

Teachers' notes – British Empire

Aims

This unit provides pupils with a range of historical sources that tell us about the British Empire. The sources offer a variety of different perspectives on its politics, products and economics from the reign of Queen Victoria.

The task is to investigate these sources to answer the key historical question: What was the British Empire?

At the end of the unit, pupil's notes can also inform a class debate, and help pupils to write a historian's preface to a new book on Empire.

Method

Before attempting this unit, pupils should have completed **Start here**. This will ensure that they are familiar with the enquiry-based method, LACE, which underpins their learning. LACE gives pupils four steps to help them to think and work like a historian using sources. These are:

Look: Describe what you can see

Ask: What questions do you need to ask, and answer, to make sense of what you have seen?

Conclude: What have you learned about the issue that you are investigating from this source?

Expand: What more would you like to know about? How can you find out?

On completing this unit, pupils will have tackled a variety of different types of source. As a follow up to the on-screen work, you might like to lead a discussion on the nature of the different types of sources pupils have used in their investigation. What are the strengths and weaknesses of different types of source? What kind of information does each source provide? Why are some sources more difficult to use?

Sources

Why do some objects survive? How do the four steps of LACE help us find out about the past by examining objects?

With a written source we can learn both from what is being said, and how it is being said. Ask pupils to think about the different types of document they have seen, and how these differ in terms of tone of voice. There is a huge range of different types of document included in the resource – letters, newspapers, government reports, advertisements, plans and maps. Encourage pupils to think about the different ways in which these provide insight.

It is helpful to discuss the idea that the artist or photographer has chosen to depict a scene in a particular way. Both paintings and photographs may have been made to convey a particular message.

Learning objectives

In this unit, pupils will:

- develop an understanding of the different types of historical source materials as evidence for the past
- increase their knowledge and understanding of some of the key aspects of the British Empire
- begin to infer thoughts, perceptions and opinions from the period using a range of sources, and appreciate differences in perceptions between past and present
- combine information from a number of sources when presenting what they have learnt

Key stage 2 curriculum links

This unit is relevant to teachers following National Curriculum History - Breadth Study: Unit 11a: Victorian Britain.

- A study of the impact of significant individuals, events and changes in work and transport on the lives of men, women and children from different sections of society.
- Knowledge and understanding of events, people and changes in the past: Pupils should be taught to identify and describe reasons for, and results of, historical events, situations, and changes in the periods studied.

- Links to **Citizenship** - pupils should be taught: to talk and write about their opinions, and explain their views, on issues that affect themselves and society; to reflect on spiritual, moral, social, and cultural issues, using imagination to understand other people's experiences; to think about the lives of people living in other places and times, and people with different values and customs.

Using this resource

This unit is designed for use online. Children's engagement with the historical sources is augmented by full and simplified transcripts of documents, audio transcripts, the ability to zoom into images to explore them in detail. Every step features support and guidance designed to help pupils to answer the key historical question - What was the British Empire?

The unit also features an electronic notebook where pupils can record their ideas about each source they evaluate. The notes that pupils complete during this unit can be printed and used as the basis for a further piece of work.

Summary of activities

Introduction

This can be a difficult concept for children to explore independently. To start the unit, it would be helpful to introduce the term Empire using the Imperial Federation World Map from 1886 on the interactive whiteboard. A high-resolution image of the map, a LACE diagram and a set of prompt questions are provided to support this introduction in the Interactive whiteboard resources section in these notes. Teachers could provide a definition of the term Empire, briefly refer to the origins of the British Empire and explain its expansion during Queen Victoria's reign.

Starter activity

This starter activity is designed to give pupils a broad introduction to the British Empire and reinforce the LACE methodology (Look, Ask, Conclude, Expand).

With the help of prompt questions given by the presenter, pupils examine an original map of the world at the end of the nineteenth century. The map depicts the countries within the British Empire. This source contains a huge amount of symbolism that

offers insight into how Britain viewed its Empire. The figure of Britannia is shown seated on a globe. The countries of the Empire are shown offering tribute. The key ideals of freedom, fraternity and federation are reflected in the imagery.

