



Colonialism and Post-Colonialism in Africa

ARGUMENT-CENTERED REFLECTION QUESTIONS

These questions can either be answered by students individually, in short and extended responses; they can be discussed by students in groups, to share out; or they can be used for a teacher-led argument-based discussion among the full class.

Documentary Excerpt: A Brief History of European Colonialism in Africa

1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor and social critic Noam Chomsky does not believe that Europeans believed their own justifications for colonialism in Africa. Summarize his argument.
2. What was a prominent strategy that “helped maintain British rule” in its African colonies, according to the documentary? Why do you think this strategy worked?
3. What did Joseph Conrad call Belgium’s colonization of the Congo in central Africa? Supply the full quotation.
4. Identify two countries in which European misrule of its African colonies set up the troubles these countries have had in the post-colonial period. Explain the film’s connection between the colonial and post-colonial problems in these two countries.

“White Man’s Burden,” by Rudyard Kipling (1899)

1. What does the poet suggest in lines 4 – 5 the white men should be doing for the native populations? What does that suggest about how he sees the role of the Western colonialist?
2. The poet suggests in “open” and “simple” speech that colonists should “seek another’s profit/And work another’s gain” (15 – 16). What might he mean by this (think of the ways that colonists might serve native populations)?
3. How does the poet state that native populations will respond to the good works of the colonists (lines 19 – 25)?
4. How does the poet contrast the work of colonists to what they would be doing if they stayed at home instead of going to Africa or the other sites of colonialization (toward the end of the poem)?
5. Who do you think the implied audience is of the poem?

Al Jazeera’s 2010 Documentary, “Africa: States of Independence”

1. What, according to African writer Biyi Bandale, was the method by which Europeans were able to colonize African tribes and territories during the “scramble for Africa”?
2. What was the metaphoric and literal engine of European imperialism in the mid to late 19th century? What, according to Al Jazeera, drove the Europeans to want to colonize Africa and Asia?
3. Jonathan Lawley, a former British colonial officer, argues that it was a “natural thing” for Europeans to “get involved” with Africa. What is his reasoning to support this claim?
4. What geopolitical (i.e., international political force) factor provided a strong push to the European colonization of Africa in the early 20th century, according to Al Jazeera?
5. List and explain three things that were wrong with the Act of Berlin of 1885, carving up Africa into separate countries?
6. What were the specific grounds on which many European leaders saw their colonial mission in Africa as a humanitarian one?



7. What was the European imperialists' relationship to the African slave trade?
8. What did the French mean when they said that they didn't want to merely colonize a territory, they wanted to assimilate a population? Which side of the first debatable issue does the French attitude support? Why?
9. Why, according to Professor Lansine Kaba, did the French ideal of cultural assimilation fail?
10. How, according to African writer Biyi Bandale, did African people living under British rule view English culture?
11. Identify two pieces of factual evidence that King Leopold II was a brutal and cruel colonial leader of the Congo. Is there a way that, according to Al Jazeera, the experience of King Leopold II and his loss of rulership over the Congo supports the negative side on the first debatable issue?
12. How did contrast in the transportation systems designed by European colonists in Africa and India support an argument for the affirmative side on the first debatable issue in this unit? What argumentative claim does this evidence support?
13. In what ways did European colonial rule over Africa become more democratic immediately after World War II?
14. Why was World War II a "turning point," according to Professor Lansine Kaba, in the relationship between African peoples and the European colonial project?
15. Describe in detail the economic factors that contributed to the end of European colonialism in African following World War II?
16. Summarize the argument that American civil rights leaders Malcolm X and Martin Luther King are seen in the video making for cause of the rise of African Nationalism?
17. What was African Nationalist leader Kwame Kkrumah's vision for the future of a post-colonial Africa?



18. Why does Al Jazeera call British Prime Minister Harold McMillan’s speech on February 3rd, 1960, in South Africa, a “tipping point” against the “colonial venture across the African continent”?
19. What international (i.e., geopolitical) struggle in Africa replaced European imperialism when European de-colonialization was well underway, beginning in 1960?
20. How does Professor Lansine Kaba describe the feeling among Africans in the early 1960s, immediately after European de-colonialization?
21. To make the point that African militaries tampered with African nationalist political leaders, Al Jazeera refers to the number of coups that took place in Africa in the first 20 years of independence. What is that number?
22. Politics became very “ethnicized” in post-colonial African countries, according to the documentary. What does this mean, and how many people died in ethnic conflicts from 1960 – 1990 in former British colonies alone?
23. How did French de-colonialization in Africa differ from that of other European countries?
24. What does the documentary mean when it says that “these days there is a complicity between Western companies and rulers in Africa” to exploit the resources of African countries for the benefit of wealthy Africans and the owners of European and American corporations?
25. Why haven’t ordinary Africans benefited from the growth of African economies over the past 10 – 15 years, according to Al Jazeera?
26. Describe the recent success stories in post-colonial Africa.

Video: “What If Africa Was Never Colonized?”

1. What particularly rattled the rest of Europe about King Leopold II of Belgium’s colonization of the Congo?
2. Why did Germany invite the European imperial powers to a conference in Berlin in 1885?



3. Why, according to the video, would sub-Saharan African peoples not have become as advanced as, and competitive with, countries in Europe and Asia, even if the European imperial powers never invaded and colonized Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?
4. Summarize the video's argument that without European colonization African tribes would likely have undertaken what it calls internal imperial wars.
5. List out the ways that, according to the video, the lives of Africans would have been improved and the ways that those lives would have been unimproved if there had been no "scramble for Africa" by the European imperial powers. Include at least three separate entries on each side.

Video: Caspian Report's Summary of *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad

1. What does Caspian Report think Joseph Conrad is saying about the official, self-proclaimed purposes of European colonization of Africa in his novella, *Heart of Darkness* (1899)?
2. What is the novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899), by Joseph Conrad, really about, according to Caspian Report? How might this interpretation be relevant to the first debatable issue of the unit?

Excerpts from *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad (1899)

1. In the first excerpt, what is Conrad's attitude toward the conquering of another people that is inherent to colonialism? What does he say is the only way that colonialism can be redeemed?
2. The second excerpt is a famous passage from the novella. It is generally interpreted to symbolize the irrationality or absurdity of the European colonial project in Africa. Explain how the scene in this passage might support this interpretation. Which side of the first debatable issue do you think this passage supports? How might the other side in the debate interpret this passage differently?
3. What argumentative claim for the affirmative side of the first debatable issue do the third and fourth excerpts support? State the argumentative claim and analyze the passages to show how they support this claim.



4. The fifth excerpt, on the other hand, seems to support the negative side of the first debatable issue. Do the same thing with this excerpt: state an argumentative claim and analyze the passages to show how they support this claim.
5. Provide a detailed paraphrase of the sixth excerpt, so that what is being described in this literary passage is made clear and easily understood. What argument might this passage support on the first debatable issue?