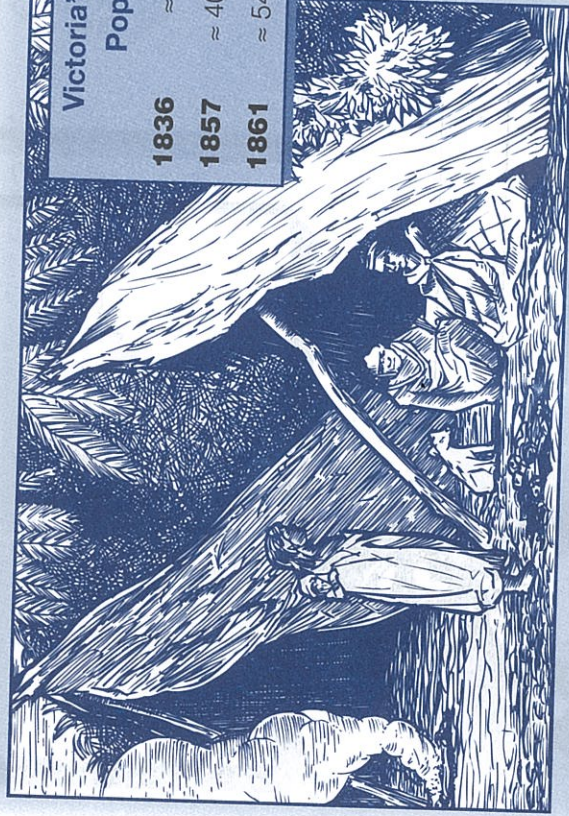


# The Goldfields and Aboriginal People

**Lesson Focus:** *You will develop an understanding of the effects of the gold rushes on the Aboriginal people.*

**Keywords:** *devastating, rife, diseases, disrupted, stripped, Corps*



	Victoria's European Population	Victoria's Aboriginal Population
1836	≈ 226	≈ 11 500
1857	≈ 400 000	≈ 1 700
1861	≈ 540 000	≈ 2 300

Traditional Aboriginal ways also were often disrupted. Many Aboriginal people, like the diggers, abused alcohol that was consumed on the diggings. The land where Aboriginal people hunted and gathered food was often stripped of trees for the gold prospectors' benefit.

The Aboriginal people had been living in harmony with the land for many years without causing a great deal of change to the natural environment. They made all their tools out of stone, bone, shell and wood and therefore placed no value on gold.

The impact of European settlement had a major effect on the native people of this continent. The new settlers took their land, ate their food, depleted their supplies, introduced illness and forced their ways on the Aboriginal people. The land was sacred to the Aboriginal people. The diggers did not care, they dug it up in their search for wealth and left the area in a mess. The native way of life would never again be the same. The European people settled in Australia with a total disregard for the people who already inhabited the area.

To make matters worse, the gold rushes had a devastating effect on Aboriginal people for a number of reasons. Diseases such as smallpox and measles were rife because of the poor conditions in which people lived on the goldfields. These diseases were passed onto the Aboriginal people and caused many deaths. This was often due to contact between diggers and Aboriginal people, when they came to the goldfields seeking food. Unfortunately, diggers sometimes would also deliberately poison the food the Aboriginal people took.

More alarmingly, many Aboriginal people were shot by diggers. Although actual numbers are unknown, in Queensland, by the end of the 19th century, approximately 1 000 settlers were killed by Murriss. In the same period, at least 10 000 people from the Koori tribe were shot dead. This was not the only State to suffer great loss of life. The table above shows the approximate numbers of the European and Aboriginal populations between 1836 and 1861.

Aboriginal men were recruited into the Native Police Corps on the goldfields in Victoria, which began with two divisions of 25 men each. The size of the force grew to a total of 60 in 1851. They were often called upon to deal with aggressive Aboriginal people and to recover stolen property. Although some people were impressed with the efficiency of the Corps, many white people were not and resented the Corps' work.

The Corps in Victoria was eventually turned against by Billibellary, a member of the Wurundjeri tribe. He claimed it was being used to kill and capture other Koori people. As a result, many men in the Corps deserted, while others were unfit to continue due to alcohol abuse.



As gold was discovered across Australia, more immigrants arrived in search of wealth and more Aboriginal communities were affected by the European ways. Devastation began to occur on an even greater scale.



Use the information to answer these questions.

1. Write the similarities and differences between the Aboriginal people and the European people on the goldfields.

Similarities

Differences

2. Write a word from the text which means:

- (a) destruction \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) common \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) reduced \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) usual \_\_\_\_\_
- (e) happen \_\_\_\_\_

3. What were the main causes of death for the Aboriginal people?

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4. What were the effects of goldmining on the land?

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5. What information can you gain from looking at the table on the previous page?

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6. There is not a lot of written information about the Aboriginal people during the gold rush.

- (a) Why do you think this is so?

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- (b) What could be done to improve this?

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Some goldmining towns in Australia were named using Aboriginal words. For example, Kalgoorlie—kulgoolah (silky pear); Ballarat—balaarat (a camping or resting place); Gympie—gimpi-gimpi (stinging bush). These are just a few.

7. (a) Locate the places listed above on the map below and write their Aboriginal name.  
(b) Can you find any more? Include them on the map with their meaning.



Use reference material to complete the following.

8. Select one disease mentioned in the text. Research to complete this table.

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Symptoms:</b>	
<b>Remedy:</b>	

**Topics for Discussion/Debate**

1. Today, Australian Customs controls the importation of certain products into the country to help prevent new diseases being introduced. Do you think this is too little, too late?
2. What is your opinion of the decline in the Aboriginal population? What could have been done to prevent this?

**Additional Activities**

1. Research to find and report on the role of the Native Police Corps. Include its beginnings, laws, roles, uniforms, weapons and any interesting facts. You can select your own style of presentation format.
2. Draw up a positive/minus/idea (PMI) chart in relation to the events on the goldfields and the effects on both the Europeans and Aboriginal people.

**Search Engine Keywords**

gold rushes Australia; Native Police Corps; <http://www.dola.wa.gov.au/lot/names/index.html> (examples from WA only)