

Y8 History Knowledge Organiser: Unit 3 – The British Empire

Key words:

Empire	A group of countries, people or land controlled and ruled by one single powerful country.
Colony	A country that is part of an Empire.
Penal Colony	An area of land or country used to house prisoners
Aborigines	A person that has been in a country or region from earliest times.
Commonwealth	A group of nations with a shared loyalty or government

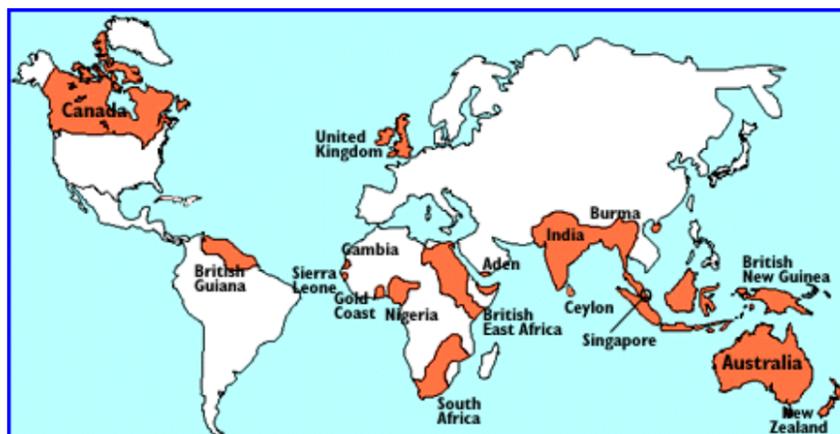
L1 What is an Empire?

An Empire is a group of countries, people or land that is controlled and ruled by one powerful country.

The British Empire, at its largest, covered 13 million miles or 22% of the world!

It controlled over 450 million people or 1/5 of the world's population.

It began in the 16th Century, with British forces establishing trading posts overseas and grew all the way through to the 20th Century.



Some of the main countries in the British Empire were:

Australia	Jamaica
South Africa	Tanzania
Canada	Malaysia
Ireland	
New Zealand	
Barbados	
Ireland	
Sri Lanka	
India	

2 Countries of the British Empire

Australia - Australia was used as a location for criminals. Criminals would be shipped to Australia, where they would be used as a workforce. They built roads, buildings, houses, shops etc. It also gave people an opportunity to escape poverty and gain wealth in Australia. It was also an important naval base, helping Britain control the seas.

The Caribbean – Because of the warm climate, the Caribbean grew important crops that Britain could not. Therefore sugar, cocoa and coffee were all grown in the Caribbean and taken to Britain. In the middle of the 1800's however, a combination of bad weather and the growth of sugar in America, led to less money being made from the area.

Africa – Britain used the people of Africa as slaves and made a lot of money selling them at auctions. The Gold Coast was important because it held lots of gold, ivory and silver, which were traded for fortunes.

India – India was an important producer of spices and of materials that were traded for money across the Empire.

L3 – How did the British Control its Empire?

Due to the huge size of the Empire, Britain had to develop a variety of methods in order to keep control of the variety of colonies under her Empire.

Military Force – Britain's weaponry developed throughout this period, inventing weapons such as the Maxim gun – one of the first machine guns invented. They also stopped guns coming into the hands of those in the Empire. The Africans had poor quality weaponry, they made their own bullets which broke their guns sometimes.

Use of Locals – The British went on a charm offensive, making the local rich people feel wanted and gave them more money and power. Local people ran the police, law courts and prisons, making them feel in charge of their country and less likely to break laws.

Communication – The British could easily communicate between the countries of their empire using methods such as telegraphs, radios and ships.

Gradual Change – The British didn't try to change everything at once, they gradually changed and developed areas of countries.

Dealing with Resistance – The British were efficient in stopping anyone who opposed the Empire. Protestors were immediately jailed and broke up local armies.

