

ET 2.2



Connecting Dialogues



Commonwealth Awareness?

The Elephant Times

Tide~ on-line magazine

Issue 2.2 : February 2022

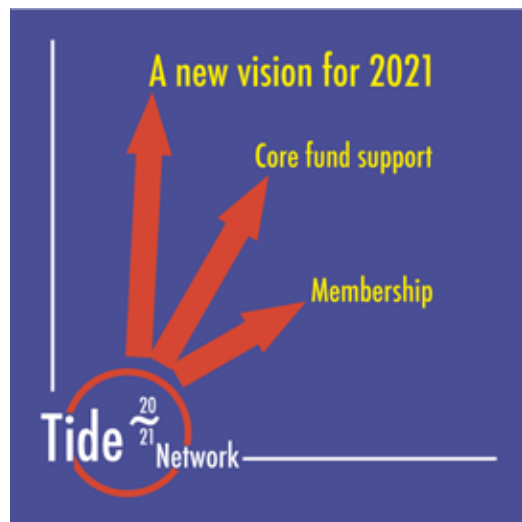


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You are welcome to adapt them for your teaching.

They represent the contribution of thousands of teachers over the years and hundreds of teachers that have taken lead roles in both curriculum projects and study visits.

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The pamphlet '**A new vision for 2021**' outlines the plan to revitalise Tide~ creating a sustainable **Network Hub** to facilitate the voluntary work of Trustees, those co-opted to take lead roles in coordinating and a growing number of new members.

The Elephant Times is edited by Jeff Serf and Scott Sinclair.

We have taken on this voluntary role as Tide~ Trustees.

Dorit Braun, Clive Harber and Darius Jackson joined the ET Team for this issue.

The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of Tide~.

On each page:

< Click on The Elephant Times to go to the Tide~ website for back issues.



Elephant Times 2.2

Commonwealth Awareness?

February 2022

This ET magazine is the first of a series focusing on the Commonwealth. The series sets out to do two things:

- ☐ support those seeking to make the most of learning opportunities linked to the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games;
- ☐ follow up and share work done by schools linked to the Games, to reflect on the experience and generate thinking, views and ideas about the potential of ongoing 'Commonwealth Awareness'.

For updates on ET resources - please sign up to our free newsletter



This Logo offers links to documents on the website: www.tidegloballearning.net

Click on underlined text to go to other websites.

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Tide~ on line magazine

Introduction ...

Birmingham is hosting the Commonwealth Games in July 2022. There will be many learning opportunities linked directly to the sport and cultural events.

Birmingham Education Partnership [BEP] has a key role in co-ordinating that work. BEP has also set up partnerships between schools in the Birmingham area with schools in a variety of Commonwealth Countries. See: [BEP Commonwealth Connections](#)

This Elephant Times [ET] series seeks to complement that work, providing an opportunity for teachers and other education practitioners to share ideas related to the Commonwealth.

We explore an approach that, inspired by Sathnam Sanghera's book 'Empireland', we are calling '[Commonwealth Awareness](#)'.

Responses to 'Empireland' are the major feature of this ET.

Isabelle Schafer's article is the first of a series resulting from a Tide~ project in partnership with Worcester University, School of Education. She includes introductory ideas about 'WORDS'.

We conclude with introductory ideas about 'FLAGS'.

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We seek ET articles from school practitioners

- ☐ to share your ideas and experiences;
- ☐ to recommend resources to other teachers;
- ☐ to reflect on learning.

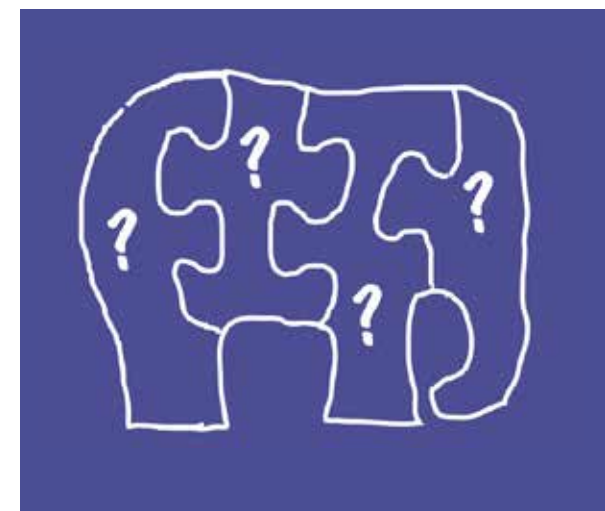
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Please let us know of your interest.

Email: elephanttimes@tidegloballearning.net



Elephant Times is now part of the Tide~ '[Connecting Dialogues](#)' initiative.

A core document outlining the initiative will be published later this term.

[See ET 2.1 on the Global Pandemic](#)



Commonwealth Awareness ?

The Commonwealth Games could be a stimulus to many learning opportunities but there are also considerable challenges to understanding the Commonwealth.

Where did it come from? - Where it is going? - How do we build an awareness of its complex and contested history?

This Elephant Times [ET] sets the scene for exploring some of those challenges. Future issues of ET magazine will build on these ideas.

We introduce an approach that, inspired by Sathnam Sanghera's book 'Empireland', we are calling '**Commonwealth Awareness**'.

Tide~'s proposition is:

- ❑ **that the key challenge for all educators**, at this stage in the build-up to The Games, is for us to think about the significance of the Commonwealth's complex and contested history and how that impacts on British society today ... and the implications of that impact for education.
- ❑ **that we should explore the idea of a 'Commonwealth Awareness' approach.** This approach should enable learners to engage with the importance of the Commonwealth legacy without becoming overwhelmed, or being pushed into taking sides [either way]. It should enable learning, and take care not to be about indoctrination.
- ❑ **that staff discussion focused on 'Empireland'** could offer a significant starting point for new conversations, team thinking and quality planning.
- ❑ **that ET magazine makes learning about the Commonwealth a feature in 2022.** This ET starts the process, later editions will focus more on sharing ideas and resources. Later we will seek articles to reflect on what has been learnt.



