

Colorful Colorado:

The People, The History, The Stories



Lesson 2



Lesson 2

The History

Grades 3rd - 5th

Summary:

Students will explore Colorado's past by building a timeline of important events, engaging in a hands-on Gold Rush activity, and learning about Colorado's two state songs. Through music, history, and interactive activities, students will connect how Colorado's history shaped the state we know today.

Essential Question:

How did events like the Gold Rush and other key moments shape the growth and identity of Colorado?

Materials Needed:

- Scissors
- Glue
- Computers for research
- Speakers
- Plastic tubs
- Sand or rice
- Rocks or beads
- Paper plates or cups

Repertoire Selection:

- William Tell Overture - Gioachino Rossini
- Where the Columbines Grow - Dr. Arthur John Fynn
- Rocky Mountain High - John Denver

Cross-Curricular Collaborations:

Social Studies

Literacy

Music



Colorado Timeline

Activity Description:

Students will learn about Colorado history through an interactive timeline activity.

Activity Preparation:

- Students will work in groups of 2-3 that can be pre-selected according to learning levels.
- Provide an 11" x 17" piece of paper to each group.
- Each group will need a pair of scissors, a glue stick or tape.
- Students will need access to a computer for researching dates.

Directions:

- Students will cut out each bullet point sentence.
- Have students draw a line across the middle of their paper.
- Students will then place each event on the timeline according to what order they think happened.
- Students will then begin researching each event to determine what year it occurred in history.
- When they find the date, they will write the date on the back of the slip of paper.
- When they have finished discovering each date, they will then create a timeline on their piece of paper by first writing each date chronologically starting with the earliest year and then gluing or taping the event next to the date.

Discussion Questions:

- What is a timeline?
- How are they helpful in understanding history?

TEACHER ANSWER SHEET

- 500 - The Anasazi culture develops in the region.
- 1541 - Spanish explorer Francisco de Coronado visits Colorado.
- 1682 - French explorer Robert de La Salle claims the land for France.
- 1803 - The United States buys eastern Colorado from France as part of the Louisiana Purchase.
- 1806 - American explorer Zebulon Pike follows the Arkansas River through Colorado.
- 1821 - The Santa Fe Trail opens.
- 1833 - Fort Bent is established as the first permanent settlement.
- 1848 - The United States acquires western Colorado from Mexico after the Mexican-American War.
- 1858 - Gold is discovered.
- 1858 - The city of Denver is established.
- 1861 - The Colorado Territory is formed by the U.S. Congress.
- 1864 - The Sand Creek Massacre occurs and many Cheyenne and Arapaho are killed.
- 1867 - Denver City becomes the capital of the territory.
- 1870 - The Denver Pacific Railway reaches Denver.
- 1876 - Colorado is admitted to the Union as the 38th state.
- 1894 - Colorado becomes the second state to give women the right to vote

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The Colorado Gold Rush

- Gold was first discovered in 1858 in what is now Confluence Park in Denver along the South Platte River and Cherry Creek.
- The slogan “Pikes Peak or Bust” was created not because gold was first found on or near Pikes Peak, but because it was a well known location.
- It is believed that almost 100,000 people rushed to Colorado between 1858 and 1860.



- The prospectors were called “Fifty-Niners” in reference to 1859, the peak year of the rush.
- Some towns like Central City and Black Hawk were built really fast to support the miners.
- Most of the gold seekers didn’t find gold or much of it. About $\frac{1}{3}$ of the people who came to Colorado left within a year but many stayed to do other jobs.
- As many settlers arrived, Native Americans were pushed off their land. The U.S. government made unfair treaties and broke promises forcing them to move to reservations.
- Mining operations damaged land and rivers and affected animals in the areas making it even harder for the Native Americans to hunt, find food and grow crops.
- You can still find gold in Colorado today! Visit some of the old mines to pan for gold and see what mines looked like.

Explore the Mines

The Argo Mill and Tunnel - Idaho Springs

Phoenix Gold Mine - Idaho Springs

The Mollie Kathleen Gold Mine - Cripple Creek

Hidee Gold Mine - Central City

Western Museum of Mining & Industry - Colorado Springs

Arapahoe Bar Gold Panning Park - Wheat Ridge

Other Resources:

Watch the short videos in this article to see gold panning in action:

The Prospect of Prospecting

9News Story



Pikes Peak or Bust!

Activity Description:

Students will learn about the Colorado Gold Rush and how it impacted settlement, transportation, the environment, and Native communities. They will engage in a role-playing activity to simulate life during the rush.

Activity Preparation:

- 3-5 plastic tubs
- A handful of painted gold rocks (small pebbles) or yellow beads
- Sand or rice for each tub
- Cups, paper plates or spoons
- Fill each plastic tub with sand or rice and hide some of the “gold” in each tub. **There does not need to be an even distribution of gold between the tubs and some can even contain no gold.**

Music to Play: William Tell Overture - Gioachino Rossini

Directions:

- Read about the Colorado Gold rush using the Quick Facts page.
- Have students locate and label the following on their Colorado Map:
 - Pikes Peak
 - Central City
 - Idaho Springs
- Divide students into groups of 3-5, based on how many plastic tubs you have.
- Explain that each group will have 30 seconds to try and find gold using whatever utensil they chose. (Most students will not find any gold!) Begin playing William Tell Overture and
- Once every group has had a chance to mine for gold, have them count what they found.
- Use the discussion questions to talk about the realities of the gold rush.

Discussion Questions:

- How did it feel to search for gold?
- Was it fair?
- What do you think people did once they realized they were not going to find enough gold?
 - Discuss how most people left but others stayed to take on other jobs like shopkeepers, miners, teachers, etc.