L4 – Wars of the Empire

The British didn't easily create their Empire and they often faced opposition from those within the colonies, who wanted rid of the British from their country:

- **India** - Britain started to occupy India in the 18th Century. As Britain gained control over India there were revolts against the British rule. At the Battle of Plassey in 1757, 3000 British soldiers defeated a 40,000 strong Indian and French Army. Small rebellions broke out and 1000's were killed. Eventually Britain managed to stop the revolt and executed many Indians.
- **Australia** – Britain claimed Australia in 1770, the aborigines who already lived there were not happy about their land being taken. The British killed them all. On the island of Tasmania, in 1802 there were 20,000 aborigines, 80 years later there were none. The same thing happened in New Zealand, where the Maori people were reduced from 100,000 to 35,000.
- **South Africa**: In 1879 Britain wanted to control more of Africa and started a war against Zululand. Britain sent 16,000 soldiers and an easy victory was expected against the Zulus who were armed with shields and spears. At the Battle of Isandlwana British soldiers were defeated by 20,000 Zulu warriors. Over 1200 British soldiers were killed and although Britain eventually managed to conquer Zululand this was one of the worst defeats Britain had ever faced.
- **Afghanistan**: In 1838 Britain sent an army of 16,000 men to Afghanistan. Although British troops managed to capture the capital Kabul the Afghans kept attacking British troops. Afghans managed to kill Britain's top general, Sir William McNaghten and paraded his chopped up body in the streets. Of the 16,000 people who had set out on the retreat from Kabul only one man Dr. William Brydon, a British Army surgeon, made it back alive
- **America**: By 1750 Britain controlled 13 different colonies on the Eastern side of America. In 1773 a protest started in Boston against the tax on tea. It quickly escalated and became a major revolt against British rule. On 4th July 1776 the Americans declared their independence from Britain. Britain quickly sent almost 60,000 soldiers to recapture America but after five years of fighting Britain was defeated.

L5 – Empire: a Force for Good or Evil?

Good	Bad
Many of the foods we enjoy today came originally from the countries of the British Empire such as tea, cocoa, chocolate, coffee, rice, curry	Rebellion: Many people in the colonies were killed when they rebelled against British rule for example the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya in 1956
Clean water and sanitation: Britain improved these important services in the Colonies which meant people were generally healthier.	Economies in the Colonies were wrecked because of Britain's hold over transport and raw materials. Britain became rich and powerful at the expense of its colonies
The colonies benefitted from the introduction of a British education system	Many colonial soldiers died fighting for Britain in its wars
Raw Materials: Britain benefitted from a plentiful supply of cheap raw materials that could be made into manufactured goods such as rubber, cloth, and woollen goods. This made Britain wealthy.	People in the colonies had no resistance to the diseases the British brought with them so many died
Britain left its system of law in the countries it colonised a legacy of good even today.	Christianity was often forced on the local people.
Many former Colonies continue to use the democratic system of Parliament introduced by Britain. This is a force for good in the world.	Native people such as the Aborigines of Australia had their land taken by The British. 80% of the Aboriginal population were wiped out in 150 years.
The colonies provided soldiers to fight for Britain examples being World War 1 and World War 2	Many people who lived in the colonies remained very poor. There were very limited job opportunities for them

L6 – Fall of the Empire

- **Actions by people in the colonies** – There were demonstrations against British rule in the 1920's for failing to honour promises to Egypt and Iraq. Britain allowed Ireland partition (splitting into Northern Ireland and Ireland), it sent out a message to others in the Empire that they could leave. In 1948 there was violence in Palestine aimed at the British. There were strikes in India, Egypt and Kenya against British Rule.
- **Actions by people in Britain** – In the 1960's people in Britain were more interested in freedom, rather than using force to keep people under control.
- **World Events** – In 1931, Canada, Australia and New Zealand formed a new Commonwealth. The domination of the USA and Russia after WW2 showed that you didn't need to have an empire to be a world leader. The loss of countries such as Singapore and Burma during WW2, changed people's attitudes on whether Britain could maintain an empire. Britain was heavily in debt to the USA after WW1.
- **Trade and Economics** - India became less important to the British Empire. The cost of keeping a large number of soldiers to defend the empire was too much. It also became clearer that the Empire could no longer provide Great Britain with the military and economic security she needed. Exports focused from Western Europe and the USA, rather than the Empire.