Africa

Botswana
Cameroon
Eswatini
Gambia, The
Ghana
Kenya
Lesotho
Malawi
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Nigeria
Rwanda
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Tanzania
Uganda
United Republic of Tanzania
Zambia

Asia

Bangladesh
Brunei Darussalam
India
Malaysia
Maldives
Pakistan
Singapore
Sri Lanka

Pacific

Australia
Fiji
Kiribati
Nauru
New Zealand
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu

Caribbean & Americas

Antigua and Barbuda
Bahamas, The
Barbados
Belize
Canada
Dominica
Grenada
Guyana
Jamaica
St Lucia
St Kitts & Nevis
St Vincent & The Grenadines
Trinidad and Tobago

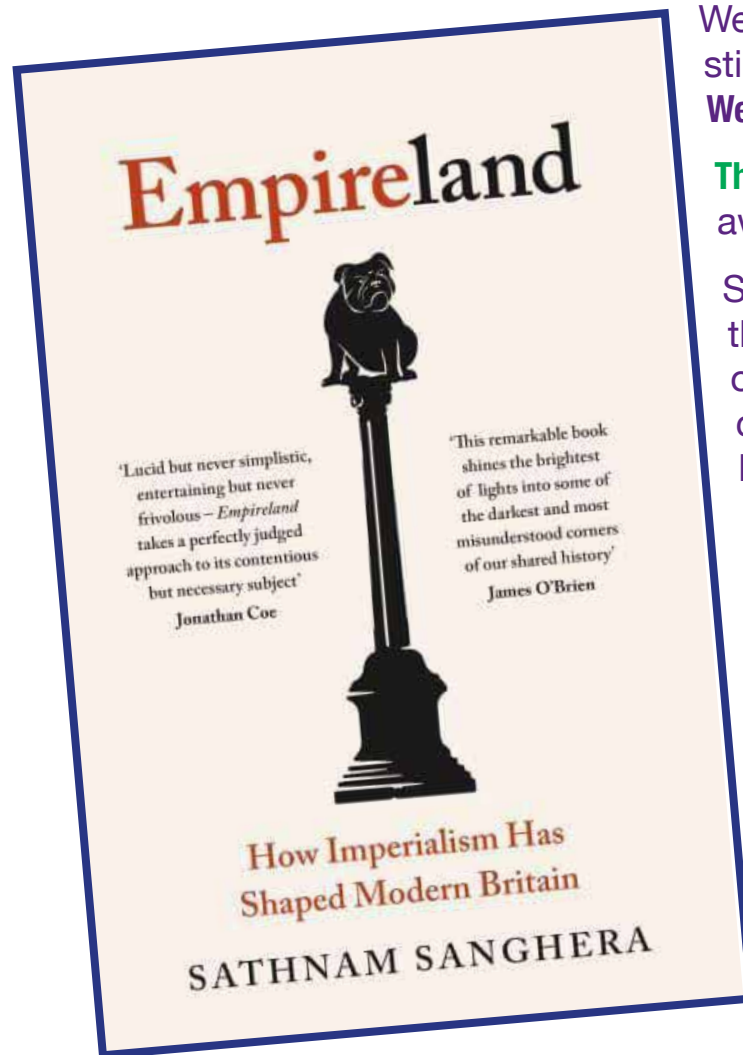
Europe

Cyprus
Malta
United Kingdom



'Empireland' - an inspiration

In a very readable 200 pages Sathnam Sanghera tells his own story and captures the essence of some 500 years of colonial history - and most importantly how that history shapes Britain today.



We have been using 'Empireland' as a stimulus to group thinking.

We commend it to you.

The first priority is about our own awareness, that is key.

Sathnam advocates finding ways forward, that greater awareness will lead to positive outcomes. There is a need to make contested matters more accessible to learners and to avoid simplistic, ridiculous all encompassing questions - such as: *Was the Empire a good or bad thing?*

When we consider even the most basic questions about the Commonwealth it is soon clear that we are engaging with not only what to teach but how we teach.

The second priority is to consider what it is we want learners to gain from **Commonwealth Awareness** and the implications at different key stages. As one Tide~ member put it: -

"Many teachers (myself included) would find the whole topic of the Commonwealth rather overwhelming, not least because one does not want to encourage any simplistic, dualistic reading of 'right' and 'wrong', nor of attributing blame, nor of unwittingly perpetuating unhelpful stereotypes of superiority and inferiority, or of 'victimhood'."

'The Empire's New Clothes' is, unlike 'Empireland', about the Commonwealth.

Philip Murphy, in a very readable often humorous style, offers insights into its history, and explores many issues coming right up-to-date, questioning some Brexit aspirations. We are left with some dilemmas, see page 8.

The chapter on 'Guilt' raises questions about 'cover up' and ways that understanding the history has been actively avoided.

A key aspect of Awareness is to do with Britain's psyche and how the past has influenced that - and the implications for our future role in the world. Making sense of the complexities of the history is pivotal. A simplistic gloss, from whatever perspective it is presented, does not help.

