

DIAMOND FEVER!

TEACHER'S GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

Late one night two travel-weary miners, Philip Arnold and John Slack, show up at a businessman's office in San Francisco. The miners seem nervous. They've got something that needs to be locked in a safe overnight. What is it? Well, that really has to stay secret, but it's . . .

DIAMONDS! And lots of them.

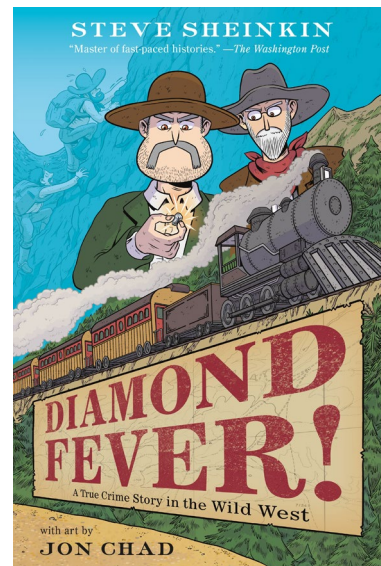
Had these two miners just discovered America's first diamond mine? Well, this *is* the Gold Rush era after all. Plenty of people are striking it rich. Anything is possible.

When word of the find hits the streets, diamond fever sweeps the country. Wealthy investors are desperate to elbow Arnold and Slack aside and seize control—but can they persuade the miners to reveal the location of their bonanza?

At the same time, thousands of prospectors fan out across the mountains and deserts of the West—will one of them find the site before greedy bankers grab everything for themselves?

In this page-turning, high-stakes Western adventure, the *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning author Steve Sheinkin tells the true story of the Great Diamond Hoax of 1872, a rollicking tale of heists and hijinks, scams and scoundrels—and the last-minute triumph of a most unlikely hero.

★“A rollicking—and well-researched—adventure story . . . **A sparkling accomplishment.**”—*Kirkus Reviews*



9781250265746 | Ages 9-12

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Sheinkin is the acclaimed author of fast-paced, cinematic nonfiction histories, including *Fallout*, *Undeclared*, *Born to Fly*, *The Port Chicago 50*, and *Bomb*. He is also the coauthor, with Ruta Sepetys, of the *New York Times* bestselling middle-grade novel *The Bletchley Riddle*. His accolades include a Newbery Honor, three Boston Globe–Horn Book Awards, a Sibert Medal and Honor, and three National Book Award finalist honors. He lives in Saratoga Springs, New York, with his wife and two children.



Jon Chad lives in Vermont with his wife and daughter. He is the illustrator of *Science Comics: Solar System* and the author of *Leo Geo*, *Science Comics: Volcanoes*, *Science Comics: The Periodic Table of Elements*, and *Pinball: A Graphic History of the Silver Ball*. Chad's graphic novel series, *The Solvers*, uses comics and superhero action to teach mathematics to young readers.

THE ROAD TO DIAMOND PEAK

Diamond Fever! begins late one night in November 1870, with two miners showing up in San Francisco carrying a bag of rough diamonds. Reports of a fabulous diamond strike spark greedy dreams in investors from Frisco to Wall Street and across the Atlantic to London. But as diamond fever rages, the actual location of the mine remains a closely guarded secret. When I started to research, I was stunned to learn that even today no one seems to know exactly where the diamond field was.

So I decided to find it. In the summer of 2024, I set out with my son David, who'd just turned fifteen. As I tell students all the time, these kinds of research trips are the best part of the job. We started in the archives at the University of Wyoming in Laramie. Clues in old folders led to a tiny history museum in Green River, where a retired detective and Wyoming history expert, Dick Blust, Jr., filled in parts of the story I'd never heard. Dick put me in touch with a rancher named Don, suggesting he might know the exact location.

Don agreed to meet me and David at "that spot on the Colorado-Wyoming border where Route 10N turns to dirt." Pretending to know what he meant, I drove our rented pickup down a narrow road with no cell service, fifty miles from the nearest gas station. We found the place, waited a while . . . and then Don bounced up in an off-road buggy. He looked us over, grinned, and said, "You fellas want to go find some diamonds?"

Don led us to the unmarked spot, miles off the dirt road. I've got the coordinates in my phone now—but I ain't sharing. But hopefully true stories like *Diamond Fever!* will inspire students to set off on research adventures of their own!



