



What impact did the British Empire have on the world?

## The good, the bad and the Ugly?

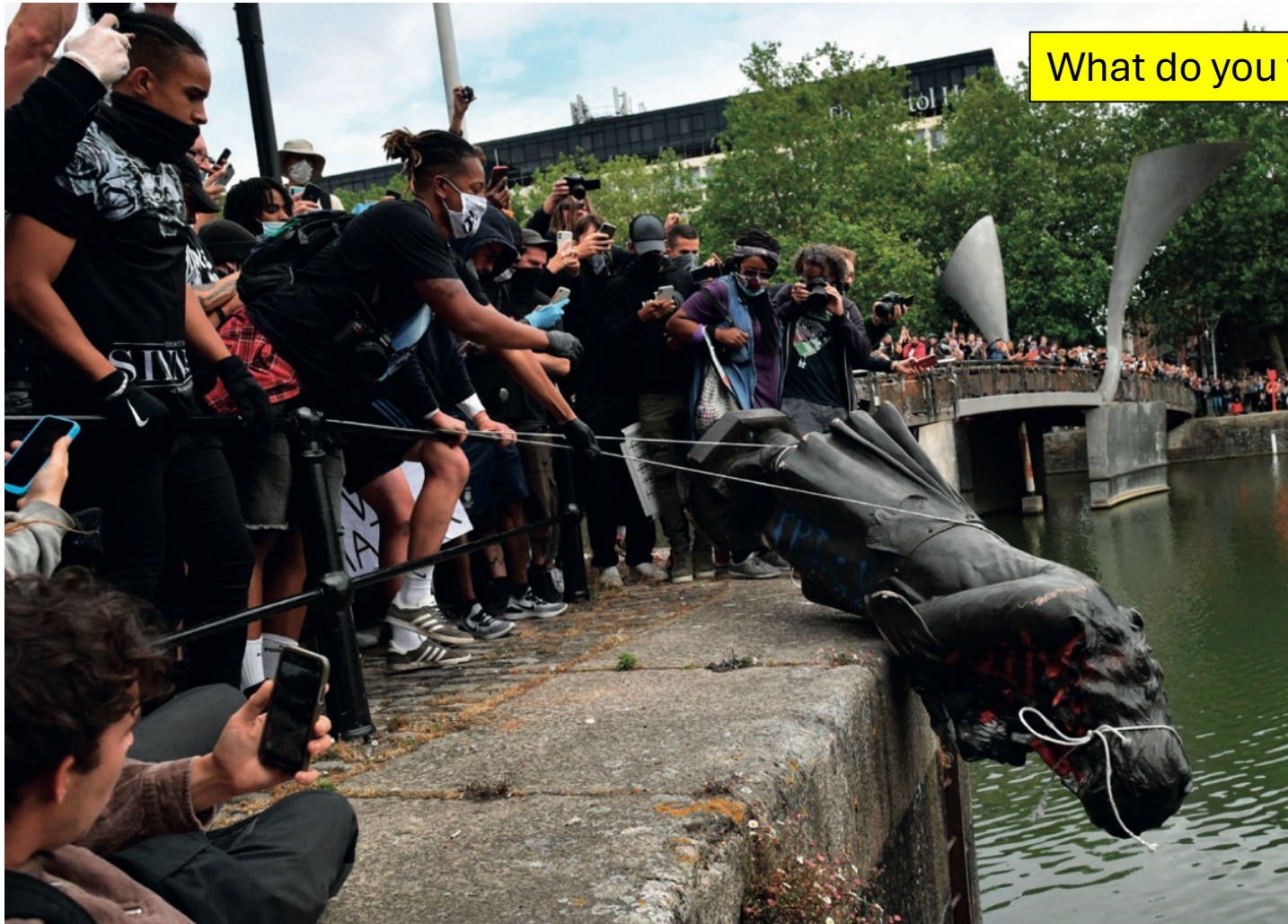
The British Empire was a huge force in the world for a very long time with its impact still being felt today! Some people argue that it was a bad thing and we should tear down statues of slave traders, some argue that it was a great thing as the Empire spread culture and education around the world. Recently there have been voices in government who believe as a nation we've become anti British by talking about our history with a certain negative lense. Many are somewhere in between and acknowledge bad things happened as well as the positive side. Prominent historian David Olusoga believes that we should, as a nation, essentially own our past and our role in some of history's darkest periods by facing up to it, not shying away from it in some historical cleansing.

Summarise this paragraph in answering the following question..