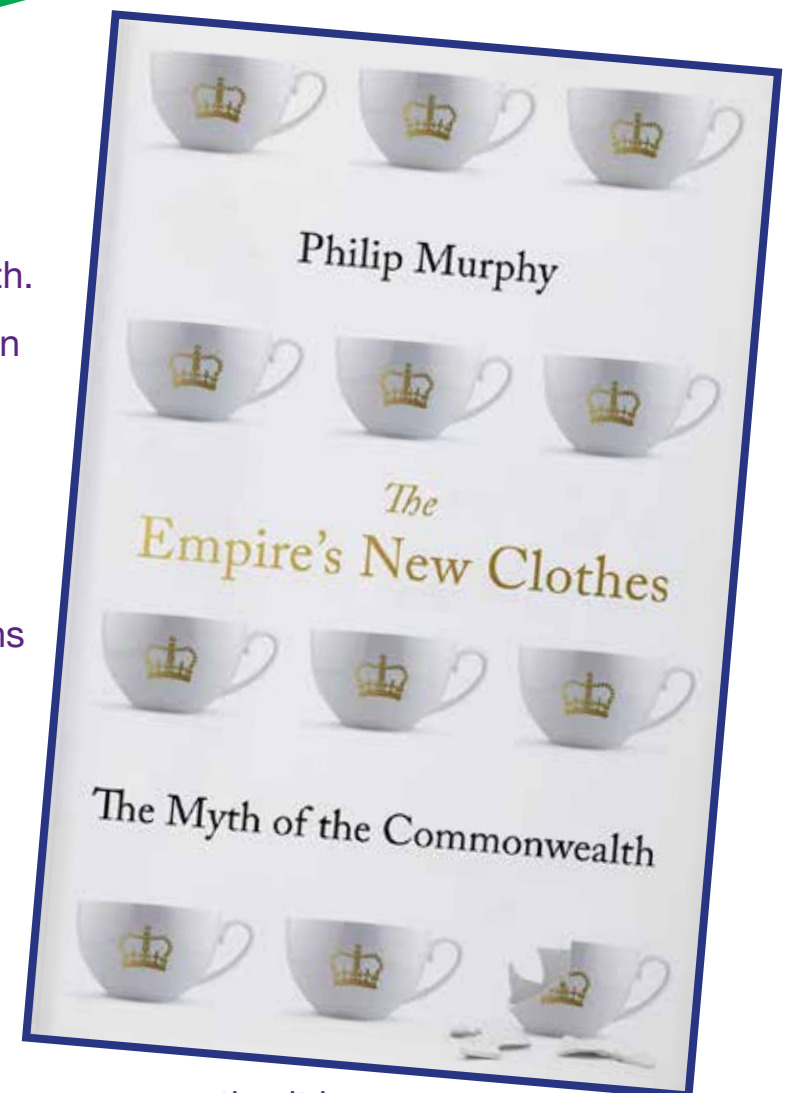
Both Phillip and Sathnam highlight **the need to move away from collective amnesia**. It would seem that Prince Charles also endorses that sentiment.

In November 2021 Barbados became a republic. It remains in the Commonwealth but the Queen is no longer head of state. Prince Charles marked this transition in Barbados, saying ...

"From the darkest days of our past, and the appalling atrocity of slavery, which forever stains our history, the people of this island forged their path with extraordinary fortitude."

We invited reflections about 'Empireland' [see page 11 on] that set the scene for the conversations that are needed. Commonwealth Awareness might be a separate initiative a bit like Empire Awareness that Sathnam seems to propose. But Darius [page 12] challenges that idea.

It is more likely that what we learn from the 2022 opportunity is that Commonwealth, or indeed Empire Awareness, is something that builds up through the key stages, has implications for a variety of curriculum areas, and provides the opportunity for the development of dialogue skills engaging with contested issues.



Dilemmas ...

Is Commonwealth Awareness a good idea?

Either way we need to engage with some key dilemmas, such as those represented here.

- ☐ Which do you agree with?
- ☐ Which do you disagree with?
- ☐ Better still - what would you write?

The five articles that follow offer a variety of reflections and ideas.

They are a stimulus to the conversations that are needed if we are to make the most of the 2022 opportunity.

We would value feedback and to learn about your experiences.

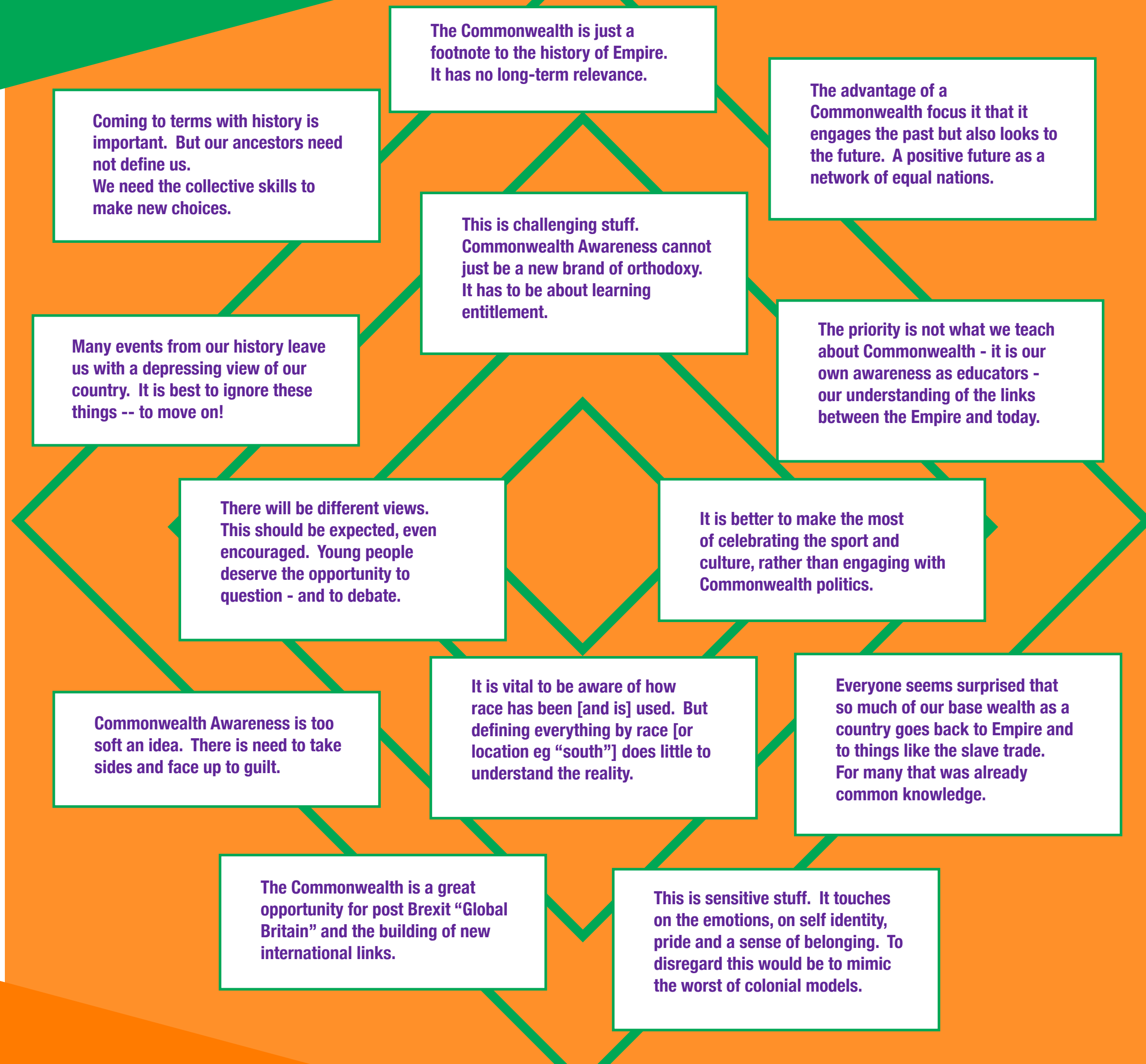
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The Elephant Times [2.21]



