



Unit 1 Activities

# The British Empire on the Eve of Revolution

This lesson will introduce students to the scope, depth, and diversity of British North America and the British Empire in the years preceding the Declaration of Independence.

## Aims /Objective

The modular activities and extensions in this unit provide opportunities for students to:

- Learn about the diverse demographics of the British Empire
- Examine historical objects and place them within the geographical context of the British Empire
- Analyze the competing wants and needs of people inhabiting British North America
- Apply their new knowledge of British North America to devise a plan for addressing its complex challenges

## Materials

### Big Idea 1: The British Empire on the Eve of Revolution

#### Primary Sources:

British Museum Collection Objects, London, England

- Bag-Senegal  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E\\_Af1960-20-235](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1960-20-235)
- Dish-India  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_1938-1011-1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1938-1011-1)
- Coin-Massachusetts  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_C-4986](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_C-4986)
- Print Portrait-Gibraltar  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_J-11-121](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_J-11-121)
- Tea Caddy-Connecticut  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H\\_1887-0307-E-142](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1887-0307-E-142)
- Print Portrait-Minorca  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1997-1207-1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1997-1207-1)
- Wampum; Gorget-Canada  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E\\_Am-6992](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Am-6992)
- Coin-Dominica  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_1906-1103-3008](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1906-1103-3008)
- Bailer-New Zealand  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E\\_Oc-NZ-123](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Oc-NZ-123)
- Conch Shell-Jamaica  
[www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E\\_Am1974-02-648](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Am1974-02-648)

#### Other Resources:

- Unit 1 Worksheet: Exploring the Empire (included)
- *Season of Independence* interactive
- Identity Cards (included)
- Map: The British Empire  
[https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1wKU4g3UKg-mAi2Pe8F\\_6dp7YnNQg1UA76&usp=sharing](https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1wKU4g3UKg-mAi2Pe8F_6dp7YnNQg1UA76&usp=sharing)

# Procedures

## Engagement 10 – 20 minutes

### WHO ARE WE?

Draw a large circle on a board or poster where students can easily see it. Tell the students that the circle represents the class as a whole. Label it with a class name/number if possible and solicit suggestions for things that everyone in the class has in common as a group, recording them in the circle.

Next, ask each student (or smaller groups of students) to think of something that makes them different from the rest of the class. For each student or group, draw a new circle and a line connecting it to the one representing the entire class. In the new circle, record what makes that person or group unique from the rest of the class. Repeat this process until all students or groups have gone.

Then, discuss the following question with students:

- Is it possible for people with many differences to peacefully exist in one group?
- What are the benefits of having different kinds of people as part of a group?
- Can this create challenges sometimes? If so, what kind of challenges can it create? How should, or can, these challenges be resolved?

## Development 40 minutes

*Teacher Preparation: Review the primary source objects from the British Museum. Make copies of the Exploring the Empire worksheet. Prepare to share the hyperlinks to the Map of the British Empire and the British Museum objects with students. (Do not reveal which part of the Empire each object has a connection to until students complete the activity)*

### EXPLORING THE EMPIRE

Begin by briefly asking students to list any parts of the world that were part of the British Empire during the Revolutionary Era. After providing some time for students to share, distribute the Exploring the Empire worksheet and inform students that they will be going on a

scavenger hunt to discover what parts of the British Empire different historical objects have connections to. Students should investigate each object's description and cross-reference it with colonies on the map. They should record what colony it is connected to and a description of what the connection is on their worksheet (where it was made, where it was discovered, who/what it depicts, etc.). Do one together to serve as an example. Review answers with the class after students complete the worksheet or sufficient time has passed. Summarize big ideas and exploring questions.

Discuss the following as a class afterward:

- How do you think British subjects who had chosen to settle in the Empire's colonies felt about being part of such a large and powerful Empire? Why might some feel proud to be part of the Empire?
- How do you think those who had not chosen to settle in the Empire felt about being part of it? (Native peoples, enslaved people, colonists conquered into the Empire, etc.)
- What kind of problems might there have been with running an Empire that controlled territory in so many different places?

