

George Orwell: *Shooting an Elephant* – Analysing an essay about colonialism

by Liam Cleary



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Die Einheit bietet den Schülerinnen und Schülern einen historischen Hintergrund zu den komplexen Untaten des Imperialismus und eine Gelegenheit, kontroverse aktuelle Themen zu diskutieren. Das Thema britischer Kolonialismus und seine Altlasten waren selten so umstritten wie heute im Zuge des Brexit, der Bewegung in Richtung eines zweiten schottischen Unabhängigkeitsreferendums und der Rassismuskorrekturen im Buckingham Palace. Diese tiefen Verwerfungen innerhalb der britischen Gesellschaft machen einen genauen Blick auf Orwells Sicht der britischen imperialistischen Geschichte und sein Unbehagen über die Art und Weise, wie moderne Staaten Individuen kontrollieren und überwachen könnten, aktueller denn je.

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Competences and skills:

In this unit, students acquire further **intercultural knowledge** and background information on the British Empire. They improve their **reading** and **essay writing skills** while working on the texts. Students also get the chance to hone their **listening comprehension skills** in the course of their work on this topic. **Vocabulary** is extended and **debating style** improved as students grapple with moral questions such as how history should be presented and how we make important decisions.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

A Analysis	C Comment	CT Creative Task
D Discussion/debate	G Group work	L Language
LVC Listening/viewing comprehension		M Mind map/visualising
P Working with a picture/cartoon		PR Presentation
R Research	RC Reading comprehension	S Summary
T Working with a text	VI Working with a video	W Writing

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: The British exploitation of Burma	M1–M2	A, C, L, RC, T, W
2.1: <i>Shooting an Elephant</i> by George Orwell (Part 1)	M3–M6	A, D, L, RC
2.2: <i>Shooting an Elephant</i> by George Orwell (Part 2)		
3: George Orwell and modern Burma	M7	LC
4: Monuments in public places	M8	D, G, P, R,
5: State surveillance today	M9	C, VI, W

M2 Worksheet – *How a nation is exploited – The British Empire in Burma*

Reading comprehension



1. Tick whether the statements are true or false.

	true	false
a) Burmese MPs are independent, free-thinking national representatives.		
b) Most Burmese are simple peasants who work the land.		
c) Well-educated Burmese attend private schools in Burma.		
d) Taxes in Burma are partly used to finance local development projects.		
e) Land taxes are greater than farmers' crop returns.		
f) A Burmese farmer's life is generally a pleasant one.		
g) Burmese industrial knowledge has improved recently.		

Language and style



2. Rewrite the following sentences by replacing the underlined words without changing the meaning:
- The government of all the Indian provinces under the control of the British Empire is of necessity despotic, because only the threat of force can subdue a population of several million subjects.
 - Recently, to appease public opinion and put a stop to nationalist agitation which was beginning to cause concern [...]



3. The author makes frequent references to political structures and control of power in the first few paragraphs of this extract. Find the words or terms in the text which match these definitions. Enter your answers in the grid.

Topic 3: George Orwell and modern Burma

M7 Worksheet – Finding George Orwell in Burma

The following interview, which was recorded for a National Public Radio programme, concentrates on Orwell's books in a Burmese context and on the relationship between the military-run state and the individual writers and storytellers in Myanmar. Emma Larkin is a pen name.



Listen to the audio recording twice and then do the tasks.

<https://raabe.click/OrwellBurma>

Listening comprehension



1. True or false. Give a reason for your answer.

a) *Burmese Days* is set in the south of Burma.

b) It is easy to disappear from society in Burma.

c) Emma Larkin wanted to use her real name on the book's cover.

d) The author Emma Larkin was brought up in Asia but does not speak Burmese.

e) The name Myanmar was introduced when the British left Burma.



2. Fill in the exact missing words as they are spoken in the text.

[...] he actually wrote three, an _____ you call it. One of the first people I spoke to about Orwell called Orwell the "prophet" and that was very _____ to me and in Burma they do have this joke whereby *Burmese Days*, which is Orwell's first novel mirrors the _____ period,



Photo B: Charles George Gordon
© Liam Cleary



Photo C: Gandhi
© Liam Cleary

Group Discussion/Role Play



2. Choose one of the roles for your group and enact a discussion in class.
 - a) You are members of a committee established by the government to deal with the thorny issue of statues in public places. You receive an application from a number of groups to have the three statues shown here removed from the public space they occupy in London due to the controversial past of the men in question. Come to a decision on whether any, all, or none of these statues should be taken away.
 - b) You belong to a group of young black English activists who believe England's colonial past needs atoning for. Make your argument for removing the Churchill statue.
 - c) You belong to a pro-Brexit, pro-Tory English organisation and have decided to ask for the removal of the Gandhi statue as a countermeasure to applications concerning the Churchill monument. Make your case.
 - d) You belong to a group of young pacifists keen to fight climate change and set a good example for future generations. You believe statues associated with the pillage of continents such as Africa and Asia should be torn down. England's colonial past is shameful. Make your argument for removing the Gordon statue.