INTRODUCTION

The language in the diggings was no less confusing than on board ships.

"Sometimes, a company of these wanderers will find itself upon a “bar”, where a few pieces of the precious metal lie scattered upon the surface of the ground; of course they immediately "prospect" it...If it "pays", they "claim" the spot, and build their shanties, the news spreads that wonderful "diggings" have been discovered at such a place--the dealers, those worse than fiends, rush vulture-like upon the scene and erect a round tent, where, in gambling, drinking, swearing and fighting, the many reproduce Pandemonium...while a few honestly and industriously commence digging for gold, and lo! as if a fairy’s wand had been waved...a full-grown mining town hath sprung into existence."

Louise A.K.S. Clappe, The Letters of Dame Shirley, Indian Bar, 1852

THE CHALLENGE

Below is a list of words and expressions from the "diggings". In your crews, decide what each word or phrase means. Write your guess next to each word. Once you have finished match your guesses with the vocabulary list. How close did you come to getting the correct definition?

Alcalde ____________________________________________________________
boom town __________________________________________________________
cradle _____________________________________________________________
ghost towns ________________________________________________________
grubstake __________________________________________________________
hopper ____________________________________________________________
Mother Lode _______________________________________________________
"pay dirt" __________________________________________________________
Poke ______________________________________________________________
stake a claim _______________________________________________________
tailings ___________________________________________________________
"Color" ___________________________________________________________
"Come down with the dust" __________________________________________
"Pan out" _________________________________________________________
ADVANCED CHALLENGE

Pretend that you are prospecting for gold in 1851. Write a letter to your family about your voyage at sea to get there and present life in the gold fields. Make sure that you use the words in the list above and on the previous page to make your letter more interesting to those reading it.