

MY NEW ZEALAND STORY

Gold! Otago, 1862

Pauline Cartwright

(Previously published as My Story: Finding Father)

Synopsis

The year is 1862 and Mary Brogan has just made a daring decision. She will leave her home in Dunedin and travel alone to Dunstan Diggings to find her father. It has been seven years since Mary last saw her father. He was supposed to have followed Mary, her mother and her younger brother Billy from Australia to New Zealand, but he never turned up. Mary is determined to find out why. She refuses to believe that her father abandoned them.

Mary has a major problem- a 13-year old girl cannot possibly travel alone and live safely among male miners. Mary decides to disguise herself as a boy called Harry Bannerman. Her disguise proves extremely effective and Mary is able to find work and live among the miners. However, many of the men she is around are unscrupulous and dangerous. They steal each other's gold and vigilante justice is commonplace, given the lack of law enforcement. Mary finds herself involved with Jack Bloxham and George Harcourt and soon her life is in danger.

However, Mary's expedition is successful because she finds her father. He was right under her nose the whole time and she didn't realise it. But does he have a reasonable explanation for why he failed to join his family, or did he just decide to keep the gold for himself?

Text Type

Gold! is written in diary form and spans from Wednesday 10th September 1862 to Friday 28th November 1862. Mary Brogan is a courageous heroine

who is determined to find her father. She is not afraid to take risks and shows amazing resourcefulness during her adventure.

Gold! gives readers a fascinating insight into the gold rush in Dunstan in 1862. Not all miners were lucky enough to find gold. Many had only rudimentary shelter and few supplies. Food was scarce and life could be dangerous. Many desperate men turned into thieves and vigilante justice was harsh.

Themes include family, corruption, justice, loyalty and the pioneering spirit shown by thousands who wished to build a better life for themselves and their families.

Sharing the novel

The novel can be covered in 4 shared sessions and 3 independent reading sessions. It has been divided up as follows: pp.5-23, pp.27-82, pp.83-132, pp.132-173.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions and be careful to establish the setting in time and place before reading the novel, as this is very important to their understanding of the story. Students should also be encouraged to identify themes and explain how they are developed in the novel.

The activities that follow the notes are suitable for students of many different abilities and suit a range of learning styles.

Introducing the Text

Study the cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What is a journal? How do you expect a journal to be set out?
What kind of information is usually contained within a journal?
Whose journal is it?
- When is the story set? What do you already know about this period?

- Where is Mary going and why is she going there? Why do you think she needs to disguise herself as a boy?
- Do you think Mary will find her father? Why do you think he failed to join his family in New Zealand?

Read the Historical Note at the end of the novel on page 174. In your books make some notes about the Dunstan rush and the conditions that many people had to live with during this period.

The teacher reads pp.5-23 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension pp.5-23

- What reasons does Mary give for why she is going to Dunstan Diggings?
- How does Mary find out that her father may be at Dunstan Diggings?
- Why did Mary's father stay behind in Australia? What does Mary tell people about her father? Why does she tell them this? Why did Mary's mother decide to move to Dunedin?
- Why does Mary want to find her father so badly?
- Why does she decide that she should disguise herself as a boy? How does she acquire her boots? What other boys clothing does she obtain? How does she hide her long hair?
- How long has it been since Mary has seen her father? What is her father's name?
- Why are so many men giving up their jobs to join in the gold rush?
- How does Mary decide to get to Dunstan Diggings? What goes awry with her plans to leave? How does this eventually work out to Mary's advantage?
- What does Mary decide to call herself after she dresses as a boy?

Discussion

- The story is set in 1862. Mary suggests in her journal that times were tough for her and her family. Explain what we know about Mary's life and describe how the family lives. What sorts of things that we take for granted today would not have been around in 1862?



- Develop a character profile for Mary Brogan. Include what we know about her already in terms of age, appearance and personality. Add to the profile as you continue reading the story.
- Imagine that you are a miner who decides to join the gold rush. What might you need to take with you? What challenges would you face going to a place that is only beginning to develop into a settlement? What possible problems might you face?

Students read pp. 27-82 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp 27-82

- Describe Mary's journey to the Dunstan Diggings. What explanation does she give to people for travelling alone?
- What does she notice about the other people heading towards the Dunstan Diggings? Has everyone who has gone there been successful? How do you know?
- How does Mary meet Jack Bloxham and George Harcourt?
- Who are Mr and Mrs Tom?
- Describe the main street of the township.
- What do the women hanging out by the refreshment tents say to Mary? Why do you think these women aren't "respectable"?
- What is Mary's first job? Who is she working for? What information does she let slip that she wishes she hadn't?
- What are some of the difficulties that Mary has pretending to be a boy?
- Why do Mr Harcourt and Mr Bloxham want Mary to talk to the miners? What do you suppose they are hoping to learn from them?
- Who lets Mary sleep in his tent?
- What do the Toms do in town? Who is Lucky?
- What do Jack and George do that upsets Mary? Why do they act this way? Why does Mary suspect that they don't really work for a bank?
- What happens to the two men who tried to jump Alec's claim? Who is responsible for sorting out disputes in Hartley? What is the problem with this system?
- How does Mary trick George and Jack into revealing that they can't read?
- What happened to Knobby's gold? Why does Mary suspect Jack and George of the robberies? Who does she reveal her suspicions to?

