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# Gunga Din: Using Literature to Understand India's Colonial Past

Kathy Sundstedt

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Gunga Din: Using Literature to Understand India’s Colonial Past

Kathy Sundstedt – School not available

Grade Level (Req.): 5th-12th grade	Content Area (Req.): World Geography, World History, English/Reading	Unit (Opt.):
Connections to Other Disciplines (Opt.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		
Time Frame (Req.): One class period	Goal (Req.): To utilize literature and understand its connection with culture.	
	Objective (Req.): Students use the Rudyard Kipling poem “Gunga Din” to understand India’s colonial past.	
Materials Needed (Req.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picture book or slideshow program of Gunga Din, illustrated by Robert Andrew Parker (ISBN #: 0-15-200456-4)</li> <li>• NOTE: A map and timeline of India’s history may be useful. Also useful may be clothing styles worn by Indian men and women in the past and present</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	New Vocabulary (Opt.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
Anticipatory Set/Introduction [Inquiry Question is required] (Req.): Who was Rudyard Kipling? Have you ever heard of Gunga Din? Where is India? What main languages are spoken there? What is an empire? A colony? Colonialism? Why do countries try to control other countries? What country once controlled India?		
Instructional Sequence/Procedure (Req.): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use the inquiry questions above to set up the activity, and the introduction provided by Kingsley Amis. The first page illustration shows a battle scene which helps to define the time period, with soldiers on horseback and the use of elephants to move cannon. Kipling won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907. NOTE: The British controlled India, which included Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, from 1860 until India’s independence in 1947, (the Raj Period) but English economic control began in 1600 with the East India Company. India provided raw materials like tea, cotton, and jute (made into burlap) and became a market for British manufactured goods.</li> <li>2. Define vocabulary as needed. Some words are defined on the page.</li> <li>3. Explain that the story is told from a first-person point of view. It is a soldier’s reminiscence to fellow soldiers, about an Indian man, fictionally named Gunga Din, whose job it was to carry water to British troops serving in India. It is told in the Cockney accent, which would have been used by many British soldiers.</li> <li>4. Read the story and show the pictures in any of the following formats. Ask students to pay</li> </ol>		

attention to the colors used by the illustrator. Ask that students try to figure out what the British soldier (who tells the story) thinks about Gunga Din. Teacher reading while showing pictures, teacher reading while students follow printed script, thirteen students read aloud numbered pieces of the script.

5. Character Education Extension: Students could tell and illustrate the story of a person who has helped them in some way.

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Formative Evaluation (Req.): Class participation

Assessment (Req.): Ask students to tell or write about the author's attitude towards Gunga Din. Discuss: Do the British soldiers think the Indians are equal to them? How can you tell they are prejudiced? Does the author's attitude change towards Gunga Din? Why? Have your attitudes ever changed about a person you know? Why? Teachers could prepare a grade level appropriate list of adjectives used to describe a person (brave, loyal, sophisticated, mean, kind, timid, etc). Ask students to circle adjectives which describe Gunga Din and give examples to support their choices.

Iowa Core Curriculum Standards Used (Req.):

- Geography, grade 9-12: Understand how physical and human characteristics create and define regions.
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Common Core Curriculum Standards Used (Opt.):

- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, grade 6-12: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text and evaluate various explanations for those events.
- Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, grade 6-12: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
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NGS Standards Used (Req.):

- How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface
- How to apply geography to interpret the past
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Five Themes of Geography Used (Req.):

- Place
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School District Standards and Benchmarks (Opt.):

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21<sup>st</sup> Century Universal Constructs (Opt.):

Other Disciplinary Standards (Opt.):

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Other Essential Information (Opt.):

Other Resources (Opt.):

- Additional information about Rudyard Kipling can be found on the Kipling Society's homepage: [www.kipling.org/uk/kip\\_fra.htm](http://www.kipling.org/uk/kip_fra.htm)
- Additional information on the British Empire in India and an interesting debate on the positive effects of colonialism can be found at: [www.activehistory.co.uk/3rds/India/worksheet.htm](http://www.activehistory.co.uk/3rds/India/worksheet.htm)
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## Introduction by Kingsley Amis

"Rudyard Kipling was uniquely equipped to portray life in India under the British Empire in all its abundant variety. He was born there, in Bombay, and was brought up largely by native servants. From the age of seventeen he was a newspaper reporter, traveling all over the subcontinent and talking with people of every nation, culture, religion, and status. Among these were the ordinary enlisted men of the British army, whom he came to know and to understand as no one else ever did. He sympathized with their lot and warmed to them, too, coarse and ignorant though they generally were, awkward to handle like soldiers anywhere but capable of loyalty, unselfishness, compassion, and even respect for individuals of other races—not very common a hundred years ago.

