

CLPE and Cheltenham Festivals: Reading Teachers=Reading Pupils

These teaching notes have been designed to support schools using Gold Rush as part of the Reading Teachers=Reading Pupils project in 2025–26. The ideas in the sequence of sessions will support teachers in using picturebooks to enhance reading comprehension and critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and composition of creative writing.

Title: *Gold Rush*

Author Illustrator: Flora Delargy

Publisher: Wide Eyed Editions (2024)

Gold Rush is a powerful illustrated non-fiction title that seeks to redress a historical balance by narrating the little-told lives and role of women in the Klondike Gold Rush. The book is both written and illustrated by Northern Irish artist Flora Delargy, an alumna of the Children's Book Illustration MA course at the Cambridge School of Art who came to prominence with her award-winning *Rescuing Titanic*. While introducing us to little-known figures from the period the book shows how gold was discovered and the hold it has on human imagination, then explores the mushrooming boom towns, the terrible journeys people had across the treacherous Yukon landscape, and the resilience and injustices experienced by the First Nations people whose territory was overwhelmed by the Gold Rush and its legacy.

Before beginning this sequence

As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group Reading Journal to organise and store discussions and responses to the text. Children could also be asked to consider the writer's use of language and how she creates a particular effect or image.

In order to engage fully with the layers of meaning and the details within the illustrations, it is advisable to ensure that you have access to a visualiser (or a similar device) or have pre-scanned spreads to enable you to share images from the text with the pupils on a large scale.

Session 1: Focus — Investigating the messages we can read in an illustration

Before you begin to read, start by sharing the book as an object with the children. Look together at the front cover and invite children to share their initial impressions. You may wish to provide some questions to focus and develop their responses, for example; *what do the children see? What does it make them think? How does it make them feel? What does the title, in conjunction with the illustration make them think about this book? What kind of book do they expect it to be? What does the quality of the production suggest?* Children might pick up on the gold foil used for the lettering that gives the book a luxurious feel, an object to treasure, as well as its relation to the subject matter. *How does this illustration and cover design make you feel? What makes you feel that way?*

Consider whom the children see in the illustration, where the action is happening and what they are doing. Consider, also, the subtitle: "The untold story of the First Nations woman who started the Klondike Gold Rush": *why might the story be **untold**; what does the phrase **First Nations** mean, and why is it in capitals;*

where is *Klondike* and what was the *Gold Rush*? Discuss what - if anything - the children already know about the Klondike Gold Rush and what questions they might have.

Some children may also know Flora Delargy's name from her debut *Rescuing Titanic*, which won the Eilís Dillon Award for debut children's book at the KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards 2022, was shortlisted for the Klaus Flugge Prize 2022 and was shortlisted for the Yoto Carnegie Medal for Illustration 2023. *If they have read this book* (and if they haven't it would be helpful to have a copy for them to read before, after or during their reading of *Gold Rush* and CLPE Teaching Notes are available for both prizes), *what does this lead them to expect of the story and how Flora will tell it, what is distinctive about her style?*

After exploring the cover, also read the blurb, and continue to discuss their expectations for the book. *What type of book do they think this might be? What are they expecting to discover inside?* Rather than the one First Nations woman from the cover, we learn it will be **four young women's real-life stories**: *might some of them be those on the foreground of the cover, is one of them the dog's owner? What more do you think you can understand about them from their depiction on the title page where we see them heading left-to-right into the book, marching, running, striding purposefully, hitching up a skirt to move faster, pointing the way forward: what kind of personalities might they have? What other clues do you gain from their facial expression and body language?* Scribe children's suggestions around a copy of the front cover or allow time for them to scribe their thoughts on post-it notes to stick around a copy of the cover. Add these all to your reading journal.

