

*“How can we find a way to communicate complex colonial histories to children?”*

Ever wondered where your stuff really comes from? Like, history-level back, before your grandparents were even born (and before phones were smart)?

Every time you wash your hands, eat a snack, or pull on your favourite hoodie, you're part of a giant story web without even noticing. Lots of the things around you travelled from far-away places, made by people you've never met. If your socks could talk, they'd probably say, "I'm toe-tally knackered".

Many of these stories began during a time called the British Empire, when Britain ruled over lots of other places for hundreds of years and, spoiler alert, it didn't always treat people very kindly. Those choices still affect the world today.

Now the world is more connected than ever. Music, games, trends, zoom across the planet in seconds. But can they also help us connect to the past?

In this book, you'll go on a journey without leaving your house, discovering hidden histories in the everyday things you barely notice.

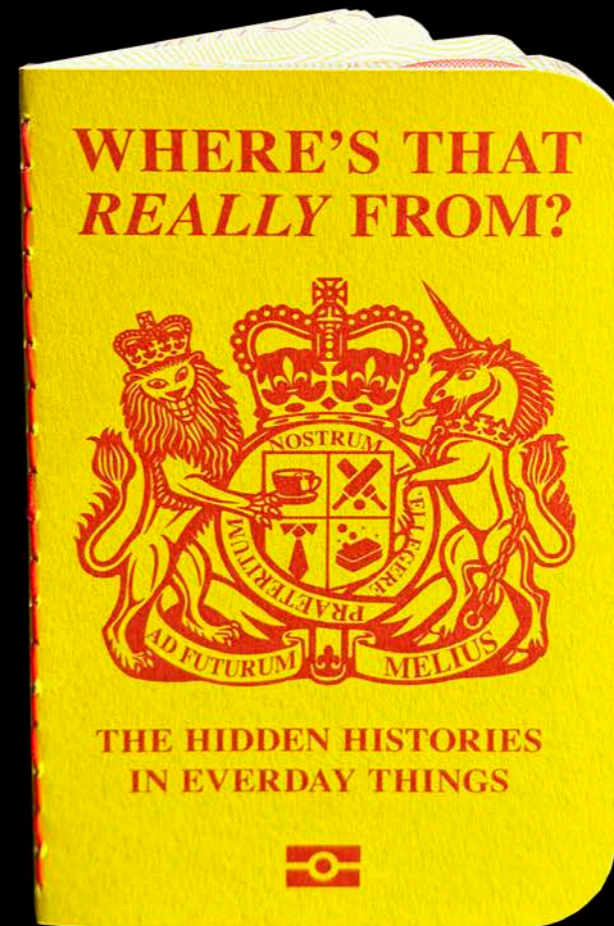
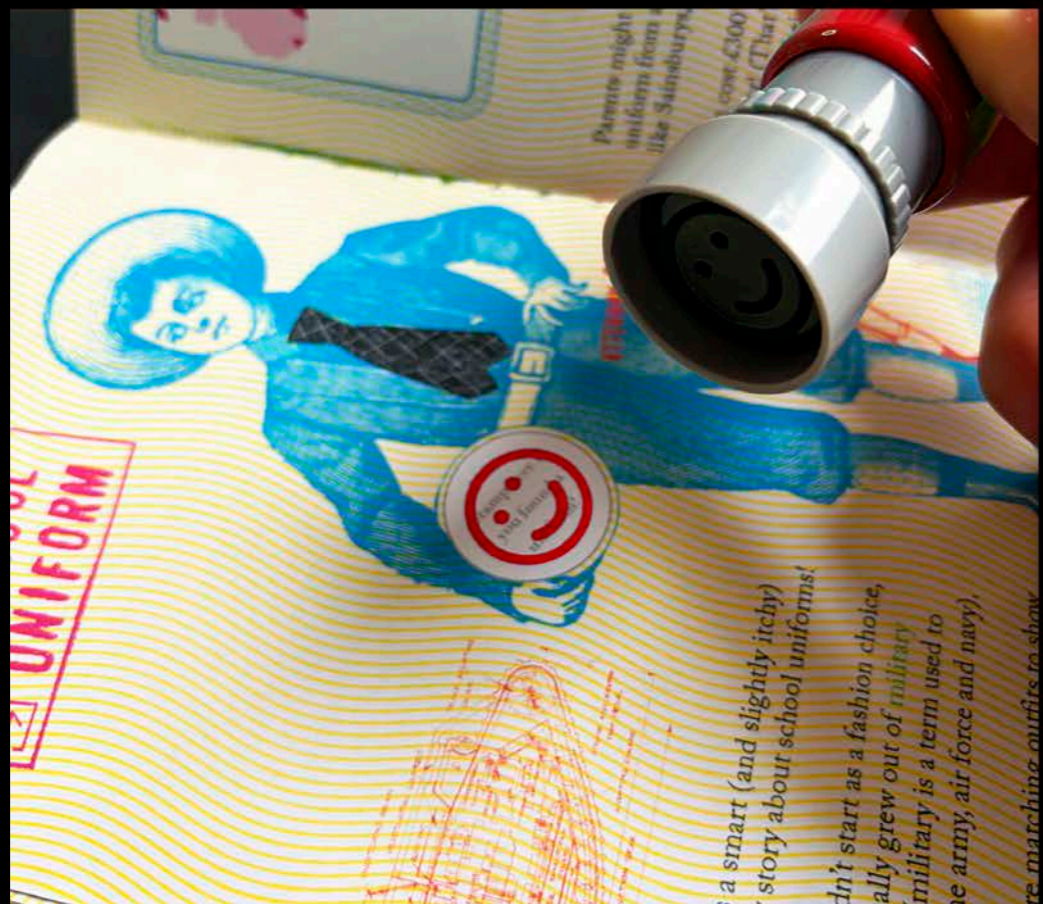
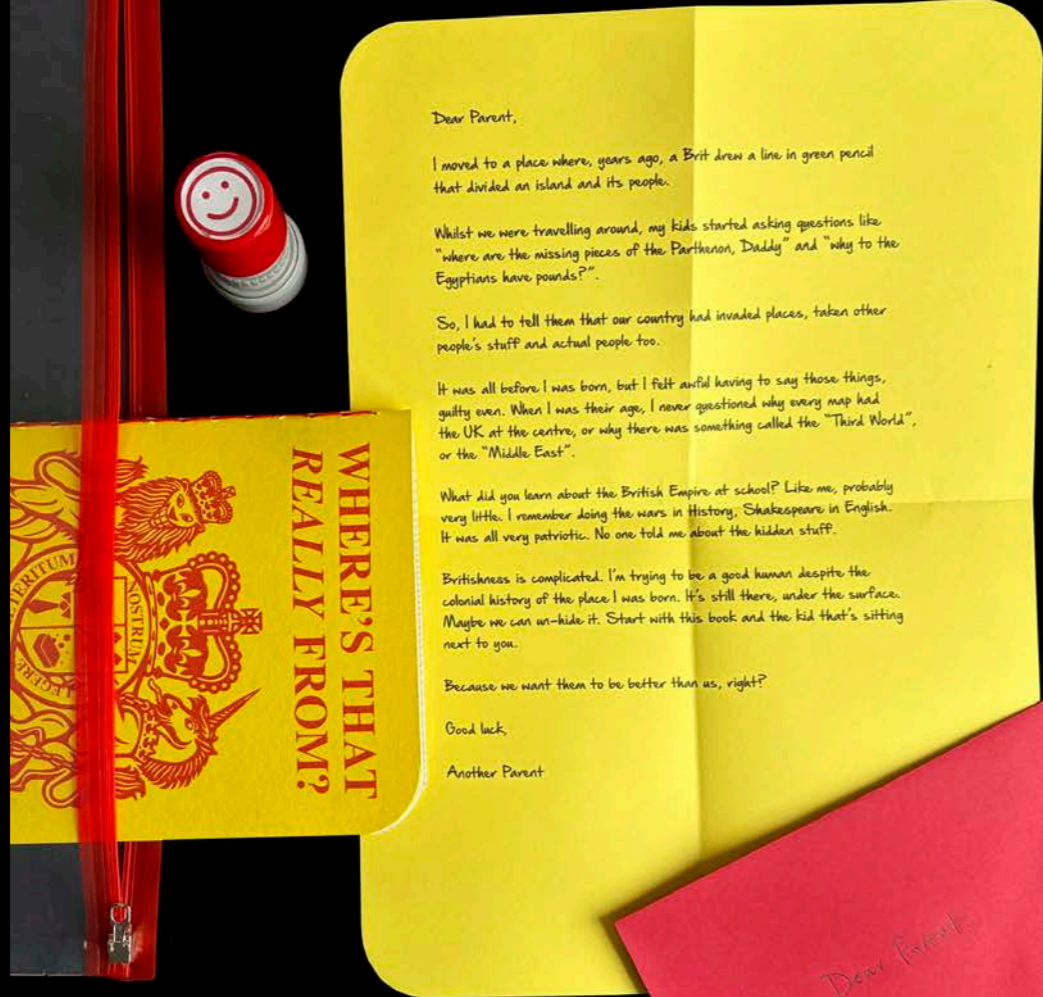
Ready? Grab an adult (they're coming too) and let's go!

