



## THE EUREKA DEBATE

December 3rd marks the anniversary of the Eureka Rebellion. This is the name given to a rebellion by gold miners who stood against colonial forces in a field at Eureka, near Ballarat Victoria in 1854.

This event is seen as an important development in Australian democracy, as the miners demanded the attention of the authorities for fair treatment and equality.

*However, there are always two sides to every story.*



The miners revolted after strict licence requirements that had been introduced and aggressively enforced by the government. Many miners objected to paying a tax that was introduced without discussion and fair representation from the mining communities.

However, the discovery of gold had created unexpected challenges for the authorities. Once the word got out about how a fortune could be made panning for gold in the rivers and creeks throughout Victoria, the gold rush was on!

A mass migration of people travelled across from all parts of the country, and indeed from around the world. At Eureka, the government found itself suddenly needing to manage a large number of people that had rapidly gathered in one area. Every day new people arrived and established individual camps, cramped together staking a claim to diggings on land that was owned by the Crown.

Living conditions for the miners and their families were difficult and the newcomers struggled. There was no sanitation and little availability of essential items for day to day living, such as food and equipment. Small traders established stalls to sell goods, but as soon as supplies arrived the shelves were stripped bare. Shelter was either basic or non-existent and any miner who owned a tent was considered to be fortunate.

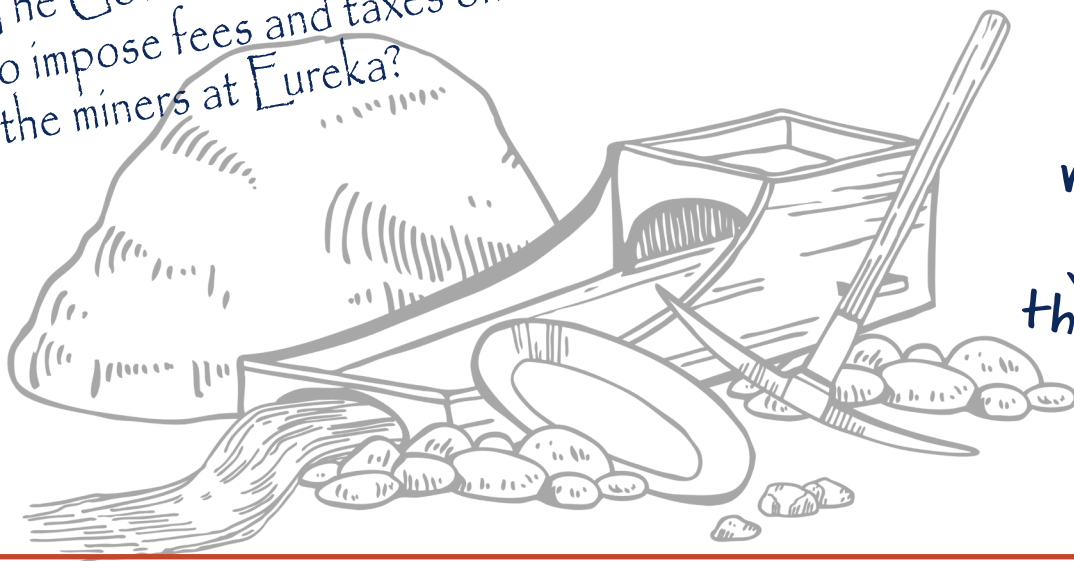
In addition to these challenges, conflict regularly broke out among the people, as they fought to keep their prized little plot of land from another miner taking it over. If anyone discovered gold, they usually kept it to themselves for fear of being robbed, or even murdered. Personal security was at risk for everyone.

The government had to do something to manage and control the situation. Maintaining law and order was the first priority and a police force was assembled. Regular troop patrols were important in keeping the peace amongst the miners and their families.

Next, a licence system was introduced. This could help the authorities keep track of who was at the diggings and how many people were involved. It also, provided revenue to help pay for the services and facilities that were required for the new communities being established.

*It all seemed like a great plan .....*

*Did The Government have the right to impose fees and taxes on the miners at Eureka?*



*What do you think?*



Gather two teams together, each with 4 members, and decide which team will defend the affirmative and negative points of view.

The topic to debate is:

## The Government had every right to impose fees and taxes on the miners at Eureka



### AFFIRMATIVE

The colonial government - struggling to manage and control mass migration of people through an unexpected gold rush.



*This team will have representatives of the government. However, one member of this team must be a police trooper working for the government to keep law and order.*

### NEGATIVE

The gold miners - fighting for individual freedom and liberty against oppression through fair representation.

*This team will have representatives from the gold mining community. One person in this team must be a family member of a miner.*



Each team will need to research details of the Eureka rebellion to prepare arguments for the debate.

Being able to imagine yourself in the shoes, or position of a miner, family member, police trooper, or government official will help you consider their point of view and what they might have been thinking during the events leading up to the rebellion at the time.

The following prompts can help guide preparation for your arguments and any rebuttals you will encounter!

- What benefits could the government have gained if miner's grievances were heard and terms negotiated before issuing taxes and licence fees?
- What do you think the government did with the money collected from the licence fees and taxes at the time?
- How could tax money have been used to satisfy the mining community?
- What do you think the miners were thinking when they staked their claim for diggings on Crown land?
- Why did the government introduce strict alcohol laws on the Ballarat diggings?
- Think about possible options the government could have taken if a miner did not pay their fees.

**Good luck  
May the best team win!**