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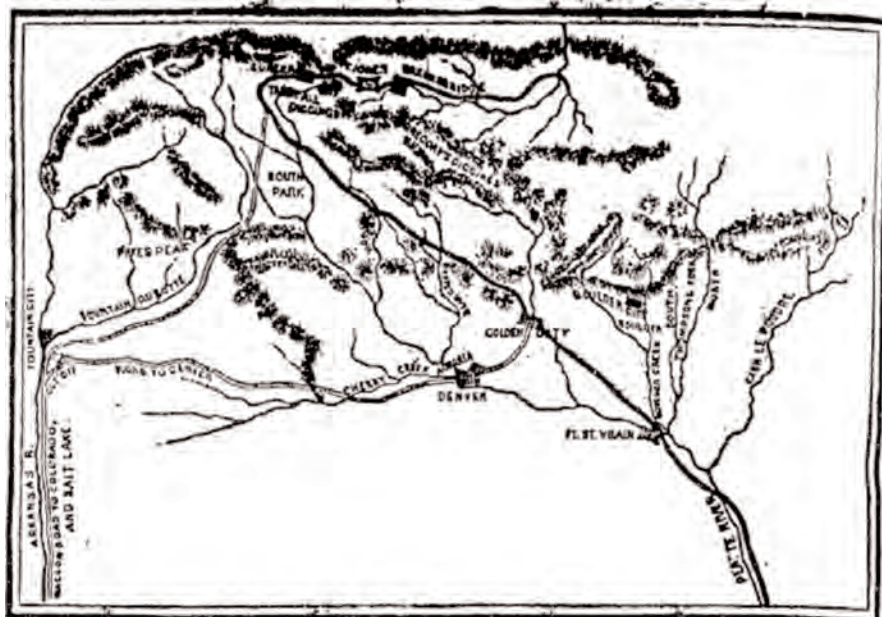
I WITNESS

HARD

GOLD

THE COLORADO  
GOLD RUSH  
OF 1859

A TALE OF  
THE OLD WEST





### **The Story**

Early Wittcomb's family needs a miracle. The farm has been hit by drought and bad times. Savings are gone, mortgage payments are due, and the bank threatens to grab the farm.

Uncle Jesse thinks he has the solution - head west and dig for gold in the Rocky Mountains. Early, too, is caught up in the gold fever but the journey costs money-money the family doesn't have. Then one night after being accused of robbery, Jesse disappears. Did he really rob the bank? Early doesn't know what to believe.

When Jesse sends a letter that he has found gold but his life is in danger, Early knows he must do whatever it takes to find him, even if it means running away and joining a wagon train with an unusual family. The journey is perilous and full of hardships, but fortunately Early has found a friend in Lizzy Bunderly, with her curiosity, fire-red hair, and ability to use a pepperbox pistol. A good thing, too - because the hardest part of Early's journey awaits him deep in the mountains, at a place called Gold Hill.

### **The Author**

Avi, the author of *Hard Gold*, is the gold standard as a writer. His writing career spans many years and many genres with great success. Have you met some of Avi's characters? Perhaps you know Poppy and her friends from Dimwood Forest, or you traveled to England in 1377 with Crispin, or maybe you sailed on the Seahawk with Charlotte Doyle. However you have experienced Avi's writing, you will recognize his rich characters, his fascinating plots, and the stories that stick in your mind far longer than the last page.

Read more about Avi and his books at: <http://www.avi-writer.com/>

### **Organization**

This guide is organized in the following way...

Chapters 1-6	How it Began
Chapters 7-10	Leaving Home
Chapters 14-17	Into the Nebraska Territory
Chapters 18-20	Cherry Creek!
Chapters 21-25	Into the Mountains and Beyond

