

Gold Fever

by Jo McCready



Book Summary

A town booms when something happens that brings a lot of people and work into the area. A town can go bust when disaster strikes or when resources run out. This book explores the cycle of boom and bust associated with the Klondike gold rush.

Features of the Book

- Historical information and photographs
- Map
- Proper nouns including the names of people, places, and ships
- Numbers expressed in a variety of ways – 1890s, six months, \$500,000, three kilometres, eight thousand, 1800, 60 000, Dredge Number 4
- Specialised vocabulary – gold rush, boom, bust, sluice, pan, claim jumper, prospectors, grubstaker, pay dirt, stake a claim, dredge, tailings

Purpose

Gold Fever can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills and understandings:

- S** interpreting information from historical photographs;
- S** recognising cause-and-effect relationships;
- S** exploring antonyms;
- S** retrieving and classifying the information in a text;
- S** writing a narrative procedure;
- S** recognising the effect that resources, industry, and tourism can have on a community.

Investigation Tools

- Step-by-step – Gold Panning, pages 10–11
- What's the Background? – Fortune Seekers, pages 14–15
- Digging Deeper – Mining Words, pages 18–19
- Making Connections – Boom Towns in Canada, page 22
- Looking Closer – Dredges, page 25
- Weighing Both Sides – The Cost of Mining, pages 28–29

The Guided Reading Lesson

- S** Interpreting information from historical photographs
- S** Recognising cause-and-effect relationships
- S** Recognising the effect that resources, industry, and tourism can have on a community

You may need to spend extra time familiarising your students with the concepts and specialised vocabulary in this book. This lesson could be taken over two or more days.

Introducing the text

Discuss the photographs on the cover of the book and read the title together.

– *When do you think this book is set? Why do you think that?*

Discuss the clues in the photographs that show the time period in which the story was set, for example, the colour, the quality of the images, clothing styles, buildings, and tools.

Read the blurb on the back of the book aloud together. Write “Boom” on the board.

– *What does “boom” mean?*

Ask a student to find “boom” in the dictionary. Read the definitions aloud and discuss which best fits this book. Write it on the board. Discuss why a town might boom.

Ask the students if they know the opposite of “boom”. If so, write “bust” on the board and repeat the activity above. If not, ask the students to look out for this as they read.

Reading and discussing the text

Read page 3 together. Start a timeline by writing “1896 – gold discovered at Bonanza Creek” at the top of a chart. Explain that a timeline is a good way to show how things change and that you will be asking the students to add events to the timeline. As they read, they will need to think about what happens at key times and how this affects the town.

Ask the students to read pages 4 and 5 independently.

- *Why did Joe Ladue shift his sawmill up the river?*
- *How would this benefit him and how would it benefit the miners?*
- *What else happened in 1896?*

Add “The first house in Dawson was finished” to the timeline.

Explain that sometimes the year of an event will not be in the text but that it can be calculated using other dates and descriptions, for example, we know that by 1897 there were more than five hundred houses in Dawson. Add this to the timeline.

Add 1898 and 1899 to the timeline. The students can now read to the end of chapter 4. While they are reading, the students can write events for these dates on sticky notes. When they have finished reading ask them to add their events to the timeline.

- *How did the arrival of the Excelsior and the Portland contribute to Dawson’s boom?*
- *What effect would shops, hotels, and restaurants have on people’s day-to-day life in Dawson?*
- *What were the advantages of arriving in Dawson early?*
- *What were the advantages of coming later?*

Read the chapter heading on page 23 together. Write “Bust” on the board. If the students don’t know what bust means, ask a student to find it in the dictionary, read the definitions aloud, and discuss which best fits this book. Write it on the board. Discuss possible reasons for Dawson’s bust, such as running out of gold, a health epidemic, or gold being found elsewhere.

- *What do you think Dawson might be like now?*

The students can now read the rest of the book independently. When they have finished reading, ask them to add other key events to the timeline.

Revisiting the Text

The activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson, during later reading sessions as mini-lessons, or as independent activities.

S Exploring antonyms

Ask the students to think about words with opposite meanings (antonyms). Make a T-chart with “Word” at the top of one column and “Antonym” at the top of the other. Write “boom” in one column.

- *Where on this chart would we write bust?*

Write it in the appropriate column. Ask the students to find the word “started” on page 3.

- *What is an antonym for “started”?*

Have a student write “started” and “finished” on the chart. Encourage the students to find other words in the story for which they know antonyms. Add these to the chart.


S Retrieving and classifying the information in a text

Ask the students to examine the diagrams on pages 10–11 and page 25.

- *How do the diagrams help us to understand these processes?*
- *What happens first? What happens next?*
- *How are the processes of panning and dredging for gold similar? How are they different?*

Ask the students to explain one of the processes in their own words using words to indicate order of events, such as “first”, “next”, and “then”.

S Writing a narrative procedure

 The students can complete the blackline master on page 73 to write a procedure for finding gold based on information in the text.

S Recognising the effect that resources, industry, and tourism can have on a community

Ask the students to look through the text and find the events recorded on the timeline. Discuss the effects that each event had on the Klondike area. Add these details to the timeline. Identify which event caused the bust and write “Bust” next to it on the timeline.