

### **The British Empire – where the sun never set**

At its peak the British Empire was the largest empire the world had ever known. It was said 'the sun never sets on the British Empire' because its span across the globe ensured that the sun was always shining on at least one of its numerous colonies or subject nations. Its power and influence stretched all over the globe for several centuries. For better or worse it had a massive impact on the history of the world. It was a product of the European age of discovery that began with the maritime explorations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which sparked the era of the European colonial empires. The America's colonisation forming part of the first era of the British Empire.

Trade by British companies largely drove its expansion. The East India Company in 1600 established outposts in parts of India. This led to expansion in the Far East including Penang and Singapore. The Hudson Bay Company led the way in Eastern Canada. The first permanent presence in Africa was at James Island on the Gambia River. Later the British landed at the Cape of Good Hope, going on to conquer what became South Africa. The Slave Trade in West Africa and the Caribbean flourished. Britain lost America but then went on to acquire New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and other islands in the Pacific. The British extended their influence in the sheikdoms of southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf including Aden. Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar became key links through the Mediterranean in the line of communication to India - making use of the newly French built Suez Canal.

The British Empire's second era and the one that is most associated with it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the Victorian period was when it was at its height. Africa became the forefront of its expansion – Egypt, Sudan and Nigeria. The British East African Company extended its influence in Uganda and Kenya. The British South African Company in Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi. In 1910, an enthusiastic British public had the vision of an empire that extended from the Cape to Cairo. By 1921, the British Empire ruled over a population of 458m people, approximately one quarter of the world's population. It covered 36.7 million square kilometres, about a quarter of the earth's total land area. This included India, Australia, Canada, Palestine, Sierra Leone, Burma and Malaya to name a few.

**Category: History / British Empire / Great Britain**  
**Level: Intermediate / Upper Intermediate**

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## The British Empire – where the sun never set – *10<sup>th</sup> September 2010*

The British Empire's legacy is widespread across the globe. This can be seen in legal and governmental systems, economic practice, the military, educational systems, sports and in the global spread of English. Another success of the Empire is the infrastructure. Roads and in particular railways were built that still survive largely intact today. Many people still thank the British for building them. The British Empire was largely run by governors appointed by London. As it expanded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century its administration and policy was tightened. The colonies later obtained such complete control of their status that in 1907 they were given the new status of dominions, which following World War I led to a more formal status of these dominions. This allowed them to join the League of Nations which recognised them as independent states equal to Britain. In 1931 the Statute of Westminster recognised them as independent countries 'within the British Empire, equal in status' to the United Kingdom.

Following World War II nationalism prevailed in many countries. Most of the territories of the British Empire were hence granted independence - beginning with India in 1947 followed by Ceylon and Burma in 1948. The Gold Coast (Ghana) was the first African country to become independent. The British public no longer actively imperial in its sentiments accepted the idea of independence as a foregone conclusion. Many newly independent countries joined The Commonwealth of Nations, a free association of independent states. Today it survives as a flexible and durable institution. Queen Elizabeth II remains as head of The Commonwealth. The last significant British colony, Hong Kong, was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Today virtually nothing remains of the British Empire. America rules the world. As for the future – China is already venturing into Africa where the British and other European countries once ruled! Is history about to be repeated?

**Note: This is a huge topic. This lesson is merely a taste of Empire!**

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**EXERCISES**

**1. The British Empire:** What three things do you know about the British Empire? Go round the room swapping stories.

**2. Geography: The British Empire:** Name five countries that were part of the British Empire. Draw a map on the board/on paper then look at the map links on page 8. Use Google maps to compare countries to see how things have changed!

**3. Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

**4. Reading:** Get students to read the passage aloud. Swap readers every paragraph.

**5. Vocabulary:** Students look through the article. Underline/highlight any vocabulary you do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through & explain any words or phrases you do not understand.

**6. The article:** Students look through the article with the teacher.  
 a) What is the article about?      b) What do you think about the article?

