

## Unit 14 The British Empire: how was it that, by 1900, Britain controlled nearly a quarter of the world?

### About the unit

In this unit pupils gain an overview of the growth of the British Empire. They learn about how and why Britain acquired a worldwide Empire by focusing on the themes of trade, exploration, war and conquest. Pupils are encouraged to focus on specific people and events, to consider, in depth, various episodes in the history of the British Empire, and to consider the impact on indigenous peoples of the British desire for Empire.

This unit is expected to take 8–11 hours. There is scope to adjust some of the teaching activities to take account of time constraints in different schools.

### Where the unit fits in

This unit links to unit 12 ‘Middle-class life 1900’ in that the focus of this unit is 1900. It complements unit 11 ‘Industrial changes’ and provides an introduction to unit 18 ‘Twentieth-century conflicts’ in that one of the root causes of the First World War was the acquisition of, and perceived need for, empires. Links could be made with unit 9 ‘Shopping – past, present and future’ in the geography scheme of work.

### Expectations

#### At the end of this unit

**most pupils will:** demonstrate knowledge of the evolution and scale of the British Empire 1750–1900; describe the complex causes of its growth and the significance of the three strands of war, trade and exploration; describe the impact of British rule on a society such as India; account for the central importance of India in the functioning of the British Empire; describe key groups who played a part in the growth of the Empire, such as the East India Company and nineteenth-century explorers and missionaries; analyse an interpretation of a significant moment in the history of the Empire; select, organise and deploy information to describe some of the attitudes British people had towards the Empire in 1900

**some pupils will not have made so much progress and will:** demonstrate some knowledge of the way the British Empire grew 1750–1900; identify some valid reasons for its growth; describe some of the ways in which the British government gained control over overseas lands and peoples; suggest different reasons why individual people became involved in the work of the Empire; comment on the way a significant moment in the history of the Empire has been represented; select and combine information when commenting on British attitudes to the Empire in 1900

**some pupils will have progressed further and will:** demonstrate a detailed knowledge of stages in the development of the British Empire; analyse the complex causal links that led to the acquisition of colonies in three continents; analyse the complexities of the relationship between Britain and India; evaluate an interpretation of a significant moment in the history of the Empire; select, organise and deploy relevant information to produce a well-structured account of the development of the British Empire

### Prior learning

It is helpful if pupils have:

- some knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of British society in the nineteenth century
- identified trends across historical periods
- considered questions of causation, diversity and significance

### Language for learning

Through the activities in this unit pupils will be able to understand, use and spell correctly words relating to:

- trade, *eg trading posts, imports, exports*
- war, *eg conquest, man-o'-war*
- exploration, *eg navigation*
- empire, *eg imperial, colony, governor-general*

Reading – through the activities pupils could:

- select relevant information and link to other information, from a range of sources

### Resources

Resources include:

- world maps showing the growth of the British Empire in 1750, 1800 and 1900 with the extent of the British Empire marked in red
- a map of India in the eighteenth century
- a map of Africa in the nineteenth century
- source materials relating to goods in a grocer's shop in 1900
- source materials relating to the Black Hole of Calcutta
- Benjamin West's painting *The death of General Wolfe*
- CD-ROMs, *eg Britain 1750–1900 (The British Library)*
- websites, *eg [www.fordham.edu.halsall/africa/africasbook.html](http://www.fordham.edu.halsall/africa/africasbook.html); [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk); [www.fordham.edu.halsall/india/indiasbook.html](http://www.fordham.edu.halsall/india/indiasbook.html); [www.indiatime.com/history/history.htm](http://www.indiatime.com/history/history.htm); [www.indiagov.org/culture/history/intro.htm](http://www.indiagov.org/culture/history/intro.htm); the virtual museum at [www.j-sainsbury.co.uk](http://www.j-sainsbury.co.uk); *Spartacus Internet Encyclopaedia of British History 1700–1920 – [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/industry.html](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/industry.html)**

---

## Out-of-school learning

Pupils could visit the Royal Commonwealth Institute and the Liverpool Maritime Museum as well as restored trading and exploration ships, *eg Cutty Sark and SS Great Britain*.