Spend some time exploring the contents list. *Do they think this is a book to dip into for research purposes or a book to read cover to cover? What makes them think that? How do these contents relate to what you were expecting from the cover and blurb? What do you predict you will find out about the four women from each section devoted to them, how do their cameos around the page enhance your insights into their activity and personality? What might be the significance of George Carnack, Bessie Couture, Chief Isaac and Nero?*

Now read aloud the text on the first double-page spread and give time and space for the children to explore the illustration; *what do we learn about Klondike and the Yukon Territory from this spread?* Here the children may consider what information and what impression are created by the sweeping panorama centred on the meandering mighty Yukon River; from the inset map at top-left; and from the text at bottom-right. Throughout the book, invite the children repeatedly to bear in mind that Flora is both author **and** illustrator — she tells some of the story through words, some through pictures, and some in the gap between the words and the pictures — and to consider what authorial illustratorial choices she has made. *What do the spread and the map between them tell you?*

Look again at the words on the page; *what is the effect of these three paragraphs?* Re-read this so the children can hear each paragraph again and consider what each contributes. *What does the first paragraph tell you about the Yukon Territory?* They might pick out words and phrases such as: **frozen, remote, thousands of kilometres, beautiful but dangerous, glaciers and endless open spaces, rugged mountain ranges**. *What does*

the second paragraph tell you about the mighty Yukon River? How does the third paragraph set up the story about to unfold? Talk with the children about what they think might happen next in the narrative, allowing them to write their predictions on post-it notes to stick around a copy of the illustration.

Repeat this close reading exercise for the next double-page spread on pages 10–11 (children might note how the page numbers are on gold nuggets!), considering what they found out about the First Nations from the text, from the larger than life Wolf and Crow standing for the moieties, and from the ‘background’ spread of stampedes and First Nations people heading up the page on and by the river.

Session 2: Focus — Introducing Shaaw Tláa/Kate Carmack; different spreads tell different stories

This session focuses on the next four spreads, the role of Shaaw Tláa in launching the Klondike Gold Rush, and the different techniques Flora uses to tell her story.

Share the spread on pages 12–13: **16 August 1896, Bonanza Creek Yukon Territory**. *What do you think is happening here? What do you find out about Shaaw Tláa — who was also known as Kate Carmack — her descent from the Tagish Wolf clan and Tlingit Crow clan, her personality and skills? How does the information you read in the text relate to what you see in the illustration?* Children might comment that we see Kate depicted three times, and each demonstrates her resourcefulness and understanding of the Yukon, her place in the group of men with whom she is travelling. *What do we notice about the characterization across the spread?* Children may note, for example, Kate’s red shirt giving us a clear indicator that we are focusing on her as she gathers pine seeds, hunts rabbits, gathers food, joins her menfolk. *What does each scene within the tableau convey?* If there is too much to focus on at once and the children find it hard to focus on the smaller details, provide them with a viewfinder to investigate parts of the illustration more closely. This is simply a piece of A4 card or paper with a small square or rectangle cut out, the children can then move this around the illustration to focus on these smaller details and then talk about what they might say about what they observe, how the parts fit with the whole. As well as the details children can tune into the bigger picture and themes across the text such as the golden sun from the cover repeated here, the mighty Yukon meandering below in the distance.

Turn to share the next spread **Kate Carmack (Shaaw Tláa)** and consider how this advances the story. The opening sentence resolves the ellipsis of the previous page (**more than just fish and game...**) and where the previous spread was like scenes from a film, here we have a more of a close-up freeze-frame of the stillness as Kate discovers a huge nugget of gold. Invite the children to consider what we see in the illustration — Kate single-handedly finding the gold - and what we read in the text about her rights as a First Nations woman. We learn that “[t]his account [...] is only one of many versions of the discovery”: *what do you think really happened? Why might there be different competing accounts — Kate found it; her brother Keish found it; her white husband George found it — and what is the impact of this story being told in the different ways?*

Now turn the page and look at the impact of the page turn. *How does Flora’s choice to switch from the tranquil close-up of Kate to the all-male reaction to the news of her discovery make us feel?* Again, read

both the words and the pictures: *how do the men's facial expressions and body language sit with what you read in the text? Do the headlines add to your engagement with and understanding of the situation? What do you think the brushstroke of gold snaking across the spread is meant to convey? Why might Flora have included it, how do you think you might respond to the page if it were not there?* Encourage the children to consider that, like every word, every mark on the page is a conscious artistic decision.

