

All about gold

Gold has captured the imagination since the earliest days of history. It has been associated with adventure, glory, power, wealth and greed. Civilisations have been destroyed and nations have gone to war for the sake of gold. Pirates have plundered the seas and others have endured long, dangerous journeys and found new lands – all in their search for gold.

Australia would be a different place today had it not been for gold. During the gold rush era of the 19th century, people came from around the world to mine gold in Australia. The increased population created new jobs, and towns such as Melbourne and Ballarat became thriving cities.

Golden awards

Gold continues to be a symbol of wealth and success. When an album sells one million copies, the artist receives a gold record. Golden Oscars and Logies are used to recognise the highest level of achievement in show business. Winning a gold medal is the ultimate achievement in sport.

In our speech, we say 'a golden opportunity' or 'as good as gold'. A generous person is said to have 'a heart of gold'. A 'golden age' is a period of peace and happiness.

What is gold?

There are many valuable metals, such as silver and copper, but gold has qualities that make it the world's most sought-after metal. Why is gold so precious? Some metals are made by people, such as bronze, which is created by combining copper and tin. But gold only comes from the Earth. It can be found in the form

of either tiny particles, called gold dust, or in large chunks, called nuggets. Gold is almost indestructible. It does not stain, shatter, burn or rust and does not dissolve in acid. This means that gold is recyclable: a modern ring may contain gold that belonged to an ancient king!

Gold is a soft metal so it is easy to shape. It can be flattened like a pancake or stretched until it is paper-thin, and it will not break. This makes it perfect for making jewellery. Gold is also used to conduct electricity, tint windows, treat diseases and fill teeth.

Fool's gold

Picture this! You've been panning for gold for months. Suddenly, you unearth three glorious nuggets, but experienced miners shake their heads and mutter, 'Fool's gold!' You have discovered a worthless mineral called pyrite. Pyrite is mistaken for gold because of its shiny yellow appearance. Although it looks like gold, pyrite is worthless because it does not have any of gold's special properties. For this reason, miners call it 'fool's gold'. Fool's gold is lighter and harder than gold, is easily shattered and often has blotches or stains. Real gold is a gleaming, more metallic colour, which is spread evenly over its surface.



Gold can be found as either tiny particles or in large chunks, called nuggets. Nuggets range in size from a pebble to a giant rock.