



Year 6 Term 1

How should the British Empire be remembered?



Key vocabulary	
empire	a collection of areas of land or countries that are ruled over and controlled by one leading or 'mother' country
imperialism	when a stronger country expands its power and control over another weaker country or territory by taking it over and establishing rule to gain wealth and resources, often creating colonies.
colony	a land controlled by a distant country, where people from that country move to settle and live
territories	the land and waters that belong to countries
indigenous	the first people or animals who lived in a place before others arrived
dominion status	the term given to countries that were allowed to rule themselves but were still considered part of the British Empire.
plantation	a large farm growing one main type of crop, like cotton, sugar, or coffee, to sell to other places

Key knowledge:

1. What was the British Empire?

- First origins in late 1500s under Queen Elizabeth I, it lasted approx. 400 years and at its height covered $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Earth's land.
- The first successful colony was in 1607 in Jamestown, now part of the state of Virginia in the USA.
- The British Empire was built to:
 - gain money, power and resources such as metals, sugar and tobacco. It helped poverty in England by giving new jobs and places to live.
 - Spread Christianity and 'civilisation'. The British people saw indigenous people as 'uncivilised' due to their different way of life and thought it was their duty to convert people, even by force.

2. Expansion of the British Empire in America, India & Africa:

- The British Empire spread from the Americas to include colonies in Africa, Asia and Australia. It had 13 British colonies in North America which eventually fought for freedom, declaring independence on 4th July 1776. The 4th July is a celebrated holiday in the USA.
- India became an official colony in 1858. It was known as the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire as Britain benefited economically from exploiting India's resources, workers and population. Indian goods were sold for large profit in the UK and Britain could trade with India's huge population. India also had a strong army.
- Britain competed with other European countries for Africa and gained control of 30 % of the African population, destroying several African Kingdoms. When they colonised the Kingdom of Benin, they exiled leaders, looted treasures and burned much of Benin city to the ground.

3. Life in the British Empire

- Many indigenous languages, religions and cultures were replaced by English and Christianity. Many previous colonies still primarily speak English today.
- Colonies mostly run by British government officials rather than indigenous people and they had to live by British laws.
- Taxes on colonised people were often high.

4. Opposition to the British Empire

- Many people were in support at the time, although some argued against forcing countries to change their traditions and cultures.
- In the 1700s and 1800s, many people including members of parliament, like William Wilberforce, opposed the transatlantic slave trade (the forced enslavement and movement of people from Africa to the Americas, particularly to work on plantations). Many British goods were farmed by enslaved people, including ingredients in Fry's chocolate.

Skills - We are historians	
1. Ask who, what, how where, why questions.	
2. Analyse and evaluate change past to present, expressing opinion on change	
3. Use a range of sources to find out about the past, questioning reliability and being aware of bias.	

5. End of the British Empire

- Countries with large white populations, e.g. Canada and Australia gained **dominion status** in the late 1800s.
- In 1926 the Commonwealth was set up between Britain and all its dominion states, agreeing to consider them all equal.
- In 1945, after WW2, Britain couldn't afford a large empire, attitudes began to change and more countries fought for independence.
- In 1947 British India achieved independence and was divided into India and Pakistan.
- One of the last countries to gain independence from Britain was Belize, in Central America, in 1981.

6. Legacy

- Today, there are only 14 territories that have strong enough constitutional links to the UK to be considered overseas territories
- To this day, there are figures historically celebrated in Bristol for their charity, such as Edward Colston, who are controversial because they gained their wealth from the British Empire and transatlantic slave trade. Colston's legacy is controversial, and movements have been made to remove his name from public places, e.g. schools and theatres and to take down statues of him.



The British Empire at its Peak in 1921.