Steve Sheinkin

Steve Sheinkin

CLICK HERE TO
GO BEHIND-THE-SCENES

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. *Diamond Fever!* is a nonfiction book, meaning it's a true story about real people and actual events. Based on the title and the subtitle of the story, what predictions can you make about the book? What questions do you have about these topics before you begin reading?
2. The subtitle is *A True Crime Story in the Wild West*. How does this subtitle set the stage for you, as a reader? Have you read books, listened to podcasts, or seen shows incorporating either “true crime” or “the Wild West” that might color your frame of reference?
3. Jacket art and interior illustrations throughout this book were created by Jon Chad. What clues does the cover design of this book offer about the story? Look closely at the details, including the two men featured at the top, the font choices, and the accompanying images of the train, forest, cliff, and subtle map.
4. Read the synopsis of the book on the inside flap of the front cover. Now that you've read this description of the plot, what questions do you have about the story before you begin reading? What questions do you predict the book will answer?
5. Talk about narrative nonfiction, and distinguish it from both informational texts and fiction writing. Nonfiction books often include features you might not find in a fiction book, such as source notes and an index. Grown-ups: Share the purpose of these elements, often called back matter, with students in advance of reading so they are aware of the resources and can access them as needed while reading *Diamond Fever!*
6. Create a graphic organizer with the headers Connect, Extend, and Challenge. As you're reading, keep track of connections you can make to the information you learn (such as other books you've read with similar themes, media you're reminded of, etc.), new ideas you gain while reading that broaden your thinking about this topic, and questions you puzzle over while reading. The goal of this exercise is to connect the book's content to your prior knowledge, actively process the information you're taking in while you're reading, and synthesize the material upon finishing the book.
7. There are many people who play significant roles in the events of *Diamond Fever!* (mostly men, but we'll come back to that). To help you keep everyone straight as you're reading, make a copy of the Cast of Characters, found on page x, and tuck it in the front of your book. As you are reading about the events in the story, jot down notes that you find interesting or suspect are important about each person alongside their caricature. Use the portraits and your notes to get back on track if you find yourself confused about the characters while reading.

READING ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Our story begins in Verdi, Nevada, on November 5, 1870, but transitions quickly to San Francisco (aka “Frisco”), California. Find a map of the United States from that era and mark on it both of those locations. (Check

the [Library of Congress Maps Division](#) for railroad, geological, and other digitized nineteenth-century map options.) As you are reading, continue to keep track of the characters' movements around the country, and the various modes of transportation used.

2. Create a list of less familiar words or phrases you encounter while reading *Diamond Fever!* This list might include “greenhorn” (page 23) or “diamond in the rough” (page 46). Can you infer the meaning of those terms from their context? You might know the meaning of some words in other contexts, like “salting” (page 85) or “bully” (page 142), but are you comfortable with their meaning as used here? Look up definitions in a dictionary as needed and try to use them in a sentence of your own—good luck with “diamondiferous” (page 78)!
3. Many of the first and last chapter lines in *Diamond Fever!* are attention-grabbers. As you're reading, flag a few of your favorites, perhaps “Even train robbers have to wait for their train” (page 1), “Some secrets just never have a chance” (page 14), or, quite the bombshell, “The diamond mine did not exist” (page 84). What sort of mood or response do these punchy sentences evoke in you, as a reader? How would you describe Sheinkin's writing style, overall?
4. Illustrator Jon Chad created a spirited and eclectic assortment of artwork that appears throughout the book. Let's dive more deeply into that.
 - a. Skim back through *Diamond Fever!* and identify various types of illustrations you find. These might include spot (page 28), full-page (page 151), and sequential artwork panels (pages 41–44). How does each specific type of artwork serve to support the author's storytelling?
 - b. Sometimes nonfiction books will include photographs or other original visual resources. Why might this particular story rely on original artwork, such as the re-creation of telegraphs (page 22) or Harpending's cipher list (page 80), even when those primary resources still exist?
 - c. Think about a section of the book that *didn't* include artwork. Which unillustrated scene of the story is so cinematic that you can picture it in your mind as you're reading? Create your own original sequential art (like one of Chad's interstitial graphic novel segments) by drawing a four- to six-panel comic rendering of that moment from the story.
 - d. The comics and illustrations for the book were digitally created using a program called Clip Studio Paint. According to Chad, this is a multistep process involving initial sketches; refinement; inking the drawings with crisp, black lines; and the addition of tones onto the drawings using another program called Adobe Photoshop. Why do you think Chad chose to use gray-scale tones for this artwork? How does his line work convey the action or contribute to the emotional energy of the scenes he created? If you have access to either of these digital softwares, use them to create a few sketches of your own; if not, use pencils and markers to create similar results on paper.
5. In the chapter “Diamonds and Salt,” readers are offered the London jeweler's account of Arnold and Slack's visit to his shop (page 88). Later, at the start of part 5, “Brilliant City,” we are given Chad's artistic rendering of the

same events (page 136). How did the graphic novel style used for the diamond merchant's story compare with what you had imagined when you first read about the incident?