Writing Prompts, Quotes that Tell the Story, More about 1859



## Chapters 1-6 How It Began...

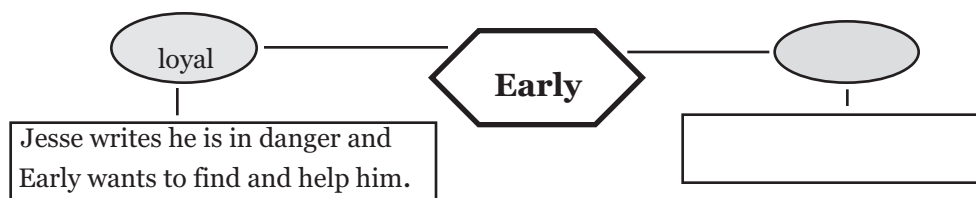
### Words of the Times

gig	n.	a light, two-wheeled one-horse carriage. (Picture on page 3)
obliged	v.	pleased (as in pleased to meet you)
carpetbag	n.	a traveling bag made of carpet fabric that was used chiefly in the United States during the 19th century
blacklegs	n.	one who cheats at cards; a cardsharp
rig	n.	a carriage, buckboard, sulky, or wagon together with the horse or horses that draw it
frock coat	n.	a man's close-fitting, knee-length coat, single-breasted or double-breasted and with a vent in the back
dither	v.	to waver in your thinking; to act indecisively

### Panning for Gold in the Story

1. Explain how these words set the tone as Avi's story begins: drought, panic, foreclosure, judge, railroad.
2. \$2000 was a lot of money. Should Pa have sold the farm? Why didn't he?
3. How did newspapers help create gold fever? Do "printed words" lie?
4. How did Judge Fuslin try to blackmail Pa? What were Pa's options?
5. Do the members of the family believe in Jesse? Do you?
6. Why did Jesse decide to "go see the elephant"? How will this affect the family?
7. What do Jesse's letters tell about his life since he left? What do they leave out?
8. What obstacles would Early face if he were to try to join Jesse?
9. Mr. Bunderly talks by "planting words all around his thoughts, rather than weeding them." Choose a good example of Mr. Bunderly's style of talking.
10. Describe the deal that Early makes with Mr. Bunderly? Is it a fair deal?
11. What "raw trials" could be ahead for Early?"

A **character map** will help us study Early (or any character) as this story unfolds. Describe Early with a trait and then give an example from the story that shows this trait. One example is done for you.



## Chapter 7 -10 Leaving Home...

### Words of the Times

jiminy	interj. exclamation of surprise
bunged-up	adj. closed as if with a cork or stopper
wretched	adj. miserable
prairie schooners	n. a type of covered wagon, similar to but smaller than the Conestoga wagon, used by pioneers in crossing the prairies
contagion	n. disease
calico	adj. made from a coarse cloth with a bright print
bonnet	1). n. a hat, usually tying under the chin and often framing the face, formerly much worn by women, now by children 2) n. anything resembling a bonnet in shape or use, in this case the canvas acting as the roofing over a wagon
pepperbox pistol	n. firearm invented in 1830, used for civilian protection and made obsolete by the Colt pistol
rock fever	n. an infectious bacterial disease of humans caused by brucellae, transmitted by contact with infected animals, and characterized by fever, malaise, and headache

### Panning for Gold in the Story

1. Do you think Early is making a mistake leaving home the way he did? How will the family react?
2. One wagon had the saying "Pikes Peak or Bust" on its side. What would our modern equivalent be to these sayings? Compare/contrast the sayings of 1859 and today.
3. Is Early a "brazen liar"? Is Lizzy "intimidating" or "most agreeable"?
4. Who is Mr. Mawr and what do you think his plans are? How could he affect the trip?
5. If you were a member of the wagon train, how would you feel about Reverend FobbScott's final blessing?
6. Is the Bunderly family up to this trip? What are their hopes and dreams?
7. The journey begins and progress is slow. Why?
8. Why would Lizzy say "Being an orphan seems fine to me"? Does this make her a mean person?
9. Mr. Mawr warns Early "there is much that is uncertain in this world." What do you think he means? What uncertainties does Early face?

**Primary Resources** are found throughout this story. A good example is the picture of the barbershop on p. 35. Choose one and read or view it carefully. Then finish these sentences.