---

## Future learning

Pupils can use their knowledge and understanding of the British Empire to make comparisons with the expansion of territory or zones of influence of twentieth-century powers. Pupils build on their understanding of the relationship between causes in unit 18 'Twentieth-century conflicts'.

### Where in the world was the British Empire in 1900?

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• about the geographical extent of the British Empire and the changes to this over time</li> <li>• that the reasons for the acquisition of the Empire can be categorised under the headings 'trade', 'exploration' and 'war'</li> <li>• to use prior knowledge to assess the validity of reasons why Britain gained an empire</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with the three world maps (the British Empire in c. 1750, c. 1800 and c. 1900), ask pupils to work out what had been lost and what gained.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to suggest possible reasons why people living on a small island off the north-west coast of Europe could gain (and lose) control of areas of land bigger than their own country. Provide pupils with a list of reasons, some correct, <i>eg the urge to explore unknown places</i>, and some incorrect, <i>eg expelled from their own land</i>. Ask pupils to use prior knowledge of the period to suggest which are correct/likely and which are incorrect/unlikely.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to sort correct/likely reasons into groups and devise a heading for each group. Alternatively, provide headings of 'trade', 'war' and 'exploration' as a basis for sorting. Reinforce the main reasons through class discussion, asking pupils to suggest possible links between the three main reasons.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify those areas of the world that were British colonies in 1765, 1800 and 1900</li> <li>• categorise possible reasons for the acquisition of an Empire of colonies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 'unlikely/incorrect' reasons could all be based on the 'push' factor as pupils will have prior knowledge of internal UK conditions and will be able to make an informed judgement.</li> </ul> |
|---|---|---|--|

Pupils should learn:

Pupils:

### How did overseas trade lead to the building of a powerful Empire of colonies?

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that many families in 1900 would have been able to buy goods from around the world and that most of these goods would have been from the British Empire</li> <li>• about the ways in which the East India Company expanded its trade and influence in India</li> <li>• to analyse and evaluate the different views about what happened in the 'Black hole of Calcutta'</li> <li>• about the ways in which India became vitally important to the British economy</li> <li>• to assess the impact of British rule in India</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce pupils to a 1900 grocery shop. Provide pupils with a range of source material, <i>eg labels, advertisements</i>, relating to the imperial origins of the selected goods.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to determine the country of origin of the goods. Using the 1900 world map, ask pupils to locate those goods with imperial origins and track shipping routes by which the goods would have come to Britain.</li> <li>• Focus on one area of the world, India, that became part of the British Empire primarily through trading activities. Use a map of India and 'focus-points', beginning in 1750, to describe the establishment of trading outposts in Madras and Bombay, and ways in which the East India Company developed its trading activities and used its private army to gain land.</li> <li>• Tell pupils about the background to the attack in 1756, by Siraj, ruler of Bengal, on Calcutta. Ask pupils to work with a range of source material which they analyse in order to answer the question <i>What really happened in the 'Black hole of Calcutta'?</i></li> <li>• Describe the steps by which the British government gradually took over control of most of India from the East India Company.</li> <li>• Provide pupils with information cards on a range of people, events and factors that contributed to making India one of the most important parts of the British Empire, <i>eg the opening of the Suez canal, the destruction of Indian hand-weaving and craft industries, the role of Benjamin Disraeli, the exporting of cotton materials from Britain, Queen Victoria becoming Empress of India</i>. Ask pupils to create a web of causation, showing the interlinking factors that made India the 'Jewel in the Crown'.</li> <li>• Discuss with pupils the ways in which one country can become subject to another. Link back to work already done on military control and economic control. Consider, too, the cultural 'over-tide' that was imposed, sometimes from philanthropic motives that took no account of Indian customs, practices and preferences.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to consider, either individually or in groups, specific political, military, economic and social factors and events that imposed British standards and perceptions on the Indian people. Ask pupils to prepare to argue a case, in nineteenth-century role, either for or against the beneficial effects of British rule on the Indian people.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use examples to describe trading links with the British Empire which affected ordinary people</li> <li>• identify the main developments in British trading activities in India</li> <li>• analyse and evaluate sources of information to reach a reasoned conclusion about what happened in the 'Black hole of Calcutta'</li> <li>• give reasons for the importance of India in the British Empire by 1900 and explain the links between them</li> <li>• demonstrate an understanding that the role of the British in India was, and is, a controversial one</li> <li>• select, then synthesise information from a range of sources</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links can be made with unit 15 'Black peoples of America' and with the Triangular Trade.</li> <li>• Links can be made with unit 13 'Mughal India 1526–1857', to examine society, culture and achievements.</li> <li>• It is important that the British attitude to Empire and the effect this had on indigenous Indian peoples is not presented as a crude 'exploiters versus exploited'.</li> <li>• It is important that pupils debate within the context of the nineteenth century. Modern attitudes to nineteenth-century Empire should not intrude into the final debate in this section.</li> <li>• It will, of course, be important for teachers to exercise sensitivity when considering this part of Britain's imperial history in the context of contemporary multicultural Britain.</li> <li>• Language for learning: pupils develop and apply reading and writing skills as they synthesise information from sources about the British in India to write an explanation with facts and ideas organised in a sequence.</li> <li>• ICT: pupils organise a structured internet search to find out relevant information about the significant person or event listed on their information card. They copy and paste relevant information to provide the basis of a causation web – what made India the 'Jewel in the Crown'.</li> </ul> |
|--|---|---|---|