Why is studying the British Empire so controversial?



In June 2020, demonstrators in Bristol pulled down a statue of Edward Colston, a major trader in enslaved Africans, and threw it into the harbour. When he died in 1721, he left a lot of money to charities and good causes – and a statue of him was put up in 1895. Many people argue that it isn't right that he should be celebrated with a statue because he made his fortune through human suffering.



What do you think?

## What is an Empire and how does a country get one?

An empire is a collection of communities, regions, territories, states or even countries that are ruled over and controlled by one leader or '**mother country**'. The areas controlled by the 'mother country' are usually called **colonies**. The 'mother country' then makes many (or sometimes all) of the key decisions to do with the places it rules over, often regardless of what the locals might want.



Why might a country want an Empire?

How might a country get build an Empire?

## So, why should we study the British Empire?

Of the world's 203 nation states today, 63 were once ruled by Britain. About 20 others were briefly occupied by Britain. So, around a third of the world's nations experienced British rule or influence at one point or another. The British made an impact on these places, which experienced huge social, economic and political changes as a result. What the British Empire left behind is something that should be questioned, discussed, and debated.

The history of the British Empire helps us make sense of other things too. It helps us uncover answers to interesting questions – such as why English is spoken in so many countries, and why Britain is such a **multicultural** society.

The consequences of the empire are still felt widely and debated today. When the British took control of places, they often drew up new borders that split the local people into new countries and regions. In some areas, this caused huge problems at the time – and even today, these changes still cause conflict, particularly the way the British divided up India in 1947.



What do you think is going on in this picture?

An artist's impression of Ho-ne Heke and other Ma-ori chopping down the British flagpole.

Does this suggest that the Ma-ori were happy with the British Empire?

When a country extends its power, influence and control over other countries and areas of land, it is known as '**imperialism**'. Britain began to extend its power, influence and control over other countries at the end of the Elizabethan period in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. So, why did Britain want an empire? And how did it get it?

The four main reasons why Britain wanted an empire were:

1. to get valuable raw materials and riches (such as diamonds, gold, spices, sugar and tea) that were found in other countries
2. so it could sell goods to the people in the colonies and make money
3. to become a more powerful country and strengthen their position in the world
4. because some people thought it was the right thing to do.

**INTERPRETATION A** Written in 2013 by Peter Cowlishaw, an author and retired school history teacher.

Land was now being annexed (invaded and taken over), not just for purposes of trade but to improve Britain's strategic position around the world and to prevent other powers from strengthening their own empires. It seemed that if you wanted to be a great power you had to have an empire.

**INTERPRETATION B** Adapted from a section titled 'Attractions of Empire' on a BBC website webpage about 'The British Empire through Time' (2019).

Many goods were of interest to the Europeans, most especially silk, cotton, opium, sugar, (to preserve meat), coffee, pepper, cardamom, other spices and tea. India, the Europeans believed, would be easy to exploit.

**INTERPRETATION C** From a 2022 article on the National Geographic Kids website called 'British Empire Facts'.

When the empire was being built, British people largely believed they were doing the right thing. In their eyes, they were expanding and developing lands and bringing order to non-white countries which brought in 'dark attitudes' - they thought were 'uncivilised' and 'backwards'. The British also believed they were doing the work of God by spreading Christianity - which they considered to be the 'right' religion.

**INTERPRETATION D** From a History textbook written by Ian Stewart, 2000.

The colonists had to purchase all their manufactured goods from Britain. This gave Britain a guaranteed market for its manufactures.

**War**

If Britain won a war against another country, it could often take over any land the other country controlled around the world. For example, when Britain won the Seven Years War (1756-1763) against France and India became part of the British Empire. British victories in war were also how Canada and Caribbean islands such as Tobago and St Lucia became part of the empire. Later though, when given to the indigenous peoples who had lived in Britain's so-called 'new' lands for centuries.

**Settlers**



Sometimes British people would go to another part of the world and start to live there. They might be looking for new business opportunities or a chance to own land, or to be coming away from the ill treatment they received in their home country as a result of their religion. This is how large parts of the North American east coast became part of the British Empire in the 1600s and 1700s. Treaties were agreed between indigenous peoples and the settlers, but over time the settlers often did not keep to these agreements and grabbed more and more land, leading to conflict.

