

History
UNFOLDING

THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN THE 19TH CENTURY



Samples are provided for evaluation purposes. Copying of the product or its parts for resale is prohibited. Additional restrictions may be set by the publisher.

MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

Contents

Introduction	2
Lesson 1	Britain Rules the Waves	4
Lesson 2	India: Jewel of the Empire	8
Lesson 3	The British in Asia and Africa	12
Lesson 4	The Scramble for Empire	16
Appendix	Image Close-ups	21

The British Empire in the 19th Century

Introduction

Great Britain's World Empire

The British Empire was already two centuries old by 1800. At that time, in fact, some might well have concluded that it had seen its best days. The American Revolution deprived the British of one of their most valuable possessions. Moreover, the wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France left Great Britain isolated and vulnerable, at one point facing a continent nearly united against it.

Yet the nineteenth century was to be the British century. Britain's industrial supremacy would remain unchallenged well into the late 1800s. And its worldwide empire would expand to encompass a quarter of the globe. In some places the control of land and resources was the primary motivation for expansion. In other places, the need for port facilities or strategic naval bases led to acquisitions. The desire to relieve population pressure at home, competition with other European powers and humanitarian concerns and missionary aims all fueled this drive for empire. It was an unshakable confidence in its cultural superiority that gave Britain the ability to impose its rule on such a wide variety of cultures and regions.

The 12 visual displays in this booklet touch on all of these themes. They should provide a focus for debating all of the issues the age of imperialism still raises. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

Britain Rules the Waves

The illustrations here focus on British naval supremacy and the role of sea power as a constant British concern in the development of its empire.

India: Jewel of the Empire

India's trade with Great Britain was always a central concern of those officials who developed the empire. And as Britain industrialized, India above all offered a limitless outlet for the products of its factories. Many other parts of the empire, from Gibraltar to Egypt, to Cape Colony, to Burma and Singapore derived their importance to the British as strategic locations along the lifeline to India.

The British in Asia and Africa

China and Africa were two other central parts of the empire the British acquired in the 1800s—the first for the trade it could generate, the second for the land, natural resources and strategic bases it offered.

The Scramble for Empire

A key factor in imperial expansion toward the end of the century were Britain's growing fears about the other rising industrial powers of Europe, France, Russia and especially Germany. The scramble for empire among these powers got out of hand precisely when it was also becoming harder to impose imperial rule within many colonial societies all over the world.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*The British Empire in the 19th Century***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand how sea power was the key to Great Britain's ability to carve out such a huge empire.
2. Students will understand that the colonies served various purposes in Britain's empire.

Britain Rules the Waves

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

A good place to begin the story of the British Empire in the nineteenth century is with the Battle of Trafalgar. The battle took place on October 21, 1805, at a key point in Britain's long war with Napoleonic France. In that battle, Admiral Horatio Nelson was able to surprise and destroy the combined French and Spanish fleet. No British ships were lost, although Nelson himself was killed. The British were already the world's foremost sea power. And their empire was already huge, despite the loss of the 13 colonies in the American Revolution. But the Battle of Trafalgar ended Napoleon's dream of invading England, and it helped insure Britain's naval supremacy for the rest of the 1800s.

Illustration 2

This cartoon portrays England as a "devilfish" with tentacles grabbing every land in sight. Yet though their empire was huge, the British did not seek to conquer and occupy lands wherever they could. They did acquire some colonies for their economic value—Jamaica, for example. Other colonies were taken mainly as naval stations to help Britain control the seas or to give it more political influence in a particular region. In the cartoon, Malta, Gibraltar, Cyprus and Cape Colony fall into this category. In India, Britain's goal at first was just to trade. But its rivalry with France led it to take control of one part of India after another. As for Egypt, which this devilfish is reaching for, its value to Great Britain had mainly to do with protecting the key sea route to India.

Illustration 3

Even before the Suez Canal was built, Egypt was of concern to Great Britain. Its strategic importance vastly increased once the canal opened in 1869. The trip from England to India was shortened by thousands of miles. Instead of rounding Africa, ships could cross the Mediterranean and pass through Suez to the Red Sea and on to the Indian Ocean. The Suez Canal was built by a French-Egyptian company under the guidance of engineer Ferdinand Marie de Lesseps. But in 1875, Egypt's growing debts forced it to let Great Britain buy Egypt's shares in the canal. This gave the British direct control over the Suez Canal. The cartoon on the right points out that Britain's real interest in the canal was India, the "key" to its mighty empire.

Lesson 1—Britain Rules the Waves

Illustration 1



Stock Montage, Inc.

Discussing the Illustration

1. This is a drawing of a famous sea battle that took place in 1805. The battle was part of a war Great Britain had been fighting for 12 years against a man who hoped to conquer and control most of Europe. Can you name that man and the nation he led?
2. On October 21, the British fleet was completely victorious in the famous battle depicted here. In the course of the battle, the British destroyed much of the fleets of two powerful nations. Can you name the battle and the two nations whose fleets were destroyed during it?
3. The British did not lose a single ship in the Battle of Trafalgar. But the commander of the British fleet was killed in the battle. Can you name him?
4. Based on what you know about that time, can you explain why this battle was so important both in terms of the Napoleonic Wars and in terms of British power throughout the 1800s?

Follow-up Activities

1. Key battles have often been turning points in the development of Great Britain's empire. During the Seven Years War, for example, two battles half a world apart had a major impact on the history of the British Empire. One was the Battle for Quebec in 1759, in which British forces were led by James Wolfe. The other was the Battle of Plassey in 1757, in India, where Robert Clive was in command. Read more about these two battles. Prepare a brief talk in class on the battles, on the role (if any) sea power played in them and on their overall importance in the growth of the British Empire.
2. What if Great Britain had lost the Battle of Trafalgar? Would the history of Europe and the British Empire have been all that different? Read more about the impact of the Battle of Trafalgar. Pretend that French Admiral Villeneuve had won instead. Now write a brief imaginary encyclopedia article on European history in the nineteenth century as you think it might have unfolded.