1. I noticed....
2. I wonder...
3. I learned...

## Chapter 11-13 On to Council Bluffs...

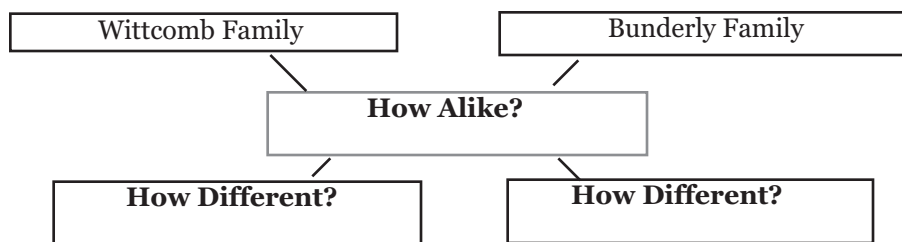
### Words of the Times

buckskin	n. a soft yellowish suede leather originally from deerskin
Colt pistol	n. a self-loading or semi-automatic pistol with removable magazine in the handle holding seven cartridges
pole ferry	n. a transport for moving people, vehicles, or goods by boat across a body of water propelled by hand poles
whirligig	n. a toy for whirling or spinning, as a top
barrow	n. a flat, rectangular frame used for carrying a load
humbug	interj. nonsense
bloomers	n. wide, loose trousers gathered at the knee and formerly worn by women and girls as an athletic costume
skiff	n. various types of boats small enough for rowing by one person

### Panning for Gold in the Story

1. What do you think Early misses most about his family?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Early and Lizzy? Has it changed?
3. Men and women have strict roles and rules in 1859. What are they?
4. Is it possible to be ladylike and be on a wagon train?
5. How does Mr. Mawr sow suspicion about Early? Why does he do this?
6. Who are the people going back and how do they affect the other travelers?
7. Should Early believe the news he learns about Jesse? Should it change his trip?
8. What surprises Lizzy and Early about Council Bluffs?
9. In town Early sees everything branded with "Pikes Peak". Branding is still a powerful way to advertise or send a message. Explain the importance then and today.
10. Explain Chapter 15's startling ending as they leave civilization. What do you think Avi is trying to tell his readers?

**Compare/Contrast** Choose a concept from this story such as the Wittcomb and Bunderly Families or the 19th century and 21st century and fill in the chart.



## Chapters 14-17 Into Nebraska Territory

### Words of the Times

sod	n. a section of grass-covered surface soil held together by matted roots
buffalo chips	n. the dried dung of buffalo used as fuel
dysentery	n. an infection of the intestines marked by severe diarrhea
cholera	n. an acute intestinal infection caused by ingestion of contaminated water or food
kilter	n. good condition
mooned	v. to travel all night to avoid the heat

### Panning for Gold in the Story

1. What must be considered if the original three wagons join a larger train?
2. Does Mr. Bunderly expect too much of his wife? Why doesn't he listen to her?
3. What do the gravestones tell us? What is it that keeps these people going?
4. How does Avi keep his story moving and interesting through the inevitable drudgery and monotony of the trip?
5. How does Mr. Mawr arrange it so that he looks blameless in trying to murder Early? What quality in Early helped him survive the trip?
6. Early and Lizzy have become sweethearts. How do they give each other hope?
7. What is it that makes men want gold? Are they fools or smart?
8. How is Mrs. Bunderly put to rest? How does Lizzy show her maturity?
9. What more could Lizzy have done for her mother? How would you comfort her?
10. What will become of them as they reach Cherry Creek? What if Early cannot find Jesse?

**Summarizing** After reading this section of the text, make a list of the key words or main ideas. From this list, write a one sentence summary of the section using as many of the main idea words as you can. Imagine you have not yet struck gold so you are on a budget of \$2.00 and each word costs 10 cents. Can you sum up this section in 20 words?



## Chapters 18 - 20 Cherry Creek!

### Words of the Times

raised color

patron

quills

v. to find gold



n. customer

n. the hollow stemlike main shaft of a feather used by miners to capture and hold gold dust

### Panning for Gold in the story

1. Did Cherry Creek meet their expectations? What was the reality of the people, buildings, prices, and gold prospects?
2. Describe the Denver House and the people Early and Lizzy find there.
3. What does Early learn about Jesse from Willard? Is Early starting to believe?
4. Do you think Jesse has two sides? Can hard times change who we are and what we are capable of doing?
5. What is the system of law and order in Cherry Creek? Was Jesse treated fairly?
6. What does \$10 a month rent in housing for Lizzy's family?
7. How do you explain the lack of women in Cherry Creek and other mining towns?
8. Where is Mr. Mawr during all of this time?
9. How did Mr. Bunderly react when Lizzy told him she was continuing on to Gold Hill with Early? Do you think he is a good parent?
10. Do you believe Early can or will find Jesse?

