Travel back in time to the last days of the 1840s... Mexico has just ceded the land of California to the United States, but it is still a territory and not quite yet our “Golden State.” Across the land, people are becoming excited by thoughts of gold but not the kind that is the color of the many poppies and trout around them. Imagine one area near the Feather River, shared by Maidu Indians, Californians, Mexicans, and a few Americans. Living among them in a cedar wood cottage, you might lie on duck feathers at night and listen to the howling of coyotes or the noises of hoot owls and squirrels above your head. You might smell the scent of cedar and spruce cones. And through the loose weave of the bark ceiling, you too might wish on shining stars...
Rose wished that her father would return home. As she closed her eyes to sleep, she thought again of a story she had heard from him about how Feather River got its name. The name came from the area's legend of the golden doves—beautiful birds that had gleaming golden feathers when they flew free. But the doves had been trapped by greedy hunters, and as the wonderful creatures lost their freedom, their feathers turned white, making them look like ordinary pigeons. This old yarn certainly has a moral—perhaps what is truly gold cannot be held.

But the story's message was lost on Rose's father, Jackson, and many others in 1849. Soon after the cry “Gold!” left the throat of James Marshall at Sutter's Mill on the American River, a great rush to find gold in California started. Jackson was building a small mill along the Feather River for grinding his crop into flour. He needed a deeper channel, called a millrace, so water could race down to better power the wheel. One day as he was digging, he spied traces of shining metal. Could it possibly be gold? Jackson scooped up some dirt from the channel in a tin saucer. He began to “cradle” the saucer, washing the sludge away. What remained was glittering yellow! Jackson knew that real gold would not break when it was pounded into a thin sheet like paper and that it would not tarnish when dipped in lye, so he quickly performed these tests. The metal did not crack or tarnish. Yes, he had discovered real gold! That gold was not enough to make him rich, but it was enough to infect him with Gold Fever—a “disease” that an excited prospector once described as an urge to do the fastest dances, to yell bravos from mountain tops, and to dream of having only the best of times.

Soon Jackson exchanged plows for picks and millstones for heavy packs. He had decided to become a miner, an Argonaut. The miners called themselves Argonauts after the sailors in a Greek myth who went on a voyage in search of a flying ram with golden wool. Like those heroes, the miners of '49 raced for gold. They staked claims in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and established camps with such colorful names as Skunk Gulch, Hen-Roost Camp, Red Buffaloes, Rodeos Delight, Rattlesnake Bar, Quack Hill, Mule Town, and Mud Town.
Jackson had left Rose in the care of her two aunts, Sylvia and Ginger. Everyone called her aunts nurses because they grew herbs, tended wilted vines, nursed sick birds, and helped bring babies into the world. Rose loved these wise and gentle women. With them, she planted poppies and roses on her mother's grave. The aunts taught their niece to fish, embroider, grow grapes and lettuce, and tend goats. When Jackson sent some gold home to Rose, the aunts suggested that she use it to buy young orange trees so there would be a new crop on the farm.

Once a week, a neighbor boy named Cesar brought mail from the village. Rose always raced to meet him as he pranced up on a frisky pony. Cesar thought, and hoped, that maybe Rose had a crush on him. Neither of them could predict yet that years later, Cesar would ask Rose to marry him.

At first after Jackson left, letters came often from Hen-Roost Camp. Rose read with anticipation her father's descriptions of his life away from her. "We miners wear wide-brimmed hats for protection from the sun and leather boots for climbing," he wrote. "We all have colorful bandanas to wipe our brows and to swat mosquitoes, suspenders to hold up our pants, and flannel shirts to absorb our sweat. When holes appear in our pants' knees or shirts' elbows, we thread needles by firelight and sew on bright red patches. Sometimes in the evening, two gents strum banjos and the rest of us dance. But we miss the voices and gentle ways of ladies. Once a fellow found a fancy bonnet with ribbons and laces. He raised it on a pole and we danced like circling, clomping, wild horses around it. The Argonauts with the most red patches dance the steps of the absent ladies, and we swing one another around. We trounce and dodge and lunge and then laugh at ourselves. Sometimes we sing as loudly as we can about being desperadoes in search of glittering gold."