Now turn the page one more time. *Are you surprised by what you see? How does this page and its various elements, link to what you have already read?* Support the children in unpicking how this spread explains **The Eternal Allure of Gold**, how Flora has drawn together ancient cultures' fascinations including the Egyptians, the link between the nugget and the sun; the split between light and dark, underground and overground; coins, artefacts, and the Gold Standard. *Why do you think Flora and her editor decided to include this informational aside from the main story of the Gold Rush? What does it add to your understanding of the importance of Kate's discovery and engagement with the unfolding narrative?* Children may note again that Flora uses an ellipsis "**One woman [...] was preparing to set sail from Seattle...**" to set up what comes next.

Session 3: Focus — Introducing Martha Black; exploring composition and layout

Share the double-page spread **Martha Black: The Stateswoman**, wordless but for its title. Invite the children to speculate about the illustration with some wh- questions: who, what, where, when, why. *Who do you think we are seeing here? What do you know about them? What do you think is happening? What are the people doing? When and where is this happening? Where might they be going? When does this fit with what we have read so far? Why do you think this woman — and the others with whom she is travelling — are setting off on their journey?*

Invite them also to consider how this spread relates to what they have read about the early stages of the Klondike Gold Rush - they may recall that the previous sentence spoke of "**one woman who longed to begin a new chapter in her own story**" *Why might Martha (presumably the focus of the spread is the person named in the title?!) be feeling this way? How might the gold rush help her write such a chapter?* Encourage the children to think about the layout and directionality of the spread: Martha and others looking **into** the book, left to right, and how the gutter divides those on board from those staying on the dockside: *what does this separation convey?*

Turn to the next spread (pages 22–23) and after sharing and inviting the children to reflect on what they have read and seen, consider again how Flora places Martha on the right-hand page nearest the page turn. They might observe that her husband and friend enjoy warmth and domesticity while Martha, on the right, although she too is inside, is surrounded by thoughts of the outside, of panning or trekking the trail. *How do her facial expression and body language contribute to your sense of her mood?* The children might also note how the swirl of gold blows across the page (*cf.* pages 16–17): *what does this convey, and again, how might the illustration affect you without it?*

The next five spreads (pp.24–35: Supplies for the Journey; pp.26–27: Routes to the Gold Fields; pp.28–29: Trekking the Chilkoot Trail; pp.30–31: Chilkoot Golden Staircase; pp.32–33: Ridings the Rapids to Dawson City) convey the consequence of Martha’s decision to follow her **destiny**. Each spread advances the story as Flora uses a different illustratorial technique, so you could allocate one spread to each of five readers, invite them to scrutinise it and report back to the others. Consider:

- **Supplies for the Journey:** *What impression does this extensive list make on you? Why do you think each item might have been included? Do you think they would all still be included, or might some items be removed, replaced or added? How do the vignettes of many of the items, and of Martha being measured for her outfit, convey the preparations necessary?*
- **Routes to the Gold Fields:** *Have you previously considered a map as a form of illustration? What choices does Flora make in the way she presents the information about the different routes to the Klondike? How does the visual information relate to what you learn about the different routes in the text? What do the legend and the inset zoomed map add to your appreciation of the journey Martha and other stampedeers might be about to undertake? Does this spread help you decide which route you might take if you were in Martha’s shoes?*
- **Trekking the Chilkoot Trail:** *Is this the route you thought she might take? Why do you think it was her choice? What do you think are the particular challenges? How do the four panels across the page affect you as a reader, and how do the illustrations deepen your engagement with and understanding of what it must have been like for Martha to undertake the journey? Children might notice the change in altitude and in weather conditions as the panels march across the pages, with Flora adding more blizzard-like snow on each panel.*
- **Chilkoot Golden Staircase:** *In this spread the children might consider the three different depictions of the staircase, and reflect on how Martha might be feeling in each case, from the panel showing her in her outfit and perhaps reflecting on the suitability of her boned skirt, tailored jacket and long skirt; the longshot on the left-hand page of the camp at the base of the staircase and the steady file of men — or mostly men — passing through and up; and of Martha leading her party on the right-hand page, the wind blowing snow in their faces and their straining aching muscles and panting breath making them aware of every step of the challenging climb. Whether the children live in houses, flats with stairs or attend a school on two or more floors, they could calculate the equivalent of climbing 1500 steps, then contemplate factoring in the cold, wind and snow!*
- **Riding the Rapids to Dawson City:** *The final spread to consider in Martha’s journey shows her riding the rapids, indeed Flora shows three separate parts of the descent to Lake Lindemann — just before setting off; mid-flow; and almost at the bottom. What is the impact on you as a reader of seeing Martha in the prow at these three different stages of the descent, and how does this illustration relate to what you read about this stage of the journey? Flora describes the ride as exhilarating: do you agree? Consider Martha’s facial expression and body language at each of the three points; in the first and third she holds on firmly, in the middle of the page she is holding on with one hand, pointing with another and seems to be smiling. Do you think she genuinely enjoyed*

the descent? How do you think you would feel? Does ‘exhausted but triumphant’ capture her feelings well, do you think?