**European exploration**

The 1500s is often referred to as the 'Age of Discovery' in Europe. New thinking about the world and better shipbuilding led to more exploration of land that Europeans had not visited before. Occasionally, explorers would find land and claim it for Britain. That happened in 1770 when Captain James Cook sailed to Australia. To strengthen the claim that the land belonged to Britain, British colonists who were there had to marry the people who already lived there - local indigenous Australians.

**Trade**

When British companies went to trade in some places, they didn't buy new land areas. These companies sometimes became so powerful that they controlled the trade of luxury goods like spices, cotton, silk and tea. The British government sometimes sent and hired soldiers to support the companies by enforcing colonial order, guarding trading settlements and controlling the local people. This happened in India and parts of Africa for many years from the 1600s.



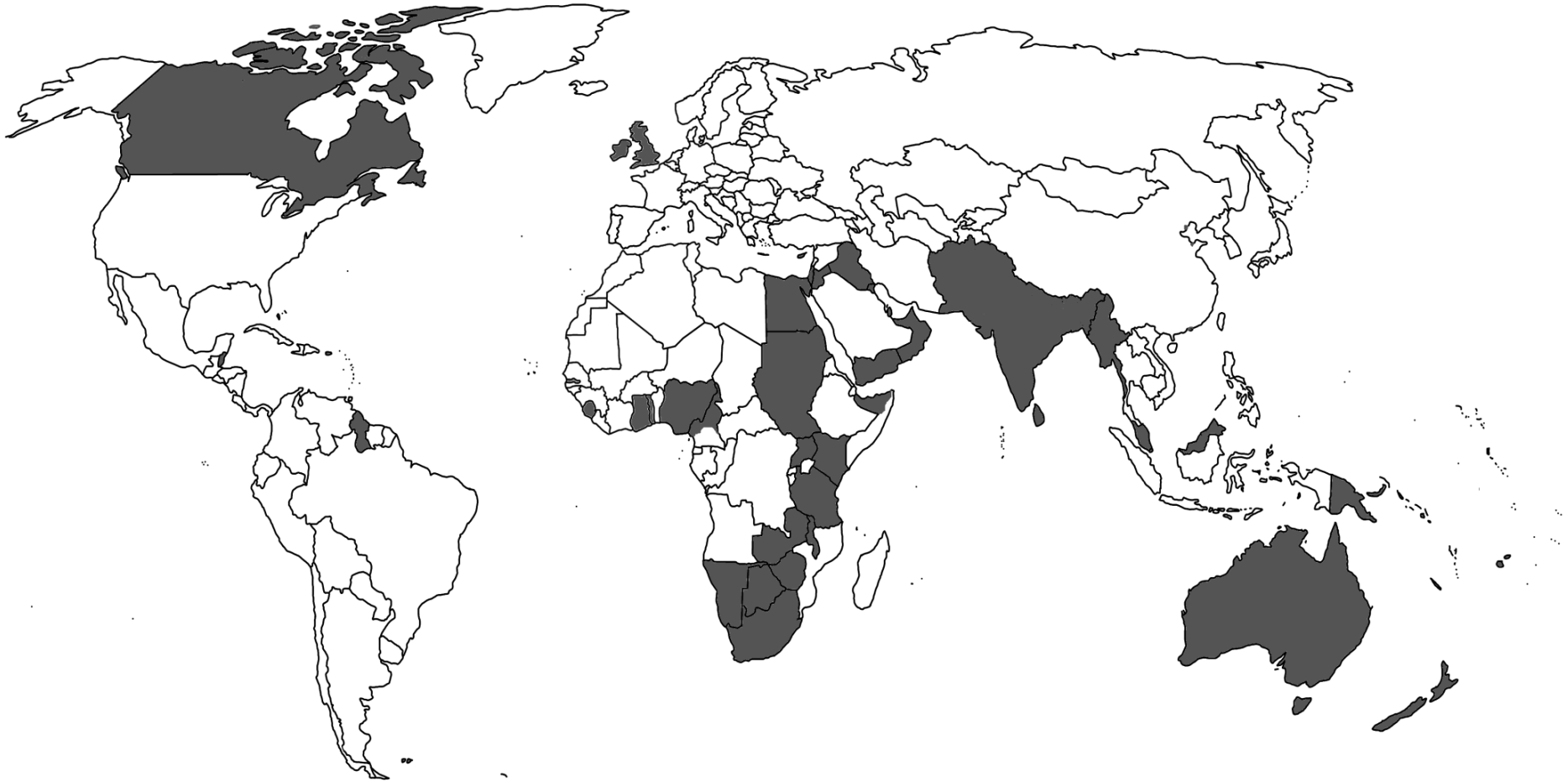
Read your information sheet carefully.