I loved this book. The honesty, the integrity, the rightful insistence by the author on his Britishness.

It is beautifully written, thoughtful and very well researched. He weighs up competing perspectives and demonstrates what it means to present a fair and balanced approach to the history of colonialism and its impact.

I fully accept his argument that Empire must be included in the national curriculum. But I don't think that will be enough. As he says: *"Let's face it, imperialism is not something that can be erased with a few statues being torn down or a few institutions facing up to their dark pasts, it exists as a legacy in my very being, and, more widely, explains nothing less than who we are as a nation"*.

Teaching about Britain's imperial past is a vital step towards addressing this legacy, but education is an open-ended process and we cannot be sure about exactly what it is that learners will gain from an exploration of empire. For me, teaching about Empire needs to be part of an entitlement for learners that enables us to consider how we are part of the world, and what that means for each of us.

I learnt much more about the horrors of British colonialism in India than I had previously been aware of, though I had been aware of some, including that the British had invented concentration camps in South Africa. I was struck by how little Sanghera was taught about his own history at school in Wolverhampton and how little he knew of Empire, given that this was part of his family history.

I realised that I was lucky because my family (refugees, from Europe, via Palestine/Israel), told me that the European History I was taught at school in Birmingham bore little relation to the European History that my parents had been taught in Europe and in Palestine. That meant I did at least question the history I was taught, and knew it was partial at best.

I am left with some questions that feel important to address in order to take up the educational challenge of this important book:

- ☐ **Where should Empire be included in the curriculum? Does it deepen things that are already studied, or does it replace things? Or both? And if so, what does it replace and how will that be explained to parents, students and governors?**
- ☐ **How best should we teach about Empire? What support and information might teachers need in order to teach this?**
- ☐ **How best could we make use of the direct experiences of teachers, students, their families and the local community?**
- ☐ **How best should we reflect that the experiences will be mixed? That people will disagree? How can we be sensitive toward possible internalised oppression?**
- ☐ **How should we respond to people who experienced trauma as part of their story? How do we avoid treating people as exotic? Or defining them by the experience?**

I hope the work taking place in the context of the Connecting Dialogues initiative will help us to address these questions.



Darius Jackson

...reflecting on 'Empireland'

There is much I liked and enjoyed reading Empireland, but the “half serious” [p 209] suggestion that establishing an Empire Day to help us understand how the British Empire defines us, still leaves me perturbed.

Whilst Sanghera is right that the British Empire is studiously ignored, setting aside a day to reflect on the impact of the empire is no answer; if only things were that simple. It would expect too much of a single day. Those of us involved in the Citizenship curriculum have experience of such ‘days’; somehow young people were expected to understand global poverty, justice, the nature of democracy or Human Rights from a single suspended timetable day that ended with a film.

On such a day we could make simple factual statements such as ‘the battle of Ordashu was fought on 4th February 1874’; this factual statement does little to help us understand the nature of the British Empire. We need to site the event in an interpretation that places the battle in its context, most importantly British empire building in West Africa during the latter part of the C19th. **Understanding of any complex issue in any discipline comes from a process of revisiting and reshaping our knowledge and ideas.**

In any study of empire, the most important concept will be empire itself; however, it is a complex concept. Even if we ignore Hardt and Negri’s Empire (2000) of ‘a decentralised and deterritorializing apparatus of rule...incorporates the entire global realm’ (p. xii) we still have a series of issues to consider:

- ☐ **How does empire relate to conquest?**
- ☐ **Why build an empire in the first place?**
- ☐ **What is the role of colonialism?**
- ☐ **Can you have an empire built on trade rather than conquest?**
- ☐ **What is the role of race theory in empire building?**
- ☐ **What is the relationship between the core and the periphery?**



These issues are too complex for a single day every year

Sanghera points out there used to be an Empire Day between 1902 and 1958 on Queen Victoria’s birthday. It was a celebration held to instil the virtues of ‘Responsibility, Sympathy, Duty and Self-Sacrifice’. In 1958 it was renamed Commonwealth Day.