**ADAPT:** Split students into groups or pairs and assign each of them a single object to simplify this task. Have each group report out their findings and then display the location of the colony their object is connected to for the entire class to see.

## Development, 40 minutes

*Teacher Preparation: Read Big Idea 1: The British Empire on the Eve of Revolution. Print or make copies of Identity Cards.*

### TAKE A STAND

Have students read the Big Idea 1 essay to learn more about the British Empire and the people that were part of it in North America. Ask students to compile a list of different types of people that were represented within the Empire as they read. Share out some of the groups and types of people they observed when they are done reading.

Distribute prepared Identity Cards to each student and explain that these cards refer to people living in 1776. Inform students that you will be reading a series of statements aloud to them, and they must consider whether the person they are representing would agree or disagree with the statement. Designate an area of the classroom for students to move to if they agree and a different area for if they disagree. Read the following statements one at a time, allowing students time to decide and move to the appropriate area before asking several students from either area to share who they represent and why they made the choice that they did:

- *I am a subject of the British Empire.*
- *I am proud to be part of the British Empire.*
- *The British Empire is beneficial to me.*
- *I enjoy freedoms as a British subject.*
- *The British Empire has a fair government*

Repeat the above process for each statement. Once complete, instruct students to access the Season of Independence interactive and investigate the different individuals highlighted in it. Provide some time for exploration, then ask students which of the individuals most closely matches the type of person they represented in the last activity. What choice did the person in the interactive make regarding whether or not to support independence? Why do you think they made this choice? How do you think factors such as social standing, race, religion, status of freedom, etc. Impacted their choice? Did any of their choices surprise you? Why or why not?

## Culmination 20 – 30 minutes

### HEAVY LIES THE CROWN

Split students into at least 3 groups and assign each of them one of the following challenges:

- Some colonists want to settle in the Ohio River Valley that became part of the Empire after the French and Indian War, but this has been home to some American Indian nations for a long time and they would like to remain on this land without disruption.
- The Empire is in a great amount of debt and needs to find a way of raising money to maintain the colonies, but subjects in the British Isles are already highly taxed.
- The Empire absorbed a large French Catholic population when it gained French territory following the French and Indian War. They would like to keep their laws and customs while Protestants in North America want them to adapt to the way the British do things.

Tell them to consider each assigned challenge as though they were a member of British Parliament or King George III and propose a solution to the challenge.

Have each group share out their proposed plan or solution to their assigned challenge. Afterward, allow the entire class to discuss why their plan might work and why it might not as well as who their plan would benefit the most and who might be hurt by it. Poll the class to see if they think the proposed solution would make most British subjects happy or unhappy.

Finally, ask students to reflect on the following question and discuss it as a class: *What were the challenges of ruling so many different types of people in British North America?*

**EXTEND:** Instruct students to research how King George III and Parliament attempted to resolve the challenges presented in this activity. Have them identify how their proposed solutions were similar to or different from those pursued by Great Britain.

## Extensions and Adaptations

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### VIRTUAL TOUR

Instruct students to view the various objects and displays in the “Rule Britannia! 1760-1765” gallery from the Museum of the American Revolution’s Virtual Tour (<https://museumvirtu-altour.org/>). Have them construct a list of evidence showing that members of the Empire were proud to have been a part of it. Ask students what might change someone’s feeling of pride and to explain why.

### PROS AND CONS

Distribute an identity card to each student or student group. Ask them to compose a list of benefits that this group received from being part of the British Empire and a list of problems that being part of the Empire created for them. Students can display their Pros/Cons list on a poster and hang them around the classroom.

Allow students to walk around the room and view the work of other students before returning for a group discussion about similarities and differences that they observe between different peoples lists and what they think the reasons are for that.

### MAP MAKERS

Supply students with the list of colonies used for the Exploring the Empire activity. Have students create their own maps depicting territory held by the British Empire in the Revolutionary era. Extend this activity by having students research when each of these colonies became part of the Empire and create a timeline to show the British Empire’s growth.