

Introduction to global learning in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 in history

Key Stage 2

A good place to start is the Roman Empire and its impact on Britain, which is perhaps the first example of globalisation. The Romans came to Britain as much for raw materials – tin, copper, silver and gold – as to extend their political power. Trade in corn, slaves and hunting dogs was also important. A key point is the impact the Romans had on the country. Rich Britons built villas, drank wine, had baths, installed heating, even moved to towns and went to the theatre. In fact, after the Romans left, in around 400 AD, historians describe the society that was left as Romano-British. The original settlers, the Celts, had been pushed to the margins of the country and struggled to survive. The impact of Rome on Britain is a fruitful area of study with much to debate.

The 2014 National Curriculum programme of study for history requires the study of ‘The achievements of the earliest civilisations’ for Key Stage 2 and this is another place to focus. This gives an opportunity to show that parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia were not always ‘inferior’ to the West and developed highly sophisticated ways of life and trade links long before Britain. Pupils are also required to study ‘A non-European society’ which also gives the opportunity to explore the Kingdom of Benin in West Africa, or Islam, or the Mayan culture as a success rather than as a problem.

By carefully selecting an appropriate study unit it is possible to use global learning in the study of good history and to show peoples and countries in a positive light.

Key Stage 3

Opportunities here are many, as most of the prescribed content takes the form of exemplars rather than compulsory content. How you choose to first portray India to pupils, or the growth of Empire, for example, is crucial. Do Indians first appear in the story as mutineers, for example, or as the Mughals who built the Taj Mahal and other treasures? Were they ‘being done to’ by Europeans, or were they a strong civilisation in their own right? Why did Europeans first go to India? To get some of the wealth, exotic commodities and resources they didn’t have themselves?

The same point about portrayal applies to Britain and its industrial development. Wealth from the slave trade helped finance mills, factories and railways. The cotton manufacturing industry depended on imports of cotton from the USA which was picked by slaves from Africa. The cotton was then sold to India, destroying an already existing highly-skilled textile industry. How often do we make these connections when we are teaching about the ‘Spinning Jenny’ and the ‘Power Loom?’ And there is the question of ‘The scramble for Africa’, colonisation and empire, as well as de-colonisation and the demands for independence. How this is portrayed in history is crucial in helping pupils understand the world they live in today.

It is important that pupils see the ‘big picture’ of history by developing their understanding of the world and not just focusing on Britain. How do they begin to understand Afghanistan without some knowledge of Empire and the Great Game? How do they understand the war against terror and 9/11 if they have not explored Islam, the Middle East and the Cold War? We need to give our pupils the tools to develop their own ‘big picture’ of the world.