Pupils should learn:

Pupils:

### What part did explorers, adventurers and missionaries play in creating the British Empire?

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that explorers and adventurers played an important part in adding lands to the British Empire</li> <li>• about the activities of one explorer in particular and the contributions of several to the expansion of the British Empire</li> <li>• about the positive and negative aspects of the role of Christian missionaries in Africa</li> <li>• to identify and categorise factors contributing to the growth of Empire and assess their significance</li> <li>• to reach an informed judgement about the role of missionaries and communicate it in a given format</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain that the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were times when explorers and adventurers explored all parts of the world that were hitherto unknown to Europeans.</li> <li>• Provide pupils, in small groups, with summary biographies about explorers, eg <i>James Cook, David Livingstone, Mary Kingsley, Mungo Park, Cecil Rhodes</i>. Ask pupils to undertake a DARTs (directed activities related to text)-type activity to identify the motives, exploration, adventures and discoveries of one explorer and reach a conclusion as to how they contributed to the growth of the British Empire.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to decide who was the most significant explorer.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to present their findings to the class to build up an overview.</li> <li>• Link back to the presentations on African explorers, and ask the question <i>Why was there a scramble for Africa 1875–1900?</i> Give pupils a timeline of events relating to British involvement in Africa from the opening of the Suez canal in 1869 to victory in the Boer War in 1902. Pupils can use textbooks and existing resources to sort events into categories: keeping out other European powers; trade with Africa; protecting trade routes to India; gaining wealth through raw materials, eg <i>gold and diamonds</i>. Use the information to contribute to a class/group concept map to explain the 'Scramble for Africa'.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to consider the impact this 'Scramble for Africa' might have had on indigenous African people by first considering a range of British source material showing British attitudes. <i>How likely was it that African people would be able to continue with their lives, untouched by European influence?</i></li> <li>• Focus on one group of British people who tried to change African beliefs and culture: missionary societies and the missionaries.</li> <li>• Explore with pupils the extent and nature of nineteenth-century missionary activity in Africa and the links with medicine and education. This could be either missionary-specific or Bible society-specific, and focus on the arguments for and against the beneficial effects of this activity on indigenous African people.</li> <li>• Ask pupils to prepare a report for a newspaper evaluating the actions of a particular missionary or missionary society. Individually or in groups, pupils can assemble copy for tomorrow's edition. 'Front pages' are put together, pinned up on walls or screens, and compared in a whole-class discussion.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use their knowledge of one explorer to describe and explain some ways in which explorers contributed to the growth of the British Empire</li> <li>• identify some causes of the 'Scramble for Africa' and explain the links between them</li> <li>• describe and explain the impact of the work of British missionaries in Africa on the people among whom they worked</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As with any research exercise, less able pupils will need to be provided with simple textbooks or teacher-prepared accounts. Most pupils will need to be helped to structure their research with data-capture ideas such as timelines, mini question boxes, tables and charts, as appropriate.</li> <li>• The activities of missionaries and missionary societies needs approaching with sensitivity.</li> <li>• Links can be made with unit 15 'Black peoples of America' where it addresses slavery within the African continent and the activities of Europeans there.</li> <li>• When discussing exploration, it should be remembered that the lands were already known to those who lived there!</li> <li>• The 'Scramble for Africa' can be linked with work in unit 18 'Twentieth-century conflicts' on the causes of the First World War.</li> <li>• Key skills: these activities will provide opportunities for pupils to demonstrate evidence of communication (written and oral presentation, class discussion)</li> <li>• ICT: the use of a desktop-publishing package would allow pupils to take the role of investigative journalists. They can prepare reports, assemble copy and create 'Front pages'. Opinions and standpoints can be discussed by the whole class using a large screen or projector.</li> </ul> |
|---|---|--|--|