Session 4: Focus — Introducing Belinda Mulrooney; exploring viewpoint

Share the double-page spread **Belinda Mulrooney & Nero: The Boomtown Entrepreneur**, again wordless but for its title. If necessary, work with the children to consider and clarify the meaning of the terms: **boomtown** and **entrepreneur**.

As before, invite the children to speculate about the illustration with some “who, what, where, when, why” questions: *Where do you think this scene is happening? Where is the woman going? What do you think you might know about her from her facial expression and body language, what she is wearing and what she is carrying? What is the rolled up document and what might be in her case? What snowy street is she walking along, and why is she going in one direction — into the book, left to right, when everyone else — all men, all in muted tones — is going in the opposite direction? And what is her relation to the enormous dog? What clues do all these elements give you to her character and personality?*

Belinda is introduced with another of Flora’s elliptical sentences: **it would take grit and determination to be a success in this town...** *What do we find out about her from the spread on pages 36–37?* The children will perhaps locate her two-thirds up on the right hand spread and can consider how seeing her on the busy streets of Seattle adds to their understanding of and engagement with her story. Like Bessie Couture — whose biography is briefly shared on pages 38–39, and who had to fight racism as well as misogyny in her battle to succeed — Belinda was an entrepreneur, another group of women trying to beat the odds to thrive in the Gold Rush towns, a setting famously described as **No place for women**. Support the children in considering what we find out about Belinda and Bessie, and how we learn this information, from the words as well as the picture, and how Flora varies the viewpoint, and why she might do this.

The children might observe that we see these women in urban settings, the new boom towns that are springing up to accommodate the needs of the — mostly — men rushing to the goldfields — and that they are often shown in front of the buildings that they own or are constructing: Bessie’s restaurants in Skagway, Belinda planning and instructing her architects and builders in the construction of her roadhouse in Bonanza Creek and her Fairview Hotel in Dawson. *What do these views of Belinda — in front of the Fairview and from above with the blueprints of her new venture spread in front of her, and of Bessie in front of The Kitchen — tell us about their place in their businesses?*

Session 5: Focus — Introducing Nellie Cashman; exploring directionality and the grammar of the page

Flora introduces her final portrait with a simple and powerful spread of Nellie Cashman holding up a large golden nugget: *how does this image affect you as a reader?* Children might reflect on the palette, the gilded background almost reminiscent of an illuminated letter in a manuscript, and the sparse text, the way Nellie holds the nugget up for inspection, admiration or as if in offering.

Turn to the spread on pages 46–47, which shows us Nellie in two locations — Arizona and the Klondike. Invite the children to consider how the images we see of Nellie here complement what is shared in the text and what more we find out about her, from her facial expression and body language, for example. *How do the contrasting images of Nellie make you feel, on the left-hand page (verso) as she battles in the hot Arizona sun, on the right-hand page (recto) as she strides into the future with her pack and winter clothing against the snow and wind?* The children might tune in to the directionality of this image, characters moving into the book, left to right suggest they will move the story on, whereas moving right to left typically goes against the narrative flow. *What else do the three vignettes of Nellie suggest about her?* We see her confidently arms akimbo in the Cassiar at the bottom-left of page 46; hauling her sledge independently at top-right; and contemplating the possibility of making money from the gold rush at the bottom-right of page 47.

Ask children if they know the expression “a picture is worth a thousand words”, and if they can explain what it means before sharing pages 48–49. *How do Flora’s illustrations help you to understand the processes of panning and of pouring water and paydirt into the sluice box?* Turn to pages 50–51 and turn the page to show how paydirt is mined: encourage the children to look in detail at how Flora uses the page, its orientation, the labelled rock strata, the zoomed in miner at bottom-left, to support the explanation she is offering in the text.

