British Imperialism in China

Learning Target: What were the causes and effects of the Opium War?

Do-Now: Grab a handout.

Homework: Effects of the Opium Wars.
A political cartoon entitled, *The reception of the diplomatique and his suite, at the Court of Pekin*, by James Gillray (died 1815), published 1792.
Emperor’s letter to King George III

...Our dynasty's majestic virtue has penetrated unto every country under Heaven, and Kings of all nations have offered their costly tribute by land and sea. As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country’s manufactures. This then is my answer to your request to appoint a representative at my Court, a request contrary to our dynastic usage, which would only result in inconvenience to yourself. I have expounded my wishes in detail and have commanded your tribute Envoys to leave in peace on their homeward journey. It behooves you, O King, to respect my sentiments and to display even greater devotion and loyalty in future, so that, by perpetual submission to our Throne, you may secure peace and prosperity for your country hereafter.

1. Does the emperor feel a need to trade with Britain? Explain.

Yesterday your Ambassador petitioned my Ministers to memorialize me regarding your trade with China, but his proposal [to open more northern ports to trade] is not consistent with our dynastic usage and cannot be entertained... as the tea, silk and porcelain which the Celestial Empire produces, are absolute necessities to European nations and to yourselves, we have permitted, as a signal mark of favour, that foreign hongs [merchant firms] should be established at Canton, so that your wants might be supplied and your country thus participate in our beneficence.

2. Describe the interaction between the emperor, Macartney, and his men?

3. Is China willing to open a trading port for Great Britain? Explain.

4. Is the emperor willing to continue trading tea, silk, and porcelain? Explain.
Your request for a small island near Chusan, where your merchants may reside and goods be warehoused, arises from your desire to develop trade. As there are neither foreign hongs nor interpreters in or near Chusan, where none of your ships have ever called, such an island would be utterly useless for your purposes….Consider, moreover, that England is not the only barbarian land which wishes to establish … trade with our Empire: supposing that other nations were all to imitate your evil example and beseech me to present them each and all with a site for trading purposes, how could I possibly comply? This also is a flagrant infringement of the usage of my Empire and cannot possibly be entertained.

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<th>Question</th>
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<td>5. Why were the British requesting a small island near Chusan?</td>
<td>Your request arises from your desire to develop trade.</td>
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<td>6. Why does the emperor turn down the British request for a small island?</td>
<td>This also is a flagrant infringement of the usage of my Empire and cannot possibly be entertained.</td>
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Causes of the Opium War

Document 1:

“Two things happened in the eighteenth century that made it difficult for England to balance its trade with the East. First, the British became a nation of tea drinkers and the demand for Chinese tea rose astronomically [enormously]. It is estimated that the average London worker spent five percent of his or her total household budget on tea. Second, northern Chinese merchants began to ship Chinese cotton from the interior to the south to compete with the Indian cotton that Britain had used to help pay for its tea consumption habits. To prevent a trade imbalance, the British tried to sell more of their own products to China, but there was not much demand for heavy woolen fabrics in a country accustomed to either cotton padding or silk.

The only solution was to increase the amount of Indian goods to pay for these Chinese luxuries, and increasingly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the item provided to China was Bengal opium. With greater opium supplies had naturally come an increase in demand and usage throughout the country, in spite of repeated prohibitions by the Chinese government and officials. The British did all they could to increase the trade: They bribed officials, helped the Chinese work out elaborate smuggling schemes to get the opium into China’s interior, and distributed free samples of the drug to innocent victims...”

Source: “The Opium War and Foreign Encroachment,” Asia for Educators, Columbia University

• Why did the British sell opium to China?
Causes of the Opium War

Document 2: Lin Tse-Hsü was appointed imperial commissioner by the Chinese emperor to address the issue of opium trade and consumption.

“...This is an instruction to foreigners of all nations: Foreigners who trade in Canton have realized large profits. They can sell all the goods they have brought to China and purchase on short order any merchandise they wish to buy. Because of this fact, the number of ships that come to China to trade has increased from 50 or 60 in the old days to more than 150 in recent years. His Majesty the Emperor allows all of you to trade in China without discrimination, and his generosity has provided you with the opportunity to realize the profit you desire. If the trade is stopped, where will your profit come from? Moreover, tea and rhubarb are essential to foreigners’ livelihood, and we have never [disapproved] the fact that year after year you have shipped these valuable products to your own countries. The favor we have bestowed upon you is very great indeed.

Feeling grateful for the favor you have received, you should at least observe our law and refrain from enriching yourselves by deliberately inflicting harm upon your benefactors. Why do you choose to ship to China opium which you yourselves do not consume in order not only to swindle people out of their money but also to endanger their very lives? You have used this evil thing to poison the Chinese people for dozens of years, and the amount of profit you have realized from this immoral trade must be very large indeed. This devilish conduct on your part not only stirs the indignation of mankind but is intolerable to Heaven as well. ...”


• In this letter, what is one message against the opium trade in China that Lin Tse-Hsü is sending to foreign traders?
The Opium Wars

Directions: Complete the questions below as we watch the clip from History of Mankind.

• How did Britain become a world power?
• What nation does Britain challenge? How does its size compare to Britain’s?
• True or False: China embraces global trade with other countries.
• What is the most lucrative commodity on the planet? What are its effects on people?
• How many million Chinese are addicted to opium? How does it compare to the number of heroin addicts in the United States today? What does it do to China’s economy?
• How does the Chinese government react to the opium crisis among the population?
• Why does Britain go to war with China?
• True or False: Britain has 26 times the manpower of China, but China has ten times the firepower of Britain.
• Who won the Opium War?

https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xwryjf
Effects of the Opium War

“. . .Article 2. Determined the opening of five Chinese cities — Canton, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Ningbo, and Shanghai — to residence by British subjects and their families “for the purpose of carrying on their mercantile pursuits, without molestation [interference] or restraint.” It also permitted the establishment of consulates in each of those cities.

Article 3. “The Island of Hong Kong to be possessed in perpetuity [forever]” by Victoria and her successors, and ruled as they “shall see fit.”

Article 4. Payment of $6 million by the Qing “as the value of the opium which was delivered up in Canton. . . .”


• Document Analysis: According to the document, what was one economic impact of the Treaty of Nanjing on China?
The Treaty of Nanjing was the first of many unequal treaties that the Chinese were forced to sign with imperialist nations. The treaty stated that:

The British gained possession of the island of Hong Kong which it held until 1997.

Several Chinese cities were forced to trade with British merchants.

The Chinese had to pay the British 21 million ounces of silver.

British citizens gained the right of extraterritoriality. Extraterritoriality is the state of being exempt from local laws, so the British, while in China, could follow their own laws and could not be arrested or punished by the Chinese.

Christian missionaries were allowed to preach in China

The British would have exclusive rights (as opposed to other nations) to trade with the Chinese in British “spheres of influence.” A sphere of influence is a country or an area of a country that another country has the power to affect what happens there.

Directions: Answer the questions below based on the document and reading.

1. Identify three ways the British benefited from the Treaty of Nanjing.
2. What is extraterritoriality?
3. What is a “sphere of influence”?