was buried in her hometown of Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Information for Alex's life and career after his return from the California gold rush is being researched at this writing, but it is known that he was in Rochester, N.Y. at the time of the 1860 census and died on 22 November 1869 at the age of 50.

The work continues.

Paul F. Johnston, Curator

National Museum of American History



Paul F. Johnston at the helm of the nuclear ship *Savannah*



APPENDIX D- Printable List of Questions from the Activity

Day 1: _____

1. Where was Van Valen headed and what was his purpose?
2. Who were the members of the "Company" traveling with Van Valen?
3. How long after the discovery of gold at John Sutter's Coloma, California, sawmill did Van Valen depart on his journey?
4. What were the main sources of information Van Valen might have used to decide to take this journey and what he should bring?

Day 20: _____

1. How many crew and how many passengers were aboard the *Hersilia*?
2. How did the conditions on board compare with those promised on the clipper cards?
3. Do you think Van Valen sailed on a clipper ship? Which pieces of evidence support your theory?

Day 121: _____

1. What news does Van Valen hear from the gold mines and how does this affect his "Gold Fever?"
2. What was Van Valen's impression of the prices for supplies and labor in Valparaiso?

Day 131: _____

1. What was life like for sailors and ship passengers at sea in the 1840s? List at least two words or phrases from each primary source that support your conclusion.

Day 142: _____

1. How long had Van Valen been away when Susan's letter was written?
2. How did Susan and Van Valen feel about being separated?
3. What is Susan doing to help with the family's expenses while Van Valen is away?
4. What is happening in New York City that makes Susan plan to go to Poughkeepsie (upstate New York)?

Day 199: _____

1. How many miles did Van Valen sail and how many days did his voyage last?
2. What was Van Valen's physical condition upon arrival in San Francisco?
3. What were some of Van Valen's initial impressions of San Francisco and the gold fields?

Day 414: _____

1. How much gold did Van Valen and his partners find and how long did it take them to gather this amount?
2. Gold was worth \$20.67 per ounce in 1849. How much was their total amount of gold worth in dollars?

Pound to ounce conversion (1 lb = 16 oz.)

Bonus Question: Over a year in the California gold rush, a company of gold miners collected

8 lbs. of gold, which was valued in 1849 at @ \$20.67/oz. The original company of prospectors numbered five, but two left the group in California and were not paid.

The two financiers back in New York City who had bankrolled the prospectors got \$500 from the gross take, against their original investment of \$2,500. They then got 25 percent of the remainder, leaving the remaining miners to split what was left over after these deductions.

How much was each miner able to take home for his year's labors? Each investor back in NY?

Student Writing Assignment: _____

1. What happened to Alexander and Susan Van Valen?