6. Telegrams were still a cutting-edge means of communication in 1870. Sheinkin briefly explains how telegrams work (page 79) and the high cost of a transatlantic cable (page 22). Working in teams of three, write a short telegram, convert that to Morse code, and transcribe the coded message. Swap places so you can try each role. (If you're interested, see this [National Park Service article](#) for more information on the development of the [Transcontinental Telegraph](#), which brought telegraph service westward across the United States.)
7. Arnold and Slack's scam worked, in large part because recent technological advancements in transportation allowed them to travel halfway around the world and back in a previously unfathomable period of time (pages 88, 199).
 - a. What do you think it would've been like in 1870 to travel from California to the East Coast on the transcontinental railroad, or to cross the Atlantic Ocean on a steamer? Are those journeys you'd be willing to undertake?
 - b. The odds of George Roberts's surveying party stumbling not just on to the same train but then into the same dining car as the geologists Emmons and Gardner were truly astronomical (page 143). Do you believe in coincidences?
3. *Diamond Fever!* is a high-stakes adventure story conveyed in a plainspoken tone though rapidly paced. How did the narrative voice make you *feel* as you read this book? Create a Pinterest board or a playlist inspired by the book's tone, settings, and pace, a reflection of the mood evoked in you while reading.
4. On several occasions during the events of the Great Diamond Hoax (page 86), men were followed by dogged reporters or fortune seekers and must hunker down or attempt subterfuge to evade notice. In our modern era, with the twenty-four-hour news cycle and cell-phone cameras, how might news about the diamond mine spread today, via either traditional or social media? Write an Associated Press-style report (include the Five Ws: who, what, when, where, and why) announcing the initial diamond mine "discovery," or create a digital post, video, or meme that shares news of the salting fraud.
5. Clarence King and his colleagues proved the unlikely heroes of this hoax, saving Americans from financial ruin with "the superpowers of science" (page 179). How else did scientific progress impact Gilded Age society? Identify a notable innovation of the era, such as the light bulb or telephone, and have a turn-and-talk conversation about the ways in which that scientific advancement would have impacted daily lives.
6. Regional responses to the Great Diamond Hoax, and to Philip Arnold's actions in particular, differed (page 188). How do you reconcile those differences in perspective, based on what you know of 1870s geopolitics? Were this a contemporary financial scam, do you believe modern San Francisco and Elizabethtown, Kentucky, residents would align or differ in their reactions? Why or why not?

7. What questions do you have for Arnold and Slack? Or for Harpending? Imagine you're a Kentucky neighbor who the Arnolds or Harpending invited over for tea. What might you ask Mary Arnold about her role in the events? How do you weigh in on Harpending's guilt or innocence (page 202)?
8. The Great Diamond Hoax may have been a newsworthy event you'd never heard of before picking up *Diamond Fever!* There are other notable historical references throughout the book that might be new to you, including the Verdi train robbery (pages 1–3), Jesse James (page 38), the Mohs' scale (page 45), the Indian Appropriations Act (page 55), the Peshtigo fire (pages 56–57), or President Grant's arrest (page 93). Pick one of these topics that intrigues you, or another ancillary topic of your choosing from the book, and dig more deeply into it. Compare notes with a peer who chose a different topic, and teach each other what you learned.
9. History tends to benefit those whose stories are documented and preserved. While *Diamond Fever!* references Mary Arnold (page 35) and the suffragist movement, the book predominantly presents male perspectives. Why might that be? As an extension activity, consider what roles women played in 1870 San Francisco, or in the railroad junction towns these men visited? How are we to interpret history when some who directly experience it cannot share their stories? How do we reconcile limited voices or their potentially biased lens when informing our modern understanding of history?

