mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “How is gold made?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hi, it's Doug! Gold. Some people are obsessed with it. They love the look of gold. I myself have a few things lying around here which look gold. This Minecraft pickaxe, a trophy, even this little nugget I picked up at a rock shop. You might recognize it as fool's gold. It's not real gold, but you get the idea.

Someone named Janvi has a question about gold. Let's give her a call now.

[Video Call]
- Hi, Doug!
- Hi, Janvi!
- I have a question for you. How is gold made?
- That's a great question.

Look around you. You probably can find something that looks like it's gold, too. A gold fidget spinner, maybe you've got a gold trophy, a doorknob even. But all of these things are just gold-colored. They're not real gold. Real gold is its own thing—its own material.

If you want to find actual gold, chances are it's going to be more expensive. Like, maybe one of your parents has a real gold necklace or a gold ring. Those cost a bit more. That's the thing about real gold—it's a really valuable material, it's worth a lot of money.

One ounce of real gold, that's the amount of gold in a coin about this size, is worth—well what would you guess? A hundred dollars? Nope, five hundred dollars? No., one ounce of gold is worth over a thousand dollars. It's one thing to find a penny or a nickel on the sidewalk somewhere. Imagine if you found a coin like this instead.

But where does real gold come from? Is it something we can make? What do you think?

Now would be a good time to pause the video and discuss.

Okay. You ready?

People who work with metal can take a piece of gold and heat it. Then, they can shape it into what they want like a gold coin or into a piece of gold jewelry. But that's always starting out with a piece of gold, to begin with. Gold isn't something we can make out of some other material.

Instead, gold is something that has to be found and dug out of the earth. When it's found, it often looks like this—a gold nugget. Or sometimes it's found as little gold flakes which gold miners have to pick out of gravel along the bottom of a river. And to find even a tiny flake is incredibly difficult.

In fact, if it were any easier to find, gold wouldn't be worth so much. That's a big part of why gold is so expensive. There just isn't that much to be found anywhere on Earth.

Now, there have been a few places on Earth where a long time ago, people did find more gold than usual. Like places near Alaska, in California, in Australia. These are all places where a Gold Rush happened—places where a few people discovered some gold nuggets on the

ground and then very quickly, lots of people rushed in to find all the gold that they could. These people were hoping to get rich fast.

But even with all that gold that's been found, there still isn't that much of it.

Still, what about stories of buried treasure? A treasure chest filled with gold coins. Could you ever find something like that?

Believe it or not, a few years ago a couple living in California was out on a walk near their home when one of them noticed a rusted metal can sticking up out of the ground. As they dug around, they found several more—each filled with real gold coins.

It's thought that these coins were buried by someone after the California Gold Rush. For some reason, the person buried their treasure and somehow forgot all about it. Or maybe they died before telling anyone where they were. The couple that found the coins got to keep them, and all together they were worth over $10,000,000.

This isn't even the first time something like this has happened. In the basement of an old theater in Italy, someone found a jar filled with hundreds of ancient gold coins.

Could there be hidden treasure buried somewhere near where you live? You never know.

So in summary, real gold isn't something that's made. It's found. It's incredibly rare, which is part of why it's so valuable.

That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Janvi, for asking it!