As Rose read and reread her father's letters, she was glad that he was happy. Still, she longed for him to return home. She began embroidering a cape decorated with golden poppies, golden trout, and golden doves for her father. She hoped that when he saw these reminders of the Feather River Valley, he would return. But because his letters stopped arriving after several months, Rose did not know where to send the cape when she had completed it.
Prospectors traveled to California from everywhere. Easterners boarded ships in Atlantic ports for Panama and Nicaragua and then crossed the jungles by mule before sailing up the Pacific to California. Others from U.S. states and territories rambled overland in wagons and hoped to stake claims. People in Mexico and South America heard rumors about a lake of gold in which golden ducks swam and golden rocks lined the beach. They scurried north to find it. And all of these strangers had to buy clothes, supplies, and food. Rose's farm prospered and grew.

By the time Rose was twenty, the Gold Rush was over, but still her father had not returned home. Rose had become an intelligent, independent, graceful, and wealthy young woman. But deep inside, she always felt a little sad. She realized that she must discover what had happened to her father, but she feared the worst. Stories of greedy miners who had driven newcomers from the mountains, stolen their claims, and even made them slaves had reached the Feather River Valley. Jackson himself might have been a victim! She decided that she must travel to San Francisco to find out.

At Yerba Cova Bay in San Francisco, Rose found old miners telling tales and singing songs about their working days. One pudgy fellow named Remorses knew Jackson. "He's a pocket hunter now," Remorses informed Rose.

"A pocket hunter?"

"Yes, that's a fellow who wanders from ghost town to ghost town looking for small pockets of gold in land claims that people have given up on and left. There's no telling where you might find him. He paces one mountain after another." Realizing that it would be impossible to find her father, Rose returned home with a heavy heart.

Sometimes at night back home, Rose would walk as if in a trance from her new cabin to the old cedarwood cabin where she had grown up. There
she could finally fall asleep under the stars that were winking through the ceiling. She imagined each star was a miner cured of Gold Fever and endless searching. One was her father watching over her.

Jackson finally returned by chance a week before her marriage to Cesar. "Remorses told me about your visit," Jackson explained in an unsteady voice as his hands shook. "I thought of you every day, Rose. But after the first year, my luck ran out. It was as if I was ill and could not think clearly. I know now that I did not always make good choices, and I am sorry." Rose could only accept him then and not judge him for the choices he had made. She knew she couldn't understand all the hardships he had suffered or the thoughts he had about his life.

Jackson stayed for the wedding ceremony. Rose finally gave her father the cape with the doves, trout, and poppies, but she could tell by his restlessness that he would wear it to return to the mountains. For better or worse, he had become a pocket hunter, a drifter.

The Gold Rush had separated father and daughter and had wounded their lives, but it had also given them dreams. Rose believed that her remembrance cape would bring her father back to her from time to time, and so she felt at peace. For Rose, that was a feeling worth more than gold.
**Create a Time Line**

“Rose’s Gold” is historical fiction. The author created her own characters and plot and set them against a background of true events. Use what you already know about the California Gold Rush and create a time line for the events in “Rose’s Gold” that parallels this time line of real events in the history of the California Gold Rush.

- **1848** Marshall discovers gold at Sutter’s Mill.
- **1849** 90,000 miners come to California looking for gold.
- **1850** California becomes a state.
- **1851** Gold is found in Greenhorn Creek, Kern County.
- **1852** Annual gold production reaches $81 million.
- **1853** Large deposits of gold are found at Columbia in Tuolomne County.
- **1854** A 195-pound mass of gold is found at Carson Hill in Calaveras County.
- **1857** Sam Brannan opens a new bank in San Francisco.
- **1864** Surface deposits are exhausted. The Gold Rush is over.
- **1859** Famous 54-pound Willard nugget is found in Butte County.

**Name the Camp**

In “Rose’s Gold,” the prospectors gave their mining camps fun, colorful names like Skunk Gulch and Hen-Roost Camp. Imagine yourself staking a claim during the Gold Rush. What would you name your camp and why? Try to think of two or three names. Share your list with a partner.

**Make a Remembrance**

Rose embroidered a cape for her father that was decorated with pleasant reminders of the past. If you were to make a remembrance for someone in your life, what would you make? Who would you make it for? Use colored pencils or markers to draw a remembrance you’d like to give someone.