Active Listening: State Songs

Activity Description:

Students will compare and contrast the two official state songs of Colorado.

Activity Preparation:

- Student packet

Music to Play:

Rocky Mountain High - John Denver and Where the Columbines Grow - Dr. Arthur John Fynn

Directions:

- Read students the quick facts of each song.
- Have students listen to both Rocky Mountain High and Where the Columbines Grow. If needed, have them listen a couple of times.
- Students can write words for each song that include similar words, scenery, tempo, sound, etc.
- Have them fill out the two questions at the bottom of the page.
- Bonus: Have students learn the chorus of one or both songs!

Rocky Mountain High Facts:

- Written by John Denver and Mike Taylor and recorded in August 1972.
- Inspired by a meteor shower he witnessed while camping near Aspen.
- It took 9 months for the song to be completed.
- It was adopted as Colorado's second state song in March of 2007.

Where the Columbines Grow Facts:

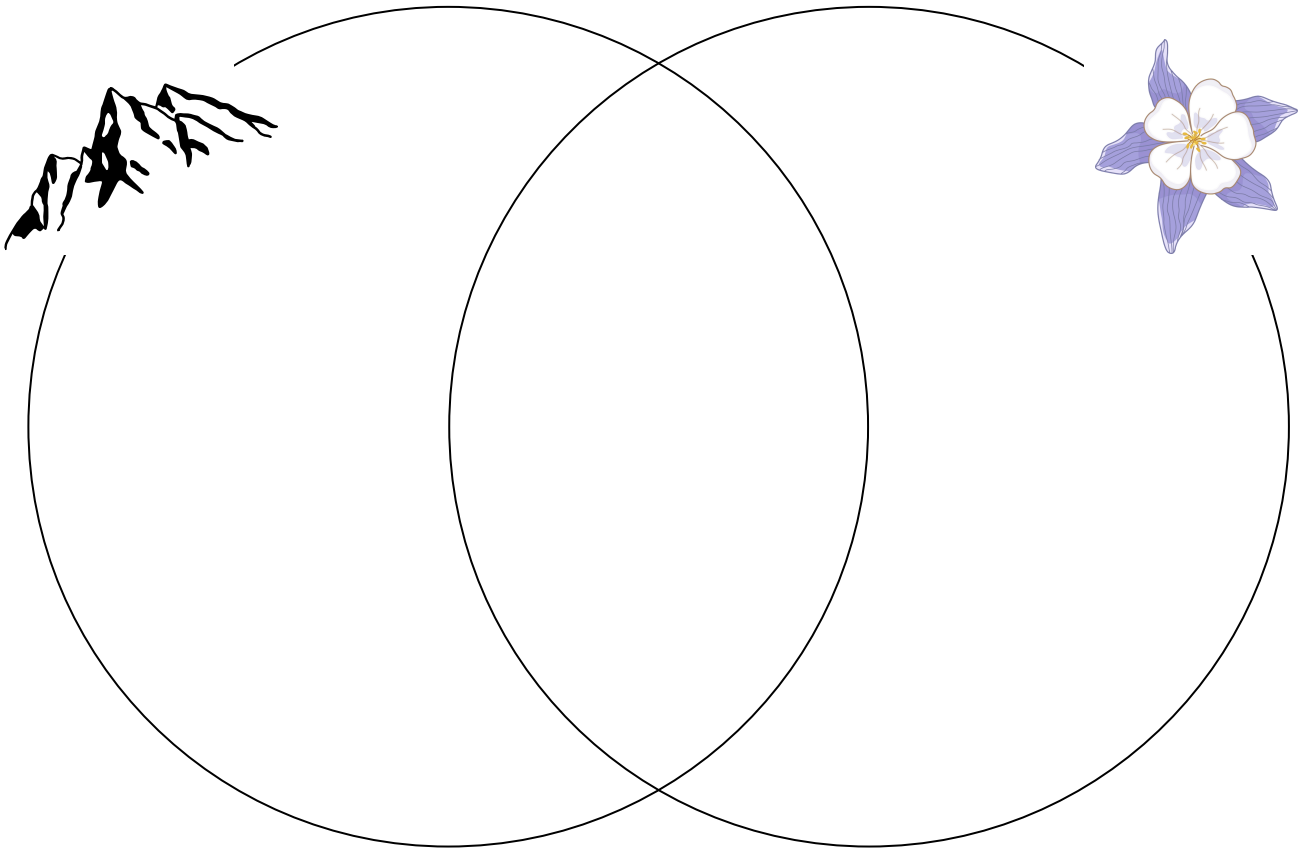
- Written and composed by Dr. Arthur John Fynn in 1911.
- Inspired by seeing a meadow of columbines while traveling through Schinzel Flats in 1896.
- Adopted as the state song on May 8, 1915.
- There was criticism that the song didn't mention Colorado, so a 4th verse was added in 1921, though it is rarely sung.

Exit Ticket Question:

What is your favorite thing about Colorado and why?

Compare and Contrast

Use the Venn diagram below to compare and contrast our two state songs. Then, write about the similarities and differences. (Think about lyrics, sound, tempo, etc.)



The two songs are similar because

They are different because



State Symbols Scavenger Hunt

See how many state symbols you can find and learn about!

Nickname	
Population (2024)	
Capital	
State Songs	
State Bird	
State Flower	
Slogan	
Amphibian	
Cactus	
Fish	
Insect	
Mammal	
Mushroom (est. 2025)	
Pet	
Reptile	
Tree	
Folk Dance	
Fossil	
Gemstone	
Mineral	
Rock	
Summer Sport	
Winter Sport	