POST-READING QUESTIONS

1. Reflect back on your pre-reading explorations. Was the story that was revealed in *Diamond Fever!* what you had expected? What surprised you about the text? Which people, events, or images from the book stood out to you the most? What questions are you still puzzling over, from your graphic organizer or otherwise?
2. Take a moment to compare the nineteenth-century map you referenced while reading with a contemporary map of the continental United States. What differences do you notice between the two, and what similarities? Now, find both San Francisco and Diamond Peak (page 201) on the newer map. If you wanted to visit one of those locations today, how would you do so? Pretend to be a travel agent planning a trip for a client from your hometown to one of those two places, or between them. What modes of transportation would you recommend—still a train and horse pack? What cities might you stop in along the way? As long as you're on vacation, what tourist attractions would you visit in the nearby area?
3. Now that you've read it, how would you describe this book to a friend? Write a quick, compelling book talk that would convince someone with no knowledge of the Great Diamond Hoax to read this story—just three or four sentences that capture the major players and plot points. If you're digitally inclined, record the pitch like you're reviewing and recommending the book online, complete with hashtags and trending audio.
4. Mining was a dangerous but potentially lucrative endeavor that drew nineteenth-century settlers westward and, in particular, to Colorado. Arnold and Stack's precious gemstones may not have been formed in that geological landscape, but plenty of valuable minerals were, and the physical and cultural impact of mining is still prevalent

in the state. Choose one of the following topics to research further and share highlights of your findings with your peers.

- a. **Burro Days:** Distance runners race burros carrying a traditional prospector's load (pick, shovel, gold pan, etc.) annually from Leadville to Fairplay, CO, an arduous mountain route that climbs over thirteen thousand feet and nearly thirty miles. Dig into the history of the celebration, and learn more about what paraphernalia prospectors in the 1870s would've needed to successfully set out for and work a mine.
 - b. **Leadville:** Gold may have drawn prospectors westward, but silver kept them in the Colorado mountains. Research Leadville's silver boom, its corresponding population spike (compare the census numbers from 1880 to 2020), and look into the lasting impact of mining on water quality in the nearby Arkansas River.
 - c. **Mount Emmons:** Remember Samuel Emmons of the geological survey of the fortieth parallel (pages 110–11)? Emmons has several notable geological formations named for him around the country, including a mountain in Colorado that was, until quite recently, mined heavily for the mineral molybdenum. Research the historic land exchange around Mount Emmons and weigh in on the cost-benefit analysis of conservation tactics (like easements that protect biodiversity) versus the desire for raw-mineral extractions (potentially critical to infrastructure and technology).
4. Thorough research is a critical component of reliable nonfiction writing. Examine Sheinkin's back matter and, if your library offers access, explore a few of the digitized resources offered. Why might an author choose to offer endnotes instead of footnotes, as Sheinkin did here? How would you compare the reliability of the "Firsthand Accounts" surrounding the Great Diamond Hoax to the information collected from the "Secondary Sources" Sheinkin referenced? Why might a tiny dose of skepticism about some of the primary sources be warranted? (See page 211 for Sheinkin's thoughts on the matter.)
 5. What was happening elsewhere in the world during 1870 to 1872, roughly the time period of these events? What was happening in your hometown or region at that time? Use primary resources, such as newspaper records like the ones found in these source notes, to research more mundane historical events like marriages, deaths, weather occurrences, and other local news.
 6. Cousins Arnold and Slack pulled off an outrageous scam—"an ingenious and infamous fraud" (page 172)—that very likely wouldn't have worked today for reasons Sheinkin notes (page 198–200). Did the true crime aspects of the story pique your curiosity? If so, research other notable economic criminals and scams, such as Charles Ponzi, Bernie Madoff (page 198), or the Theranos or FTX cryptocurrency collapses, to better understand white-collar crime and the landscape of contemporary financial schemes.
 7. Author Steve Sheinkin is the recipient of many major literary awards, including a Newbery Honor, a Sibert Medal, three National Book Award commendations, and the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement in writing for young adults. Whew! Spend some time familiarizing yourself with the criteria for these awards and with some of Sheinkin's other books, then prepare three questions you'd ask if you had the opportunity to interview him.

EDUCATOR'S NOTE

Have you ever heard the phrase “truth is stranger than fiction”? Arnold and Slack’s *Great Diamond Hoax* was a success thanks to a fairly improbable series of real-life events, and Sheinkin’s propulsive retelling of the scammers’ hijinks reads like a fictional adventure tale. Immersive storytelling is a sneaky superpower of narrative nonfiction writing. It’s also a true hallmark of Sheinkin’s award-winning work. Engrossing, emotionally rich, and factually accurate stories like *Diamond Fever!* are incredibly effective at helping readers build crucial skills as informationally literate, independent thinkers. Incorporating rigorously researched yet accessible books like this one into your curriculum offers students the vital opportunity to bolster their background knowledge, enhance critical thinking skills, and ignite curiosity about the world beyond their classroom walls. This book’s multimodal format brings the added benefit of building visual literacy while supporting creative thinkers within traditional content areas. I hope this guide sparks *your* curiosity and supports your invaluable work. Thank you, educators, for all you do to empower young readers!

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE BY KIT BALLENGER

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