How do the men set a trap for Jack and George? Describe how the two men were caught.

Discussion

- What challenges does Mary face on her journey to the Dunstan Diggings and during her stay in Hartley? How does she deal with these challenges? What qualities does she possess? How do you think she would have felt being alone in a strange place? If you were in her position is there anything that you would have done differently? Explain your answer.
- Mary's mother would know that Mary is missing now. How would she be feeling? How might she go about finding her daughter?
- Make some predictions about what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read pp. 83-132 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 83-132

- Why didn't the men hand Jack and George over to the Commissioner?
- Why does Mary feel so lonely?
- What does Sam give Mary as a reward for helping to catch George and Jack?
- What exciting idea does Mary have about how to earn some extra money? What inspires this idea?
- Why does Mary think that Jim may be her father?
- How does Mary manage to change from being a boy into being a girl with no one noticing? How successful is her singing idea? Why is Mary worried about singing too often?
- How did Dougal the schoolteacher die? What does his death illustrate about the dangers of life in Hartley?
- Why is Lucky so curious about the girl who was singing? What does Mary learn from Lucky about her father?
- What does Mary see posted on the front of the store that startles her?
- How does Lucky organise for Mary to meet her father? Who does Mary see at the assigned meeting place? What amazing discovery does she make?

- Describe Mary's terrifying ordeal with Jack and George. How does she manage to escape?
- How does Mary's mother react when she comes home?

Discussion

- Describe Mary's relationship with the Toms. What sort of people are they? How have they become like surrogate parents to Mary?
- How has Mary developed as a character as a result of her experiences with Jack and George? What do you think that she has learned?
- How has the Hartley settlement grown and changed even during Mary's short stay there? What do you think will happen to the settlement when the gold runs out?
- Mary spends her time at Hartley pretending to be a boy. What is difficult about pretending to be someone that you are not?
- What do you think Mary's father told her about his reasons for not joining his family in New Zealand?

Students read pp. 132-173 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 132-173

- What does Mary reveal to her father when he arrives at the Commissioner's tent?
- Why can't Lucky return to Dunedin with Mary immediately?
- How does Mary's mother react when she reveals to her that she has found her father? How does she feel about moving to Dunstan?
- Who rides with Mary back to Dunedin? Describe their journey home. What changes does she notice when she arrives back in Dunedin?
- How do Mary and her mother prepare for their trip to Dunstan? How does Uncle Rupert feel about their decision to move? Why does he feel this way?
- Summarise Mary's account of "the story why my father didn't come".
- What does Mary think she will miss the most about Dunedin?
- How has Mary's mother changed since she arrived in Dunstan?
- Why does Mary believe that her father has lost his urge to pan for gold?

- What can't Mary resist doing when she goes to identify George and Jack?

Discussion

- How does Mary feel now that her family is reunited? How will her life in Dunstan be different from her life in Dunedin? What aspects of life in Dunstan do you think Mary will enjoy most? What are some of the disadvantages of living there?
- Identify the climax of the novel. Why is the event important?
- What are the main themes in this novel? Explain how they are developed throughout the story.

Activities

Plot - Create a flow diagram that shows the main events in the novel in chronological order.

Newspaper front page - Design a newspaper front page for "The Dunstan Chronicle". Remember to include a banner headline, feature articles, illustrations and advertisements that are in keeping with the 1862 setting for the book.

Writing - Write an epilogue for the story that explains what Mary's first year living in Dunstan with her family was like.

Research - Conduct a research assignment on the Dunstan gold rush. Formulate focussing questions. Present your findings in a report, on a poster or as an oral presentation.

Poetry - Imagine that you are a gold miner in Dunstan. Write a poem about your experiences panning for gold.

Poster - Design a missing poster like the one that Mary saw hanging up in the store in Dunstan.

Letter - Write a letter to a friend explaining what you liked about *Gold!* and why they should read it.

Letter - Write the letter that Mary's father wrote to her mother explaining why he didn't join her in New Zealand.

Paragraph - Write a paragraph explaining the differences between life in New Zealand in 1862 and today.

Collage - Make a collage that illustrates a main theme from the story.

Teacher Notes by Vicki Gyde