In your books match up interpretations A-D with one of the reasons why Britain wanted an Empire.

You should use a quote from each to prove how they link or match up

Why did Britain want an Empire?, in your own words, you need to use **AT LEAST** one example from each of the boxes on your sheet

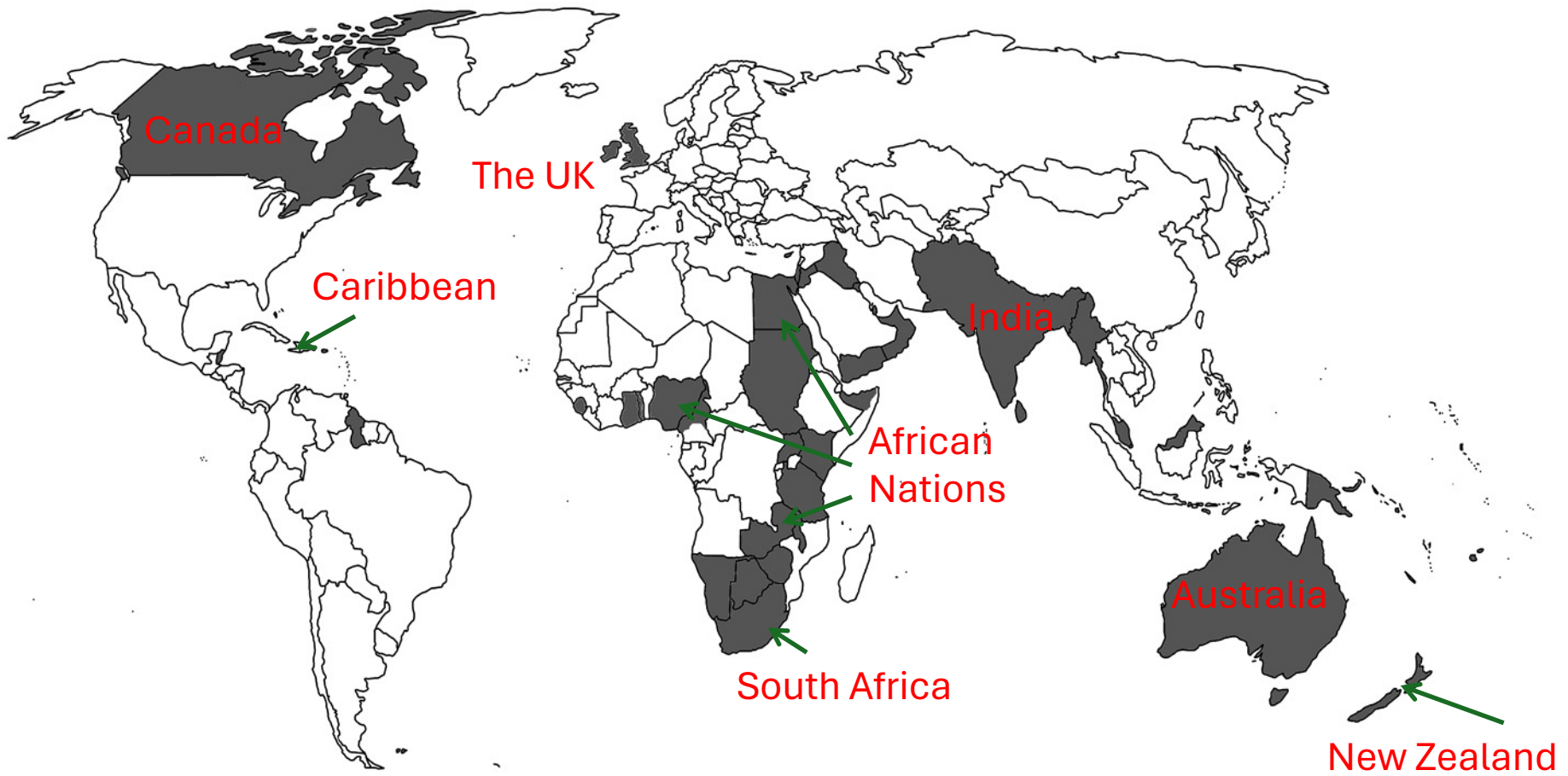
## How big was the British Empire?

