



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2024 Volume I: Landscape, Art, and Ecology

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## **Extraction of Profits in the Gold Rush: Chinese Miners and California Ecology**

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This unit is an attempt to tell a history which occurred at the intersection of race, class, and industrial scale extractive economics. The major difficulty in constructing this unit is to weave together the narratives of white and Chinese immigrants to California to gain wealth and prosperity and the counter narrative of environmental destruction on an Industrial scale. Chinese immigrants are commonly included in history textbooks in their role building the Transcontinental Railroad. The part of the historical narrative that is usually left out is the broader story of Chinese participation in mining across the western USA both before and after their participation in the building of the railroads. The Gold Rush tends to be framed as a time of heroic, individual, white, male subjugation of the land in a quest for personal fortune, however this unit argues that Chinese men ought to be part of this foundational myth, and that the myth itself needs to be revised to include the corporations which organized large scale mining, government laws which favored some groups over others, and the rapid adoption of industrial technology to exploit and destroy the landscape.

(Developed for U.S. History Ethnic Studies, grades 11-12; recommended for U.S. History, grades 7-12, and Social Studies, grades 3-5)

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