However, throughout its 56 years **the day was a focus for conflict**; groups sympathetic to imperialism saw it as a day for celebrating national pride, marching bands, and tales of daring, whilst others, generally referred to as ‘Communists and pacifists’ used it to critique the very idea of an empire.

As reactions to the National Trust interim report ‘Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust’ demonstrates the idea of imperial legacy is no less controversial today. **Opening another front in the ‘Culture Wars’ is not the way to clearer understanding of the empire’s legacy** but it would lead to a highly symbolic fight over statues, street names and a call to “save our history”.

We are left with the issue that the British Empire is ignored or romanticised. So, what should be done? The simplest readings of education theory show the importance of concrete examples preceding abstract thought; we count chairs, stairs and houses before we encounter number bonds, square roots and least-square regression.

If we are to introduce an understanding of how Britain’s imperial legacy into popular history it must be based on specific examples in particular locations, either cultural, such as Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park, Hugh Masekela’s song Vasco Da

Gama, or Linton Kwezi Johnson’s album Bass Culture or places such as Powis Castle, Lancaster Maritime Museum, or Porthmadog Harbour. In other words, in specific local narratives the imperial dimensions need to be highlighted.



[Click on cover to listen](#)

...reflecting on 'Empireland'

Driving to work listening to the first chapter of 'Empireland' as an audio-book ...

I was struck by how rich a resource this is for starting points for projects with young people in art and design.

The legacy of the Empire in the culture of Great Britain is enormous, and this chapter offers a list that includes such things as: Anglo-Indian words like veranda, pyjamas, dinghy, calico, and bazaar; how the importation of expensive items such as Indian fabrics led to the domestic production of items like shawls; the impact on business and economy – Liberties of London is housed in a building made of ships' timbers and is of the same proportions as HMS Hindustan, Shell is named after its imports of antiques and shells from the Far East, and Bass developed its India Pale Ale after realising that the journey of 4-5 months led to greater flavour and depth (our city's very own unique Worcestershire Sauce came into being in a similar way).

In sport, the ‘Kop’ terrace at football grounds is named due to the steep terracing and likeness to the location of the Battle of Spion Kop; the many memorials and statues to those involved in the Empire, such as Colston’s statue that was the centre of much recent news when it was torn down and thrown into the River Avon. Rudyard Kipling named many of the streets around the old Wembley Stadium (originally called the Empire Stadium) with names reminiscent of Empire, such as Dominion Way, Empire Way, Engineers’ Way and Union Approach.



Kieran Lyman

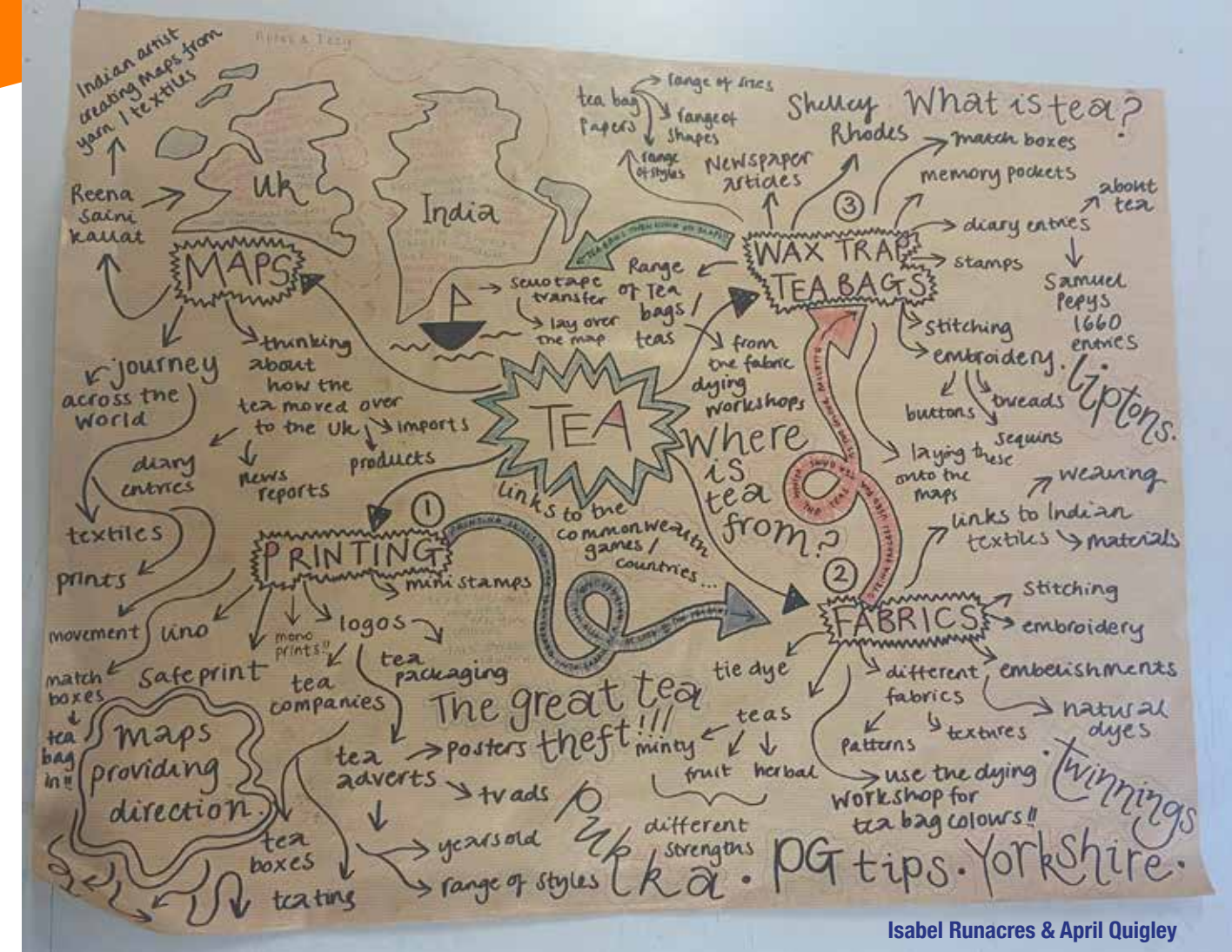
Simon Huson

**Senior lecturer
Subject lead: PGCE
Art & Design.**

**School of Education
University of
Worcester**



The Elephant Times [2.21]



As an artist I see many potential outcomes for pupils.