**7. Life in the British Empire:** In pairs. Discuss together the following. What does it tell you about life back then?

1) Moving from another Empire country	5) The weather
2) Going up the jungle for some sport	6) Shopping
3) A visit from a relative back home in blighty	7) A telegram
4) The washing and cleaning	8) The horse & carriage

**8. Let's chat!** In pairs. You are in a tea room in London enjoying afternoon tea together. One of you is on holiday having just arrived from a British Empire country. Discuss the points listed about everyday living. How did you travel? Was the journey ok? Etc. How do you find living in the country? Use a stiff upper lip! (i.e. talk posh).

Your British Empire country _____	Time period _____
1 Weather	6 Horse and carriage / Cars
2 Sending a letter	7 Servants
3 Steam ship / Sailing clipper	8 Washing clothes
4 Cooking	9 Shopping
5 Leisure activities	10 Steam trains

The teacher may get some students to act out their scenes.

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**9. Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

**Student A**

- 1) Name three African countries that were part of the British Empire.
- 2) What does the phrase 'where the sun never sets' mean?
- 3) Where was Britain's first permanent presence in Africa?
- 4) What drove the British Empire's expansion?
- 5) Why were Malta and Cyprus part of the Empire?

**Student B**

- 1) What did the French build?
- 2) Who is now venturing into Africa?
- 3) What happened following World War II?
- 4) Name three legacies of Empire.
- 5) What happened in 1907?

**10. A typical day in the British Empire:** In pairs/groups. Choose one of the people listed. It is another typical day for you in the Empire where the sun never sets. The Governor and his wife are sitting on a veranda having a drink discussing his week. The governor orders a stiff gin & tonic and a Singapore Sling! Use a stiff British upper class accent! Continue the story. Interact your scene or mix your story.

Your chosen British Empire country _____	Date _____
1) Governor	3) A soldier
2) Wife of Governor	4) A servant of the wife

The teacher may get some students to act out their scenes.

**11. Quick debate:** Students A think the British Empire was a good thing. Explain why. Students B think it was wrong. Explain why.

**12. Pros and cons of Empire:** Think of three advantages and disadvantages of the British Empire. Discuss them briefly with your partner.

Advantages	Disadvantages
1	1
2	2
3	3

**13. Trade:** Think of four goods or commodities that were traded across the British Empire. Are they still traded today? Discuss with your partner.

1	3
2	4

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

**14. Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **The British Empire**. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

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**DISCUSSION**

**STUDENT A's QUESTIONS**

- 1) What economic benefits did the British Empire bring to Britain?
- 2) Do you think peoples' lives were better then or now in countries of the former British Empire?
- 3) How do you think the locals were treated by the British?
- 4) Why did the British conquer so many countries?
- 5) Which countries have been the most successful since their independence?
- 6) Which former British Empire countries in particular haven't prospered, have got dictators and their people silenced?
- 7) What advantages were there for the British of having an Empire?
- 8) If you had the choice of living in a former British Empire country which one would you live in and why?
- 9) What do you think the natives thought of the British during Empire?
- 10) Do you think migrating to an Empire country brought individuals opportunities in life?

**STUDENT B's QUESTIONS**

- 1) Should we regard the British Empire positively or negatively?
- 2) What do you think of the British Empire?
- 3) Do you think migration was voluntary or forced?
- 4) Do you think travelling was easier then than now?
- 5) What might you have done in the evenings 100 years ago in Empire land?
- 6) How do you think the British spent their summers in India during the days of the British Empire?
- 7) What sort of sports might have been played by the British in British India, Burma, and parts of Africa?
- 8) Why was the British Empire so successful for so long?
- 9) Why do you think the British Empire crumbled?
- 10) How did people migrate to parts of the British Empire?

## SPEAKING

Let's discuss! The British Empire

*Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1*

Discuss the British Empire. What do you think it must have been like living as a British citizen or as a local - in one the following countries at the height of the British Empire?

1	India	5	USA
2	Malaya / Burma	6	West Africa
3	Southern Africa	7	Australia
4	Hong Kong	8	Aden

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

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**GAP FILL: READING**

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

At its peak the British Empire was the largest empire the world had ever known. It was said 'the sun never sets on the British Empire' because its span across the globe ensured that the sun was always shining on at least one of its numerous \_\_\_\_\_ or subject nations. Its power and influence stretched all over the globe for several centuries. For better or worse it had a massive impact on the history of the world. It was a product of the European age of \_\_\_\_\_ that began with the \_\_\_\_\_ explorations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which sparked the era of the European \_\_\_\_\_ empires. The America's \_\_\_\_\_ forming part of the first era of the British Empire. \_\_\_\_\_ by British companies largely drove its expansion. The East India Company in 1600 established outposts in parts of India. This led to expansion in the Far East including Penang and Singapore. The Hudson Bay Company led the way in Eastern Canada. The first \_\_\_\_\_ presence in Africa was at James Island on the Gambia River. Later the British landed at the Cape of Good Hope, going on to \_\_\_\_\_ what became South Africa.