**3...2...1...**This strategy will encourage readers to slow down and think about what has been read and decide what is important. Write down...

- 3** Things you have found out about Gold (or keyword of choice)
  - 2** Interesting things from the story
  - 1** Question you still have
- 
- 







## Chapters 21 - 25 Into the Mountains and Beyond

### Words of the Times

arastra wheel	n. large stone wheel for crushing gold laden ore
sluice rockers	n. prospecting equipment
chinked	adj. filled with mud as in the narrow gaps between logs

### Panning for Gold in the story

1. How does this trip to Gold Hill compare/contrast to their journey across country?
2. Why would Early think “I hope I don’t find Jesse”?
3. Describe the prospector and the washer woman on the trail. What can be learned from them about the times?
4. What is Dunsha McFadden’s business?
5. How is the process of retrieving the gold different here in the mountains?
6. How does Early spot Jesse? Is he the same man Early remembered?
7. How has Jesse lived over the past months? Should the family be thankful to him?
8. How do Early and Lizzy avoid Mr. Mawr?
9. What would you predict happened to Jesse? Will he ever come back?
10. How did Early set things right? Why doesn’t he tell his parents the truth about Jesse?
11. How do the minister’s words connect to Jesse and others in this story?
12. Picture Early as an older and wiser man talking to his own son. How would he answer this question...Was gold worth the looking for?



**Questioning the Author** allows a reader to go beyond the text and make inquiries of the author as to his intent in writing and what is or is not clear in a story. What questions would you like to ask Avi? What is he trying to tell you with his story, *Hard Gold*. What scenes or days in this story do you have questions about? What scenes are particularly clear or strong in your mind? Where would you like to know more?





### Writing Prompts

Choose one of the following quotes from the story and use it as a springboard for writing. You can agree or disagree with the statement or you can explain how the statement showed itself in the story or connects to your own life. Be specific and use details to make your writing clear and interesting.

1. "Dreaming don't work in the sunshine."
2. "A shared secret is an honor shared."
3. "Enterprise feeds best on joy, not despair."
4. "...capability is unladylike."
5. "Gold can make you crazy."
6. "Rich people do as they choose."
7. "You either put one foot in front of your other foot, or you would be left behind."
8. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."
9. "One gains good experience from doleful events."

### Quotes that tell the story

Identify the following quotes. The chapter the quote is found in is in parentheses.

- A. Who made the comment? What emotions are being expressed?
- B. What were the circumstances? What were the causes and effects of each statement?
- C. What was its importance in the story?

1. "This farm is going to be left to my boy." (1)
2. "You sell the farm to the railroad, and I'll make sure no charges are placed..." (4)
3. "I think I might just go see the elephant." (4)
4. "I bid you a most hearty welcome to our great adventure." (8)
5. "If there is bravery in ignorance, you may be sure I have the bravest family in the world." (8)
6. "I wonder if he can be trusted. You might be better without him." (11)
7. "You ever get to thinking that gold isn't worth the looking for" (20)
8. "Jesse was found guilty. Sentenced to be hung." (19)
9. "You shouldn't have done it. It was wrong." (23)
10. "Jesse, will you ever come back!" (23)



### Want to Know More about 1859?

The Colorado Historical Newspaper Collection has placed Colorado newspapers online covering the years 1859 - 1923 - a great primary resource. Go to [www.ColoradoHistoricNewspapers.org](http://www.ColoradoHistoricNewspapers.org). Click on the tab titled *Featured Topics*. Under Colorado-Specific Topics click on *Early Denver-Area Gold Mines* and/or *Mining Songs*. You will find links to many news articles that will broaden your knowledge of the life and times of the Gold Rush in Colorado in 1859.