Projects that trainee teachers began developing on our planning day included figurehead designs for the Cutty Sark, designing a new baton for the Commonwealth Games, mapping the journey of tea across the world, fashion and millinery in the Empire, postage stamps from Commonwealth countries, and stackable, interchangeable, ceramic sculptures that represent commonwealth countries.



Stephanie Bescoby



Rachael Roblin

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Tide™ on line magazine

...reflecting on 'Empireland'

The murder of George Floyd in May 2020, and subsequent BLM protests, stimulated a variety of responses from secondary teacher educators at the University of Worcester. These experiences helped identify an opportunity to enhance inclusion and to increase representation.

Following the development and delivery of a series of teacher educator workshops on decolonising, diversifying and democratising our subject curricula, we decided to use Sathnam Sanghera's insightful text **'Empireland'** as a stimulus for a joint Tide~global learning/University of Worcester project to make the most of learning opportunities linked to the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games.

Our reading of 'Empireland' enabled us - a group of educated, white, middle-class, lecturers - to come face-to-face with our uninformed pre-conceptions of Empire. We were confronted with how little we actually know.

'Empireland' took us on a learning journey which included a clearer understanding of the past, present and future of the British Empire, and its evolution and legacy in the form of the Commonwealth, an organisation that spans 54 nations, with an estimated population of 2.4 billion people.

Our discussions have continued over a period of six months and stimulated rich debate on the history of The Commonwealth, on white privilege, the role of allyship, how we are seeing the world differently and our responsibilities as teacher educators to support our trainees and in-service colleagues in exploring these topics. We would like to encourage everyone, within and beyond formal education, to read or listen to Sanghera's 'Empireland' and reflect on their own education of Empire.

**Rebecca Davidge,
Elena Lengthorn
& Rachael Moore**

**Reflect on teacher
educator discussion
about 'Empireland'**

**School of Education,
University of Worcester**



Four common threads emerged from our team reflections:

1. **A new understanding of the open and welcome invitation given to Commonwealth citizens to migrate to the UK juxtaposed with the racist realities they frequently faced, and that the legacy of Empire is all encompassing, relating to every school subject and not limited to history and citizenship.**
2. **A new way of seeing the world and a new appreciation of the representations portrayed in the images that we see and use in our teacher training.**
3. **An appreciation that this dialogic space had been created for us to bear witness to the racism that some trainees had witnessed and faced themselves in schools.**
4. **An acknowledgement that we feel a level of uncertainty and lack of confidence in talking about racism and Empire. We each had questions about the approach we should take in relation to appropriate language.**

In our most recent development session we explored what sort of impact this project might have. We asked questions about how learning of this type, focused at the time of The Commonwealth Games in nearby Birmingham, might too easily be considered tokenistic and not lead to lasting curricular or values change. One colleague commented that it feels like *"the change in thinking we are aiming to achieve is immeasurable ... how do we measure the immeasurable?"*

The Tide~ University of Worcester collaboration aims to engage teacher educators, trainee teachers and teachers in the community in opening a dialogue about decolonising, diversifying and democratising the curriculum through an exploration of the role and relevance of The Commonwealth.

It is proposed that a series of curriculum-focused articles will be published in a special issue of the Elephant Times to support learning on Commonwealth themes in schools.

Audrey Osler

...reflecting on 'Empireland'

For me, Sathnam Sanghera's Empireland carries greatest resonance when the author writes:

"... imperialism is not something that can be erased with a few statues being torn down or a few institutions facing up to their dark pasts, it exists as a legacy in my very being".

For me too, Empire exists as a legacy in my being. The story of Empire is also the story of my own family, with my three-times great grandfather abducted as a child in southern India and sold in the late 18th century to an officer on an East India Company ship. As a trafficked child, he was forced to work aboard ship on the trade routes along the Indian coast and then onto to China. Eventually freed, he later worked for a British family in France at the time of the Revolution. He finally returned to Madras, India, many years later and worked for a settler family from England. The story of Empire is also the story of my grandparents who left Madras after the First World War, first seeking work in British North Borneo, and then moving to Singapore in the 1930s. They were British subjects and lived in British colonial territories through most of their lives, since Singapore remained a Crown colony until 1963.

Audrey Osler

**Professor Emeritus
University of Leeds**

Empireland is a reminder to those of us living in Britain how Empire, something we most commonly associate with history, is also about the present day and who we are today. It is a reminder that the history we may have learned is frequently simplistic and partial.

At school in England, in the 1960s and 1970s, the history I studied through to A level was predominantly about Britain. School books briefly covered the British East India Company (EIC) and how trade routes were established. We learned that Robert Clive, 'Clive of India', was engaged in war with successive Indian leaders, and that he returned to Britain extremely rich.



The Elephant Times [2.21]

Did I realise this was a struggle for power, or did I assume at that time that conquering and plundering was an Englishman's birth right?

I don't think we were ever told directly that Clive's Indian-acquired wealth was in large part loot or that the wars and other policies instigated by the EIC led to devastation of agricultural workers' livelihoods, famine, and mass displacement of people. Today this plunder can be viewed at Powis Castle in Wales, although it is only in recent months that the National Trust has hurriedly put together a temporary exhibition where this is made explicit.

