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## **“The White Man’s Burden” Teacher Page**

### Overview:

In 1899, British writer Rudyard Kipling was inspired by events during the Spanish-American War and composed the famous poem “The White Man’s Burden.” In this lesson, students will read the poem and understand how the sentiments it expressed were characteristic of pro-imperialist thinking at the time. They will then read a direct response to Kipling’s poem (also published in 1899) titled “The Brown Man’s Burden” and compare the different perspectives.

### Objectives:

Students will:

- understand how ethnocentric attitudes fueled imperialism
- assess the role literature played in the debate over imperialism
- identify and evaluate opposing points of view

### Web Sites Used in this Lesson:

“The White Man’s Burden” can be found at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Kipling.html>

“The Brown Man’s Burden” is part of a larger Web site called “The White Man’s Burden and Its Critics,” located at <http://www.boondocksnet.com/kipling/index.html>. The specific URL for the poem is <http://www.boondocksnet.com/kipling/labouche.html>.

### Strategies:

Have students listen to “Rule Britannia” (lyrics and audio clips can be found at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/rulebritannia.html>) and hand out copies of the lyrics so they can follow along. Ask “What types of emotions do you think this song would have raised in British people of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when they listened to it?” Next, guide the class through a reading of the lyrics of the song. Have students speculate on what the primary message of the song is, and how the song might have led people to support imperialist actions.

Have students complete the worksheet.

### Wrap-Up:

Ask the class to what extent attitudes like Kipling’s were merely a rationalization for imperialist goals. Have them also consider how such attitudes may have helped nations to achieve imperialist goals.

Extension Activity:

Have students locate other historical examples of jingoistic poems or songs and compare them to the poems in this lesson, as well as to “Rule Britannia.”

## **“The White Man’s Burden” Student Worksheet**

### Introduction:

In 1899, British writer Rudyard Kipling was inspired by events during the Spanish-American War and composed a poem titled “The White Man’s Burden.” The poem became a focal point for the debate about imperialism and prompted both positive and negative responses, including parodies of the original poem. Much can be learned about the way people thought at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by examining literature of this type. In this lesson, you will read both “The White Man’s Burden” and a takeoff of the poem titled “The Brown Man’s Burden.”

### Directions:

#### **“The White Man’s Burden”**

Go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Kipling.html>. Read the whole poem then answer the following questions:

1. Describe what you think Kipling means by “the white man’s burden.”
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How would you characterize the tone of this poem?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. To whom do you think the poem is addressed? What do you think Kipling hoped to accomplish by publishing this poem?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. List two or three words or phrases that Kipling uses to describe indigenous peoples. How do these examples reveal Kipling’s attitude towards these peoples?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Give three examples of some of the specific difficulties Kipling foresees in taking up “the white man’s burden.”

6. Kipling portrays “the white man’s burden” as a difficult and thankless undertaking, yet urges that it be taken up nevertheless. How does the last verse of the poem reveal why he thinks it should be taken up in spite of all the difficulties associated with it?

**“The Brown Man’s Burden”**

Go to <http://www.boondocksnet.com/kipling/labouche.html>. Read the whole poem then answer the following questions:

7. In Kipling’s poem, each verse begins “Take up the white man’s burden”; in this poem, the author has changed this line to read “Pile on the brown man’s burden.” What is the significance of this?
8. How would you characterize the tone of this poem?
9. To whom do you think the poem is addressed? What do you think the author hoped to accomplish by publishing this poem?
10. What is the author’s main objection to what Kipling advocates in “The White Man’s Burden”?
11. What does the author see as the true motivating force behind imperialism?
12. In your own words, write either a four-verse poem or a one-page editorial responding to Kipling’s poem from the perspective of someone living at that time.

## The Economics of Imperialism Teacher Page

### Overview:

In this lesson, students read two slightly differing views on the economics of imperialism. Both works deal with other aspects of imperialism (racism, nationalism), but students are directed to read only the excerpts in which the authors discuss their views on economics. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu lays out the classic argument for imperialism as a means to gain new markets and sources of raw materials, while also emphasizing that imperialism is not a means to short-term profit, but for long-term increases in productivity and trade. John Hobson undercuts the “markets and materials” concept, arguing that merely expanding the British Empire is of no economic benefit since it is haphazard and inefficient. These two views contrast, but do not stand in total opposition to one another, since both are pro-imperialist; in the lesson’s final questions, students are asked to make a detailed comparison of these views.

### Objectives:

Students will:

- understand the connection between industrialism and imperialism
- evaluate how economic motives contributed to imperialism

### Web Sites Used in this Lesson:

Paul Leroy-Beaulieu on the Desirability of Imperialism, 1891 can be found at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/beaulieu.htm>

John Hobson: Imperialism, 1902 is at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1902hobson.html>

### Strategies:

Review with the class how the Industrial Revolution affected the rate of production, international trade, and investment.

Do technological improvements necessarily result in increased prosperity for businesses and nations?

Have students complete the worksheet. Answers to the final question could range in length from a paragraph to a full page or more, depending on the time available.

Wrap-Up:

After students have completed the worksheet, discuss the answers as a class, then pose the following questions:

1. How convincing do you think Hobson's arguments are?
2. To whom do you think Leroy-Beaulieu and Hobson were addressing their arguments?

Extension Activity:

Have students compare the economic arguments pro-imperialists used for opening new markets to arguments used by free-trade proponents today. Students could examine language from NAFTA or the GATT agreements to find a basis for comparison.