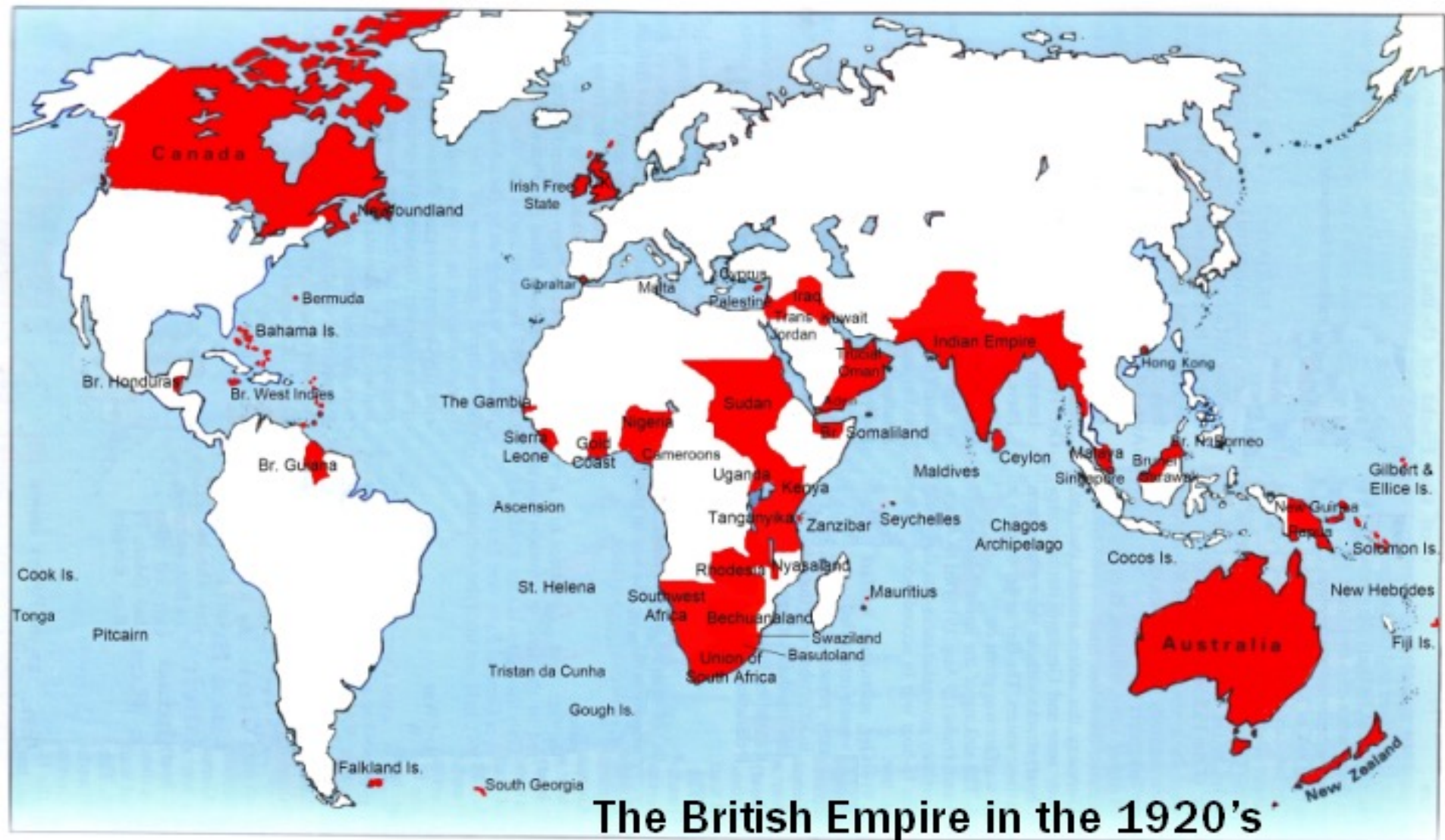


Stick this map into your books and label as many of the countries in grey as you can



# How big was the British Empire?





The Sun Never Sets on the British Empire...

Write this statement and say what you think it means?

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Britain set up \_\_ colonies in America and some trading posts in \_\_\_\_\_. They could easily fight untrained \_\_\_\_\_. British colonies had to buy goods from \_\_\_\_\_. The British could bring back raw materials like furs, \_\_\_\_\_, tobacco and tea. Britain's main rival was \_\_\_\_\_. France was bigger and had a better army but they were involved in wars in \_\_\_\_\_ and because Britain concentrated on their \_\_\_\_\_ they took over more countries.

**Sugar / Empire / natives / Europe / Britain /  
13 / India / France**