At school I learned nothing about Ireland beyond the sixteenth century, and had no real understanding of Empire or, indeed, what the Commonwealth was all about. I continued with history at university, where the focus was again on Britain and British history. Although everyone followed at least one module on European history and another on world history, the world history I studied was about Europeans (in this case the Vikings) migrating as far as Kiev to the East and North America to the West, in search of better lands, greater prosperity and, in the course of things, frequently ending up dominating those they conquered. British history was history at home, rather than away, so Empire was again avoided.

Presumably Empire became a 'difficult history' in the 1960s. My father was schooled in 1930s England, when Empire was no doubt presented in most primary schools as Britain's a gift to the world, and when children were invited to celebrate Empire Day on an annual basis. He expressed his experiences simply and baldly: **"They history they told us was lies"**.

But Empire's legacy is with us today. Many of the examples Sanghera provides impact on all of us in Britain today: empire's impact on language, migration patterns, preferred sports, and that strangely British mix of arrogance, sense of exceptionalism, and, at times, what appears to be hugely vulnerable national identity.

This legacy is with us whether a person's family history is one of migration across the globe or whether we trace our families back to 18th century Birmingham.

cont ...

Yet I find it hard to fully identify with Empireland which retells the story of conquest, migration and international politics yet still manages, though its language and examples, to generally exclude half of us. **Sanghera's story of Empire neglects women, both at home and abroad.** Those statutes, now the focus of culture wars, never meant much to me. They were always alien, comprised of male military heroes, politicians and so on. This was the case long before it dawned on me that all of those represented were White, or that many were cruel, oppressive or otherwise reprehensible individuals who, in many cases, were criticised as such during their lifetimes. It was only as the British Empire was increasingly and openly challenged through Independence movements that statues of Robert Clive were erected. At the time of his death his reputation was at an all-time low.

The 'othering' processes – no let's be more direct - the racism that Sanghera was subjected to as a Sikh boy growing up in Wolverhampton in the 1970s and 1980s, may be, for some people, an uncomfortable read. Some may argue that his experiences were atypical. But the stories I collected from Birmingham school girls, all young people of colour, who also grew up in the 1970s and 1980s belie this. Others will suggest that things have got better. Clearly, some things have improved, not least the legal framework for challenging inequality. But history isn't an inevitable march towards progress.

Until very recently, I might have accepted that things have generally improved over recent decades. But in many ways, we remain a divided society, and some of these divisions were exploited by political leaders during the Brexit referendum campaign and subsequently.

A couple of years ago, I was having dinner in a restaurant in Watford, just 20 miles from central London and a stone's throw from my birthplace. The social context had already confirmed my personal history of schooling and work in that location. I was then asked: where are you from? The woman asking went on to make it clear that she considered me an outsider or interloper, because of my parentage. **The legacy of Empire lives on.**

The task for teachers, to face our difficult shared history and contribute to a shared sense of belonging, remains challenging. But I would argue, it remains necessary and compelling.



Jacinda Arden PM New Zealand

Sheikh Hasina PM Bangladesh

- Mia Amor Mottley PM Barbados -

“Three phenomenal leaders from the Commonwealth”



Second World War recruitment poster

**Two images of Commonwealth
... discuss**



Multilingual through and through ...

Isabelle Schafer

“Zen through and through”

“Gourmet through and through”

“British through and through”

Such seemingly simple statements emphasise a state of mind, define a personality trait or specify a characteristic, and raise a number of important points. What’s more, “definitions, boundaries and perceptions are examined and tested” when we discuss identity (Fisher et al., 2020, p.449). Namely -

- ◊ It is possible to be zen, gourmet and British at the same time and, therefore, it is perhaps judicious to suggest that identity is multi-faceted (Beaudrie et al. 2021, Fisher 2020, Hidayati et al. 2019, Seals 2018).
- ◊ One must consider the contexts in which such statements can be made and if a person saying that they are, for example, “zen through and through” wants to take a stance in relation to themselves, others or society at large. Someone may want to adopt a ‘zen’ stance in a particular social situation, to fit in, but this might be a role rather than something that is permanent. They might also hide or dismiss a part of their identity to fit in.
- ◊ What it means to identify as zen, gourmet or British is open to interpretation and it may be largely dependent on people’s backgrounds, for example.
- ◊ It will not have escaped the reader that ‘zen’ and ‘gourmet’ are not ‘British through and through’ words. Maybe we are all multilingual.

Some of the words that have been
‘borrowed’ from other languages used in
Commonwealth countries.

The 2022 Commonwealth Games afford the opportunity to develop and strengthen pupils’ confidence, knowledge and understanding of language.

They can also help bring to the fore the importance of empowering pupils, whether it be in light of their perceptions of learning languages or in the context of decolonising the curriculum i.e **acknowledging and confronting the past to help us challenge and enrich our understanding of who we are and our world views.**

Pupils can explore language in English, and also in languages such as French and Spanish, as the examples given here are cognates or semi-cognates in those languages. A fact-finding exercise, to be supplemented by follow-up inferential questions could be a starting point. It might involve asking pupils to find out the place or the continent where those words originate from.

‘Place’ and ‘continent’ are deliberately vague terms because borders between countries as we know them changed throughout centuries including during the colonisation period. Plus, languages ‘seep’ through borders that, after all, are often merely lines drawn on maps.

As a language specialist, referring to historical or geographical perspectives is perhaps daunting, but acknowledging history is important because it can stop us from erasing the context in which language was created and ‘transmitted’ or ‘borrowed.’

taboo
avatar
ketchup
safari
pyjamas
bungalow
banjo
barbecue
boomerang
loot
yoga
bangle
icon
zombie
dinghy
jumbo
banana
juggernaut
cot
cash
cushy
chutney
cola
shampoo
commando
guru

Isabelle Schafer
School Quality
Coordinator and
PGCE Secondary
Modern Languages
Course Leader
School of Education,
University of Worcester



Instead, we can guide pupils to reflect on the significance of words in their original language and on their meaning in English, highlighting similarities and differences; for example, whilst “tapu” can mean “sacred” in Māori (Moorfield 2021), “taboo” has a different meaning in English. If we only focus on language features, we run the risk of limiting ourselves to developing pupils’ language awareness and reducing language to an end in itself, rather than a tool.