"Kipling celebrated the qualities of the British soldier in his Barrack-Room Ballads, first published in 1890 when the author was still only twenty-four years old, in style and subject matter and achievement unparalleled in English. They were soon wildly popular, not only in print but also as recited and sung in the Victorian music halls and at smoking concerts. Among them, "Gunga Din" was always a favorite, and some of its shrases, notably the last line, are still current today. The story is based on a then famous incident of the ferocious Indian Mutiny of 1857, and Gunga Din himself was modeled on a heroic water-carrier at the siege of Delhi in that year."

## Gunga Din, by Rudyard Kipling

You may talk o' gin and beer  
When you're quartered safe out 'ere,  
And you're sent to penny-fights and Aldershot it;  
But when it comes to slaughter  
You will do your work on water,  
An' you'll lick the bloomin' bots of 'im that's got it.

Now in Injia's sunny clime,  
Where I sued to spend my time  
A-servin of 'Er Majesty the Queen,  
Of all them blackfaced crew  
The finest man I knew  
Was our regimental *bhisti*, Gunga Din

He was "Din! Din! Din!"  
"You limpin' lump o' brick-dust, Gunga Din!"  
"Hi! Slippy hitherao!"  
"Water, get it! *Panee lao*"  
"You squidgy-nosed old idol, Gunga Din."

The uniform 'e wore  
Was nothin' much before,  
An' rather less than 'arf o' that be'ind,

For a piece o' twisty rag  
An' a goatskin water-gag  
Was all the field-equipment 'e could find.

"When the sweatin' troop-train lay  
In a *sidin'* through the day,  
Where the 'eat would make your bloomin' eyebrows crawl,  
We shouted "*Harry By!*"  
Till our throats were bricky-dry,  
Then we wopped 'im 'cause 'e couldn't' serve us all.

It was "Din! Din! Din!"  
"You '*eathen*, where the mischief 'ave you been?  
"You put some *juldee* in it,  
"Or I'll *marrow* you this minute  
"If you don't fill up my helmet, Gunga Din!"

"E would dot an' carry one  
Till the longest day was done,  
An' 'e didn't seem to know the use o' fear.

If we charged or broke or cut,  
You could bet your bloomin' nut,  
'E'd be waitin' fifty paces right flank rear.  
With 'is *mussick* on 'is back,  
'E would skip with our attack,  
An' watch us till the bugles made "Retire."  
An' for all 'is dirty 'ide  
'E was white, clear white, inside  
When 'e went to tend the woulded under fire!

"It was "Din! Din! Din!"  
With the bullets kickin' dust spots on the green.  
When the cartridges ran out,  
You could hear the front-files shout,  
"Hi! *Ammunition-mules* an' Gunga Din!"

I shan't forget the night  
When I dropped be'ind the fight  
With a bullet where my belt-plate should 'a" been.  
I was chokin' mad with thirst,  
An the man that spied me first  
Was our good old grinnin' gruntin' Gunga Din.  
"E lifted up my 'ead,  
An' he plugged me where I bled,  
An' 'e guv me 'arf-a-pint o' water-green:

It was crawlin' and it stunk,  
But of all the drinks I've drunk,  
I'm gratefulest to one from Gunga Din

It was Din! Din ! Din!  
"Ere's a beggar with a bullet through 'is spleen;  
"E's chawin' up the ground,  
"An 'e's kickin' all around:  
"For Gawd's sake git the water, Gunga Din!"

'E carried me away  
To where a *dooli* lay  
An' a bullet come an' drilled the beggar clean.  
'E put me safe inside,  
An' just before 'e died,  
"I'ope you liked your drink," sez Gunga Din.

So I'll meet 'im later on  
In the place where 'e is gone—  
Where it's always double drill and no canteen;  
'E'll be squattin' on the coals  
Givin' drinks to poor damned souls,  
An' I'll get a swig in hell from Gunga Din!

"Din! Din! Din!  
You Lazarushian-leather Gunga Din!  
Tho' I've belted you and *flayed* you,  
By the living' Gawd that made you,  
You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!

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*bhisti*: water carrier

*Panee lao*: Bring water swiftly!

"*Harry By*: Oh Brother!

*sidin'*: a side track of a rail line

*'eathen*: heathen; refers to the fact that Gunga Din is not a Christian

*juldee*: quickness

*marrow*: hit

*mussick*: water-skin

*Ammunition-mules*: vehicles to carry ammunition

*dooli*: stretcher/litter to carry the wounded

*flay*: to strike or belittle with words