Imagine you were off to seek your fortune...

Close your eyes and imagine you can travel back in time. You’re in California in 1850, just after the Gold Rush begins. You’re still a child, but your life is completely different.

In the diggings, your family may live in a tent, a rough shelter of pine boughs, or a tiny cabin. Your chores begin early in the morning when you haul water from the river, collect wood for the fire, or feed your family’s animals before you watch your younger brothers or sisters. There is no school, but you will work hard all day long. Your parents need all the help you can give them.

You might help your father pan for gold, or, if you’re a boy, you may take his rifle and hunt for rabbits, quail, or squirrels. Girls might gather berries or edible plants in the forest.

If your mother runs a restaurant out of your family’s tent, you may wait on tables or wash dishes. You might sing, dance, or play an instrument to entertain miners—and get paid in gold dust or coins. When the saloons are empty, you can run a wet pin along the cracks in the floorboards to pick up any gold dust spilled by miners the night before.

If you have any free time, you can play games with other kids. Or, if you’re adventurous, you might sneak away to a Native American camp. The Pomo and Miwok Indians have lived in this area for generations. Maybe you could learn a few words of their languages, and trade gold dust or coins for deerskin moccasins. You might also learn how these Indians’ lives have changed now that miners have taken over the land where the Indians hunt and fish.

Later, you could pay a visit to some miners. Don’t be surprised if they fuss over you and tell you stories, make you toys, or teach you to read. Most miners have left their families behind, and they miss their children.

Every once in a while, you might go to a dance nearby. If you’re a girl, you’ll be very popular. There are very few women in the diggings, so girls of all ages dance. Watch your bare feet around all those heavy boots!

What do you think? Would you enjoy the danger, excitement, hardship, and the adventure of the California Gold Rush?
Directions: Read “Kids in the Gold Fields.” Then fill in the circle next to the best answer for each question. Use your answers to solve the riddle below.

1. What conclusion can you draw about the Gold Rush from this story?
   ○ A. Everyone became very rich.
   ○ B. Everyday life was not easy.
   ○ C. Most miners brought their families with them.

2. Which of the following sentences is an opinion?
   ○ D. Some miners lived in tents.
   ○ E. Mining for gold was a waste of time.
   ○ F. Kids in the diggings worked hard.

3. From the story, you could guess that the word edible means
   ○ G. safe to eat.
   ○ H. delicious.
   ○ I. cool and green.
   ○ J. poisonous.

4. Pomo and Miwok are Native American
   ○ K. authors.
   ○ L. articles of clothing.
   ○ M. camps made of bark and wood.
   ○ N. tribes.

5. According to this article, what chore might a kid living in the gold fields have had?
   ○ O. vacuuming the carpets
   ○ P. baby-sitting
   ○ Q. mowing the yard

6. How did the miners affect the lives of Native Americans who lived nearby?
   ○ R. Miners stole moccasins from them.
   ○ S. Miners charged the Native Americans a toll to cross the rivers.
   ○ T. Miners stayed on their land.

7. Another good title for this story might be
   ○ V. “California: Land of Gold and Sun.”
   ○ W. “Time Travel Back to the Civil War.”

8. About how many years ago did the Gold Rush begin?
   ○ X. 50
   ○ Y. 100
   ○ Z. 150

Bonus: Match the number under each line with the questions you just answered. Write the letter of your answer to that question on the line. You will spell out the answer to the riddle below.

Where did the young dog sleep in the gold fields?

In a  

5  7  5  6  2  4  6
ANSWERS

Kids in the Gold Fields (page 11)
Bonus: In a pup tent