

# The British Empire

## Vocabulary

<b>British Empire</b>	An empire made up of 56 countries, which at its peak contained one quarter of the world's land and population.
<b>colonisation</b>	The movement of people to a country to establish control of a country from its indigenous population.
<b>colonies</b>	Places controlled by a leading country.
<b>empire</b>	A collection of areas of land or countries that are ruled over and controlled by one leading country.
<b>imperialism</b>	A policy of extending power and influence through colonisation or the use of military force.
<b>merchant</b>	A person involved in trading goods.
<b>monarch</b>	The head of a state - a king, queen or emperor.
<b>monopoly</b>	a situation in which a company or organization is the only one in an area of business or activity and has complete control of it
<b>natural resources</b>	Things such as minerals, wood, coal, etc. that exist naturally in a place and can be used by people.
<b>plantations</b>	An area of land in a hot country where a crop is grown.
<b>settler</b>	Someone who moves to a new place where there were not many people before
<b>slavery</b>	Forcing someone to do work for you with no pay
<b>subjects</b>	The people under the control of the state.

## What was the British Empire?

The British Empire was a group of countries and regions which were controlled by Great Britain. At its peak, the British Empire was the largest Empire the world has ever seen. Great Britain ruled over 50 countries (around 24% of the world's land). This made Great Britain very rich.

The British Empire was first established as early as 1497, however it reached its peak in the years between 1815 and 1914. This time is often referred to as the 'British Century'.

The British Empire was spread as far as New Zealand in the east and Canada in the west. It included countries such as Jamaica, South Africa, Egypt, Singapore, India, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe. It has hugely influenced societies, cultures, industries, the languages spoken and the way that people live across the world.



**A map of the world showing countries which were part of the British Empire**

Dear Parents,

Our first Humanities topic is a History unit about 'The British Empire'. Please help your children to prepare for this topic by learning some of the key words and the facts on this sheet.

There are some homework activities on the back of this sheet. Your child can complete these at any time. Your child's teacher would love to see what they have created.

Thank you for your support,  
Kind regards,  
Year 6 Teachers

## Key facts about the British Empire:

- Lasted during 1497 - 1997.
- Over 450 million people (more than a quarter of the world's population).
- 36,000,000 square miles of territory (more than a quarter of the world's area).
- The end of the British Empire was not one single event. That being said, the actual end of the British Empire was when Britain handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997.

## British Empire Major Events

### Beginnings

- During the Middle Ages, the kings of England tried to conquer other countries.
- As early as 1169, the Normans invaded Ireland.
- In 1277, Edward I conquered North Wales.
- In the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), Edward III and Henry V conquered large parts of France.
- By 1500, much of the gained land had been lost.

### The First British Empire (1497-1783)

- Throughout this time, English seamen reached places that Europeans had not previously been. They set up colonies there so that they could trade the resources.
- The first English colonies were in North America.
- Britain fought wars to protect its empire, including the 7 Years' War with France. Many American territories were lost in the American War of Independence.

### The Transatlantic Slave Trade

- One of the more horrific parts of the British Empire was its position at the heart of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.
- For 400 years from the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, British slave traders are estimated to have bought or sold around 3 million slaves. Slavery made Britain incredibly wealthy.
- Britain banned slave trading in its empire from 1807.

### The Second British Empire (1783-1914)

- Britain began to look towards other areas of the world, for example Asia and Australia, to fulfil its imperial ambitions.
- Areas of India, the Caribbean and New Zealand were added to the Empire, which grew massively.
- Britons at the time were proud of the Empire and its power, however those living in colonies experienced inequality and a loss of culture and religion.

### The End of the British Empire

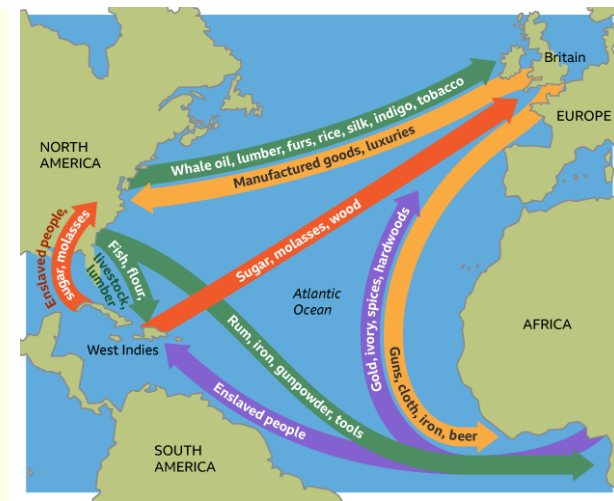
- Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a number of states became 'dominions', meaning that they remained part of the empire, but governed themselves.
- During the First and Second World War, Britain relied heavily upon its empire in order to win. The countries who supported Britain began to take an increasingly independent view. Furthermore, the wars left Britain weakened and less interested in its empire than it had been previously.
- By the late 1970s, the empire became reduced to a few pockets of territory around the world. Most people view the official end of the empire as the transfer of Hong Kong back to China in 1997.

## India and the British Empire

India is often described as the jewel in the crown of the British Empire, which shows its importance to Great Britain. Following World War I, more and more Indians wanted independence from the British Empire.

In 1920, a man called Mohandas Gandhi became the leader of the Indian National Congress and he persuaded many of his followers to use passive resistance and non-violence to end the British rule of India. This involved refusing to work, sit-down strikes and refusing to pay taxes. This approach to protest led to much admiration towards Gandhi.

In 1947, India was granted independence. Unfortunately, on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948 (in New Delhi) Gandhi was assassinated by an Indian who felt that Gandhi favoured British India's Muslims more than Hindus.



### A map showing trade within the British Empire

Trade was an important part of the British Empire. The raw materials for products were brought from all over the British Empire to Great Britain to turn into goods which were sold across the empire, such as guns manufactured in Birmingham.

The colonisation of the Americas and the demand used for cotton, tobacco and sugar lead to the enslavement of people from west Africa to work in the fields.

### Homework Ideas:

- Create an advertising poster to encourage a country to join the British Empire.
- Write a letter detailing why slavery should be abolished.
- Create a poster showing the flags of countries that were part of the British Empire.
- Create a drawing or a model of an expeditionary ship such as Captain Cook's ship HMS Endeavour.
- Produce a fact file about Mohandas Gandhi.
- Create a collage of the British flag.

