



# You Precious Things

**Gold. Diamonds.** Glittering, gleaming, highly prized, highly priced. Two of the most precious substances on Earth. And here's something else the two have in common: they're both elements.

You're probably not surprised that gold is an element—after all, it is a metal—but diamonds? You won't find them on the periodic table. But a diamond is an element all the same. It's what happens when you take a lump of the element carbon and bury it for millions of years under tons of pressure.



## Dazzling—but Dangerous?

**Carbon exists in more than one form. Graphite is a soft, black form. A diamond is a hard, colorless form. In fact, a diamond is the hardest substance found in nature, taking its strength from the very tight arrangement between carbon atoms. Diamonds can cut glass, which is why the lowest quality stones are used as cutting tools. Gem diamonds, the kind in beautiful jewelry, were first found in streambeds in India and Borneo. Many now come from South Africa and can also be found in Australia, Russia, and Angola.**

**Two of the most famous diamonds are the Koh-i-Noor, now among the English crown jewels, and the Cullinan, from which 105 individual stones were cut. But the most famous is the Hope Diamond. Or, some might say, infamous. Read on and decide for yourself.**

DISCOVERY EDUCATION SCIENCE CONNECTION

### Paris, France, 1668



French merchant named Jean Baptiste Tavernier brings a 112-carat (22,400 mg) blue diamond from India to France. Legend has it that the gem is cursed because a thief stole it long ago from the eye of a statue of the Hindu goddess Sita. Tavernier sells the diamond to King Louis XIV, who has it cut into a 67-carat heart-shaped stone and names it the Blue Diamond of the Crown. On his next trip to India, the story goes, Tavernier is killed by wild dogs.

King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette inherit the "French Blue." In 1792, at the height of the French Revolution, it is stolen along with all the other French crown jewels. The king and queen lose their heads at the guillotine, and the diamond supposedly makes its way to Wilhelm Fals, a Dutch diamond cutter. Fals recuts it—and his son steals it from him. The father dies of grief over the theft. The son commits suicide.

In 1830, Henry Hope buys a 44.5-carat deep blue oval-cut diamond gem experts agree is the French Blue. It becomes known as the Hope Diamond; over the next 80 years, at least three owners meet with tragedy. In 1911, a wealthy and eccentric American socialite named Evalyn Walsh McLean purchases it. Later her son is killed in a car crash; her husband dies in a mental hospital; and her daughter dies of an overdose of sleeping pills.

Mrs. McLean dies (of natural causes), and New York jeweler Harry Winston purchases all her jewels in 1947. Eleven years later, he gives the stone to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., where it is on permanent display. He may have been glad to get rid of it.