Hidayati et al. (2019 p.123) suggest that a critical language awareness approach is more fruitful. If we consider that language is situated and a means to an end, we can then look at how language is used to shape identities. **We can also reflect critically on the language used to tell stories, on the content of those stories, who tells them and who is at the receiving end.**

Seals (2018) and Fisher et al. (2020) also explore identity formation and from their perspective, the onus is on educators to ensure that:

- ❑ pupils are given opportunities to develop a “multilingual mindset” as it “might lead to enhanced social cohesion in the school and beyond.” (Fisher 2020, p.451);
- ❑ pupils get to learn “more about their heritage languages and cultures” (Seals, 2018, p.331). This will empower them and increase their self-esteem.

It is likely that a lesson focusing on the etymology of a few selected words or using a song or a video clip as a prompt will turn into a cross-curricular lesson, possibly with links to PSHE.

It is also likely that even if pupils complete tasks, create a poem or a display in a modern language in relation to the 2022 Commonwealth Games or perhaps about la Francophonie (French speaking countries) or el mundo hispanohablante (Spanish speaking countries) for example, they will have discussed ideas in English beforehand to deepen their knowledge.

Perhaps then, through our lessons, we can explore how we are connected through and through.



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This part of a series of articles from a Tide~ partnership project with the School of Education, University of Worcester.

See page 14.

Connections: Languages

English is an official language in most Commonwealth Countries.

This map activity explores other colonial languages in Africa. [Click on map].

It needs to be recognised that ‘local’ languages are also important in Africa.

There is scope for learner online research about the local languages that are spoken in different African counties.

How many local languages can you find out about?

Tide~

Flags ... what do they symbolise?

Flags represent a country. Because they are lively and fun, they can enliven learning linked to the Commonwealth Games, **but it is also important to offer learners the opportunity to gain insights into their deeper significance.**

Flags, even today, have a role in political strategy. For example, recently Ministers and MPs, of all parties, have been interviewed on TV with the Union Jack* as a backdrop.

❑ What does this symbolise?

❑ How is this seen in different parts of the UK?

Flags have an emotional dynamic, they can offer a focus for identity and a sense of pride. They are symbols that are instantly recognisable. They are a shorthand for something that seeks to unite, but they can also divide.

Such national pride highlights a key dilemma: **Can you be proud to be British yet ashamed about aspects of our colonial history?**

Sathnam Sanghera suggests that we can, indeed that we must. That dynamic is essential to thinking about how we learn about the Commonwealth, and as a contribution to a revitalised UK.



* There are many protocols and rituals about flags. We know it should only be known as a "union jack" when it is on the jack-stay but that idea has moved on.



One approach would be to investigate "alternative" flags such as the Union Black flag by artist Chris Ofili

What feelings are raised by this flag representing the United Kingdom?

It was flown over Tate Britain during the exhibition of Caribbean-British art called [Life Between Islands](#). [video].

A debate could be structured - asking small groups to prepare either an argument in favour, or against the flag. What key points arise when those ideas are shared? Do they provide an opportunity to discuss matters such as national pride, inclusion and exclusion, and identity?

When the artist gave the flag to Tate Britain the Director said:

"Ofili's Union Black asks questions about British identity, the colonial legacy and the meaning of national allegiance which remain as relevant today as they were when the work was created 14 years ago. At Tate Britain inspirational works of art remind us of Britain's position in the world and how history informs the present. We are proud to fly Union Black above the gallery later this year and are deeply grateful to Chris for donating this work to the nation."

Another simple stimulus for debate about the role of flags is a [short and irreverent clip](#) with Lego people voiced by Eddie Izzard.

It is about how Britain used the Union Jack to stake a claim on colonised land.

One way to engage with this could be to do a poster with Lego characters in the middle and then add made up quotes to represent a range of contrasting perspectives.





Inviting students to **design a flag for the school, or their community** can generate useful debate. Working in small groups, they will probably find themselves discussing symbolism and the difficulties of how symbols might be interpreted.

They could share their flags and the main issues that arose.

On the Ghana flag the red represents the blood of those who died in the country's struggle for independence from Britain, the gold the mineral wealth, and the green symbolizes the country's rich forests and natural wealth. The black star is the symbol of African emancipation from slavery. These are also the colours symbolising a Pan African vision.



In the 37 years between Ghana's independence in 1957 and the election of Nelson Mandela as President in South Africa in 1994 many African countries gained independence.

There are many strands of enquiry including the potential of Pan Africanism and whether that is in tension with colonially based structures such as the Commonwealth.



The Y shape on South African flag represents the convergence of cultures in the new South Africa. It replaced one that included the Union Flag.

The black, green and yellow are from Mandela's African Nation Congress party. The red, white and blue from the old Transvaal flag.

South Africa became a republic in 1961 [following a whites only vote]. Their application to remain in the Commonwealth was turned down due to their apartheid policies. They rejoined 33 years later in 1994.



The debates in New Zealand about a new flag offer several strands of enquiry. About the choices made and the process of selection, - about moving on from having the Union flag, - about debates regarding the continuing role of the Queen.

The 'silver fern' has, for 130 years, been a New Zealand symbol.



The Barbados flag represents the sea, sky and sand. The black trident head was taken from the colonial badge. The staff is broken to symbolise the break from being a colony. The points of the trident represent the three principles of democracy - government of, for and by the people.



Barbados recently became a republic. It remains in the Commonwealth but the Queen is no longer head of state. Again several strands of enquiry linked to that transition, not least Prince Charles' speech. [See quote on page 7.]