



Year 5

The Early British Empire

Lesson Series

- 1. The British Empire**
- 2. Global Trade**
- 3. The Mughal Empire and the East India Company**
- 4. The Seven Year War**
- 5. What motivated Britain to build an Empire?**

Name: _____

Class: _____

Lesson 1 - The British Empire

An 'empire' is a group of countries ruled over by a single monarch or ruling power. An empire doesn't need an 'emperor'.

The British Empire is a term used to describe all the places around the world that were once ruled by Britain. Built over many years, it grew to include large areas of North America, Australia, New Zealand, Asia and Africa, as well as small parts of Central and South America, too.

The size of the British Empire – the amount of land and number of people under British rule – changed in size over the years. At its height in 1922, it was the largest empire the world had ever seen, covering around a quarter of Earth's land surface and ruling over 458 million people.



Lesson 2 - Global Trade

From around 1600, the British Empire grew out of Britain's trade with the 'New World'. The first seeds of the Empire were coastal trading posts, governed by commercial bodies such as the East India Trading Company, where British power stretched little further than a few miles inland.

Examples included Bengal, Madras and Bombay in India and the Gold Coast in West Africa. Gradually, the British settled in larger areas and established more control - particularly in the Americas. Victory in the Seven Years War (1756-63) was a significant turning point, as France ceded vast territories in India and North America to Britain.



Lesson 3 - The Mughal Empire and the East India Company

The Mughal Empire ruled most of India and Pakistan in the 16th and 17th century. The Mughals were Muslims who ruled a country with a large Hindu majority. They allowed Hindus to have powerful jobs in senior government or military positions. The Mughals brought many changes to India, including the Urdu language (a mix of Persian, Arabic and Hindi), architecture (e.g. the Taj Mahal), Persian art and culture and periods of religious tolerance.

With the permission of Emperor Jahangir, the East India Company established small but highly profitable trading settlements on India's eastern and western coasts. Until 1750, almost all of India was under the control of the Mughal Empire, and Britain's interest in the country was predominantly commercial. The East India Company (EIC) grew in size and influence and became one of London's most powerful financial institutions.

In the 18th century, the EIC became increasingly involved in politics. Around 1750 the Mughal Empire began to break up, causing endless conflicts between different Mughal Princes, and the British, French and Dutch traders. After military victories, such as at the Battles of Plassey led by Robert Clive (1757), the EIC was granted the Diwani of Bengal – control over the administration of the region and the right to collect tax revenue. By 1818, the EIC was the biggest political power in India. The EIC had control over at least two-thirds of the subcontinent.



Lesson 4 - The Seven Years Wars

The Battle of Plassey (1757) and the Battle of Quebec took place during the Seven Years War (1756-1763) fought between Britain and France.

It was perhaps Britain's most successful war ever, as they gained land in North America, West Africa, the Philippines and India from the French and Spanish. This marks the beginning of the British Empire's world dominance. These victories led to a surge of patriotism in Britain, and songs such as 'Rule Britannia' and the character of Britannia became part of British culture (even though this meant that Britain was exploiting people from all over the world). Figures such as William Pitt, General Wolfe and Robert Clive became national heroes.



Lesson 5 - What motivated Britain to build an Empire?

The British Empire emerged out of a desire to protect and expand its growing trade interests around the world (Global Trade).

India had a huge population, so Britain exploited this to create a powerful army (Global Defence).

Britain was extremely successful in the Seven Years War, gaining land in North America, Africa, the Philippines and India. Many territories were gained from the French (Global Political Power).