Finally, share the last two spreads of Nellie consoling miners on pages 52–53 and the celebration of her **hitting the bonanza** on pages 54–55. Discuss how Flora uses layout, facial expressions, body language, and colour palette to convey different moods and emotions.

Read on to the end of the book, encouraging the children to bring to bear what they have learned about layout, composition, directionality and characterization to draw meaning from the remaining spreads. Share the beautiful scene of bison in the snow, of stampedes heading across the page into blizzard conditions, of Martha in a field of wildflowers, of Nellie and Belinda wondering at the aurora borealis. End by returning, as the book does, to Kate Carmack in a forest of cardinals, how her life turned out, and how the women we have met are now celebrated and their contribution recognised.

After reading

Reread and discuss the book as a whole, comparing the depictions of the women on the title page with what we know and think about them at the end. *How has your understanding changed? How did Flora’s use of words and illustration affect our engagement and understanding?*

Draw together the children’s responses to the book with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls ‘the four basic questions’. These questions give pupils accessible starting points for discussion: Tell me...

- *was there anything they liked about this picturebook?*
- *was there anything that they particularly disliked...?*

- *was there anything that puzzled them?*
- *were there any patterns...any connections that they noticed...?*

The openness of these questions encourages every pupil to feel that they have something to say. It allows everyone to take part in arriving at a shared view without the fear of the ‘wrong’ answer. (Aidan Chambers, *Tell Me: Children, Reading & Talk with The Reading Environment*, Thimble Press, 2011).

Allow plenty of time for the children to explore the book independently following these sessions. They may want to re-read, or they may be inspired to create their own illustrations (if so, allow time and space and access to art materials and reference photographs or videos to allow children to do this). You may want to get extra copies of the book to explore in group reading sessions or for interested children to borrow from the reading area or school library and read together.

You could also:

- Use dramatic approaches like [freeze framing](#) and [hot seating](#) to explore the women further, then go on to [write in role](#) as any of the women at key points in the story. For example, you could freeze frame Kate Carmack discovering the nugget, or debating with the menfolk who should stake the claim, or any of the other many incidents in her life, then write entries in a Gold Rush Diary or keep a Travel Journal.
- Deepen children’s understanding of the gold rush by carrying out further research, perhaps following up with some of the sources Flora shares on page 75, and the many internet resources that are available, then writing up their findings or presenting them in a way that they choose – perhaps as a mixture of text and illustration, as Flora does.
- Provide pen portraits of each of these women, drawing on information in the book as well as further facts they are able to discover from their wider research. Hotseating could be useful for this activity. A pen portrait is an informal description of a person or a group of people, a character sketch in words. A pen portrait may discuss ‘hard’ facts, such as age or gender, but it should also focus on ‘softer’ aspects, such as attitudes and appearance. It might be interesting to let the children choose the characters they think are worth noting, likely to include the four women we have read about, but perhaps also Bessie Couture, George Carmack, Skookum Jim Mason, Káa Goox, Will Black, etc. Information you could include in the pen portrait might be name, appearance, background, likes and dislikes, as well as any other ideas they have expressed and the writer’s own inferences about them from what they have read.

Other Books and Resources related to Flora Delargy

- *Rescuing Titanic: A True Story of Quiet Bravery in the North Atlantic* (Wide Eyes Editions, 2021)
- Discussing *Rescuing Titanic* with Nikki Gamble: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l48w8GIDgQA>
- Discussing *Gold Rush* with Nikki Gamble: <https://vimeo.com/1024269676>

©The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education

You may use this teaching resource freely in your school but it cannot be commercially published or reproduced or used for anything other than educational purposes without the express permission of CLPE.

- [CLPE Teaching notes for Rescuing Titanic Klaus Flugge Prize 2022 shortlist](#)
- [CLPE Teaching notes for *Rescuing Titanic* yoto Carnegie Medal for Illustration 2023 shortlist](#)

These resources were created by The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE).

CLPE is a charity working to improve literacy in primary schools. Find out more about our training courses, free resources and high-quality teaching sequences. [Support us to continue to provide resources that raise children's engagement and attainment in literacy to schools and parents.](#)

Visit: www.clpe.org.uk