Pupils should learn:

Pupils:

### Did the British fight wars to gain colonies?

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that some colonies were added to the British Empire through peace treaties at the end of wars between European powers</li> <li>• that a painting of the death of General Wolfe is an interpretation of what actually happened</li> <li>• to analyse and evaluate different interpretations of the same event</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell pupils that there were times when wars between European powers resulted in Britain gaining colonies as 'prizes'.</li> <li>• Return to the three world maps (1765, 1800 and 1900) and 'fast-forward' along a timeline. Explain that:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the wars against France (ending in 1763) added French-held territories in Canada and India to those already held in North America and the Caribbean;</li> <li>– the Thirteen Colonies broke away from Britain to form the USA, having defeated the British in the War of American Independence (1775–83);</li> <li>– during the wars with France (1793–1815) Britain took over French, Spanish and Dutch-held lands in the Caribbean, and Dutch-held territories in Sri Lanka and South Africa</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Use a painting such as <i>The death of General Wolfe</i> by Benjamin West to explore attitudes to fighting wars to gain colonies. Ask pupils <i>How likely it was, in the heat of battle, that the General would die like this?</i> Ask what attitudes to war, soldiers, indigenous peoples, etc this painting shows. Provide pupils (either individually or in groups) with additional information about Benjamin West, reports of the death of Wolfe and other interpretations. Pupils put together a reasoned evaluation of the painting as an interpretation of the event. As a class, compare evaluations and discuss the differences.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop an overview of the ways in which wars between European powers resulted in the extension of the British Empire</li> <li>• explain how and why an interpretation has been produced</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would be possible to study <i>The death of Nelson</i> (also by Benjamin West) in place of <i>The death of General Wolfe</i>.</li> <li>• Key skills: these activities provide opportunities for pupils to demonstrate evidence of communication, working with others, improved learning and performance (by comparing and discussing their evaluations).</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|--|

### How did British people celebrate Empire Day?

- |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that British people celebrated Empire Day</li> <li>• about how and why the British Empire expanded</li> <li>• to consider the significance of factors leading to the creation of the British Empire</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell pupils that for many years British people celebrated Empire Day on 1 June.</li> <li>• Use a range of sources to illustrate that towns and villages, churches and other organisations all put on shows, plays, entertainments, exhibitions, etc to celebrate the British Empire.</li> <li>• Give pupils, in groups, one theme from 'trade', 'exploration' and 'war'. Ask them to make a presentation to the rest of the class to explain what part their theme played in the growth of the British Empire. The presentations could be in drama, tableaux, series of interviews, etc, as it might have been presented/celebrated by pupils in 1900.</li> <li>• Pupils research, prepare and make presentations.</li> <li>• Lead a discussion to summarise the significance of the different themes. This could be enhanced through the use of explanation cards which pupils have to include or exclude.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate understanding of attitudes to Empire in 1900 through preparing an Empire Day presentation</li> <li>• explain the ways in which the British government gained control of nearly one quarter of the world before 1900</li> <li>• identify and explain significant factors in the expansion of the British Empire</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This activity needs to be firmly located in 1900, to aid understanding of the historical context for certain attitudes and values.</li> <li>• Citizenship: teachers may wish to develop this to support work about the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the UK and the need for mutual respect and understanding.</li> <li>• This activity can be extended by looking at a range of source material to consider British attitudes to their Empire.</li> </ul> |
|---|---|--|---|