Main activity

Pupils are then invited to explore an interactive version of the Federation map. They click on highlighted countries to access different sources. Pupils make notes on these sources and use them to help to answer the question: What was the British Empire?

Extension activities

On completing the unit pupils have the opportunity to print or save their notes on the sources they investigated. These can be used as evidence of their learning, and understanding of the LACE methodology.

Pupils could return to these sources to prepare for a class discussion, debating the question: Did the British Empire do more harm than good?

See the Interactive whiteboard resources section of these notes for guidance on ways to prepare and manage this debate.

Pupils could also use their notes, and the outcomes of a class debate, as the starting point to write a historian's preface to a book called *The British Empire: Greatest on Earth?*

Teachers could use the following prompt questions to help pupils to explore this task:

What did Britain gain from having an Empire?

Was the British Empire good for the countries that were a part of it?

What is your opinion of the British Empire?

It is important that teachers try to explore the perceptions and attitudes of the Victorians to the Empire as revealed in the sources for this activity. What do you think the Victorians felt about the Empire from looking at these sources? Do Victorian

attitudes differ from those of today? Would all Victorians think the same way? Is there a different view of the Empire?

Historical source credits and captions for Queen Victoria

- Imperial Federation World Map. Map of the world showing the British Empire from *The Graphic*, 1886 (V&A NAL Pressmark PP.44.X)
- Letter written in 1838 by missionaries in Australia asking for help from the Governor of New South Wales (TNA: CO 201/280)
- Letter concerning immigrants from India who went to Trinidad. 1857 (TNA: CO 318/218)
- Pair of baggy embroidered cotton trousers from Burma. They were gathered at the waist by means of a cord and would have been worn by a Yinbaw farmer. They were collected by Sir James George Scott, a colonial administrator for Burma (Museum no. 0798(IS))
- Necklace of glass beads made in South Africa. British people were able to collect examples of beadwork, like this necklace, through their involvement in the Anglo-Zulu Wars (V&A: 1488-1903)
- Souvenir plate for the Golden Jubilee in 1887, featuring the extent of the British Empire (V&A: CIRC.198-1966)
- Illustration of the Colonies Court at the Great Exhibition in 1851. This shows the importance of the Empire's natural resources to Victorian Britain (V&A: 19536:12)
- Letter to England reporting on the progress of young boys sent to Australia in the 1840s (TNA: HO 45/1838)
- Article from the *Illustrated London News* describing the exhibits in the Canadian court at The Great Exhibition in 1851 (TNA: ZPER 34/18)
- A thanksgiving prayer given in churches across Britain following the Indian Mutiny in 1859 (TNA: HO 45/6857)
- Paisley shawl from Kashmir in India in around 1850. These shawls had been fashionable since the late eighteenth century. This one was shown at the Great Exhibition (V&A: 772-1852)
- Biscuit tin, 1894 (V&A: M.257-1983)
- Watercolour drawings for the cover of a book called *Colonia* souvenir album of the Colonies published in 1889 (TNA: COPY 1/77f463)
- A woman's dress from Abyssinia (now called Ethiopia). It was taken by British troops at the siege of Magdala in 1868. It may have belonged to the second wife of the Ethiopian Emperor (V&A: 399-1869)
- Illustration from *The Graphic* showing scenes from life in Ireland, 1882 (TNA: ZPER 35/9)
- Photograph of Queen Victoria having a lesson in Hindustani from her Muslim servant, Munshi Hafiz Abdul Karim, 1897 (TNA: COPY 1/432f34)
- Furniture fabric. called *The British Empire*, designed in 1887 (V&A: CIRC.837-1967)
- A board game called *A tour through the British Colonies*. London is shown as the centre of the Empire, 1853 (V&A: E.2650:1 to 3-1953)