Assessing Your Learning 2

Was the British Empire a good or bad thing?

Good historians have to know their facts. It’s impossible to be a successful history student without knowing the correct names, dates and places linked to the topic you’re studying. But history is full of opinions too – and it’s just as important to be aware of them.

The British Empire is a great example of a topic full of amazing events, memorable dates and fascinating facts – but it’s also a topic on which people have different opinions. Some are very positive about it, whilst others say it was a bad thing. Some opinions are mixed. Read through the opinions on page 21 carefully – talk with a partner or ask your teacher about any opinions you don’t quite understand.

Task 1
Make two lists, one of all the negative things about the British Empire and one of all the positive things. Don’t just use the opinions on these pages to help you, use the knowledge gained from your studies on the British Empire. Are there any that don’t fit into either list? Explain why.

Task 2
As you can see, the British Empire has always been the subject of fierce debate. There have even been calls to ban the teaching of it in schools! Imagine that your headteacher has BANNED the teaching of the British Empire at your school. Write the headteacher a letter explaining whether you support the decision or not. The way your letter will be assessed is laid out below:

Assessing your work
Look at the success criteria for this task to help you plan and evaluate your work.

A good letter will…
- say whether you agree with the decision or not
- list some good and/or bad points about the Empire.

A better letter will…
- say whether we should study the British Empire
- give several reasons why we should or shouldn’t study the Empire and back them up with facts and figures
- be structured like a letter and use key terms.

The best letter will…
- meet all the above criteria
- use all the correct historical terms
- cover both sides of the argument
- explain the needs of modern History students and what you think should be taught about the past.

TOP TIP: Don’t just copy out the opinions – try to put them in your own words.

Which skill? This task is assessing your ability to identify and describe how people have interpreted the British Empire in different ways.

Be a Top Historian
Good historians don’t just decide whether or not they agree with an opinion, but how far they agree with it and why.

How big is the British Empire today?
There are several small colonies that are still part of the British Empire. Today they are called British Overseas Territories. Carry out your own research to find out where they are, label them on a world map and write a short history of each one.

The British Empire was about three things – God, gold and glory! It’s a myth that it was about helping countries. All the empire builders cared about was converting natives to Christianity, personal glory and making money.

The British did some awful things – their role in the slave trade, the Amritsar Massacre in India and the use of concentration camps in the Boer War, for example. The British thought they were racially superior to the people they conquered. We say it’s wrong for the racist Nazis to take over Europe in World War Two, so why isn’t it wrong for racist Brits to try and take over the rest of the world?

The British Empire was a force for good!

Hungry for more?

Great Britain was always at war in one part of the Empire or another. The people in the colonies rebelled against the British because the British just weren’t trusted! When they pulled out of India, the British left chaos behind. The divisions between India and Pakistan, and those in many former colonies in Africa too, can be traced back to the British Empire.