

“The White Man’s Burden” Student Worksheet

Introduction:

In 1899, British writer Rudyard Kipling was inspired by events during the Spanish-American War and composed a poem titled “The White Man’s Burden.” The poem became a focal point for the debate about imperialism and prompted both positive and negative responses, including parodies of the original poem. Much can be learned about the way people thought at the turn of the 20th century by examining literature of this type. In this lesson, you will read both “The White Man’s Burden” and a takeoff of the poem titled “The Brown Man’s Burden.”

All web links for this lesson can be found at:

<http://www.socialstudies.com/worldlinks.html>

Directions:

“The White Man’s Burden”

Go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Kipling.html>. Read the whole poem then answer the following questions:

1. Describe what you think Kipling means by “the white man’s burden.”

2. How would you characterize the tone of this poem?

3. To whom do you think the poem is addressed? What do you think Kipling hoped to accomplish by publishing this poem?

4. List two or three words or phrases that Kipling uses to describe indigenous peoples. How do these examples reveal Kipling’s attitude towards these peoples?

5. Give three examples of some of the specific difficulties Kipling foresees in taking up “the white man’s burden.”

6. Kipling portrays “the white man’s burden” as a difficult and thankless undertaking, yet urges that it be taken up nevertheless. How does the last verse of the poem reveal why he thinks it should be taken up in spite of all the difficulties associated with it?

“The Brown Man’s Burden”

Go to <http://www.boondocksnet.com/kipling/labouche.html>. Read the whole poem then answer the following questions:

7. In Kipling’s poem, each verse begins “Take up the white man’s burden”; in this poem, the author has changed this line to read “Pile on the brown man’s burden.” What is the significance of this?
8. How would you characterize the tone of this poem?
9. To whom do you think the poem is addressed? What do you think the author hoped to accomplish by publishing this poem?
10. What is the author’s main objection to what Kipling advocates in “The White Man’s Burden”?
11. What does the author see as the true motivating force behind imperialism?
12. In your own words, write either a four-verse poem or a one-page editorial responding to Kipling’s poem from the perspective of someone living at that time.