The Slave Trade in West Africa and the Caribbean flourished. Britain lost America but then went on to acquire New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and other islands in the Pacific. The British extended their influence in the \_\_\_\_\_ of southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf including Aden. Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar became key links through the Mediterranean in the line of communication to India - making use of the newly French built Suez Canal. The British Empire's second \_\_\_\_\_ and the one that is most associated with it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the Victorian period was when it was at its height. Africa became the \_\_\_\_\_ of its \_\_\_\_\_ - Egypt, Sudan and Nigeria. The British East African Company extended its \_\_\_\_\_ in Uganda and Kenya. The British South African Company in Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi. In 1910, an \_\_\_\_\_ British public had the \_\_\_\_\_ of an empire that extended from the Cape to Cairo. By 1921, the British \_\_\_\_\_ ruled over a population of 458m people, approximately one quarter of the world's population.

*permanent*

*colonial*

*colonisation*

*trade*

*colonies*

*discovery*

*conquer*

*maritime*

*forefront*

*expansion*

*era*

*influence*

*empire*

*sheikdoms*

*vision*

*enthusiastic*

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## GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

At its peak the British Empire was the largest empire the world had ever known. It was said 'the sun never sets (1)\_\_\_ the British Empire' because (2)\_\_\_ span across the globe ensured that the sun was always shining on at least one of its numerous colonies or subject nations. Its power (3)\_\_\_ influence stretched all over the globe for several centuries. For better or worse it had a massive impact on the history of the world. It was a product of the European age of discovery that began with (4)\_\_\_ maritime explorations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which sparked the era (5)\_\_\_ the European colonial empires. The America's colonisation forming part of the first era of the British Empire. Trade (6)\_\_\_ British companies largely drove its expansion. The East India Company in 1600 established outposts in parts of India. This led to expansion in the Far East including Penang and Singapore. The Hudson Bay Company led the way in Eastern Canada. The first permanent presence in Africa was (7)\_\_\_ James Island on the Gambia River. Later the British landed at the Cape of Good Hope, going on to conquer what became South Africa. The Slave Trade (8)\_\_\_ West Africa and the Caribbean flourished.

*in*  
*its*  
*the*  
*of*  
*and*  
*on*  
*at*  
*by*

Britain lost America but (1)\_\_\_ went on to acquire New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga and (2)\_\_\_ islands in the pacific. The British extended (3)\_\_\_ influence in the sheikdoms of southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf including Aden. Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar became key links (4)\_\_\_ the Mediterranean in the line of communication to India - making use of the newly French built Suez Canal. The British Empire's second era and the one that is (5)\_\_\_ associated with it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the Victorian period was (6)\_\_\_ it was at its height. Africa became the forefront of its expansion – Egypt, Sudan and Nigeria. The British East African Company extended its influence in Uganda and Kenya. The British South African Company in Rhodesia, Zambia and Malawi. In 1910, an enthusiastic British public had the vision of an empire (7)\_\_\_ extended (8)\_\_\_ the Cape to Cairo. By 1921, the British Empire ruled over a population of 458m people, approximately one quarter of the world's population.

*most*  
*other*  
*through*  
*from*  
*when*  
*that*  
*their*  
*then*

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## SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings:  
**Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	nationalism	11	prevailed
2	sheikdoms	12	hence
3	foregone	13	enthusiastic
4	durable	14	dominions
5	intact	15	associated
6	infrastructure	16	expansion
7	influence	17	colonisation
8	presence	18	flexible
9	communication	19	widespread
10	colonial	20	numerous

## LINKS

<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/pinkbits.htm>  
<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/maproom/maproom.htm>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British\\_Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_British\\_Empire.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_British_Empire.png)  
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