# WHERE'S THAT *REALLY* FROM?



## THE HIDDEN HISTORIES IN EVERYDAY THINGS





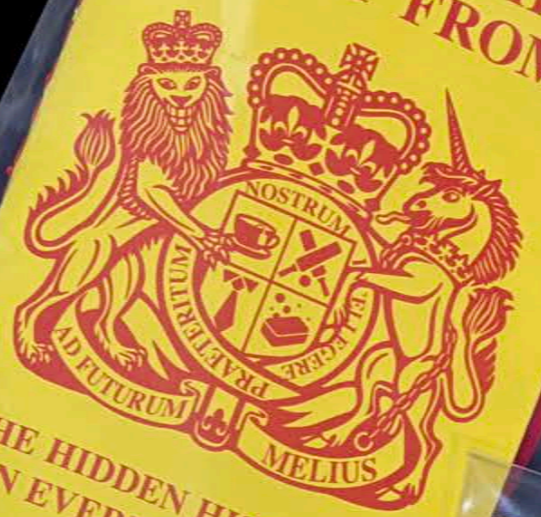


WHERE'S THAT  
REALLY FROM?



THE HIDDEN HISTORIES  
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THE HIDDEN HISTORIES  
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# WHERE'S THAT REALLY FROM?



## THE HIDDEN HISTORIES IN EVERYDAY THINGS




Where's  
that  
*really*  
from?

## LOOK AROUND YOUR HOME.

The things you eat, use and wear all have stories hiding inside them.

Some of these stories have travelled a very long way, crossing oceans and centuries. They can come from a time when Britain ruled a huge empire\*.

It left behind things that are familiar and fun, but also things that aren't. Books you read at school sometimes overlook these links to the past, especially where difficult things like conflict are involved.

They've been the  in the room (something that's too big to hide but is ignored because it seems too difficult to deal with). But it's really important to say that many people were treated unfairly and their stories matter.

By knowing a bit about the British Empire, we might be able to shrink the elephant a bit and start to think about what it all means today. Do any of the things that happened then, still happen now?

\*An empire is a group of countries that are ruled by a single other country or government



ADULTS - look at the objects together and talk about what their hidden histories can mean to you both.  
Ok, ready? Turn the page and we'll make a start...

# TEA



You know that drink that helps adults wake up in the morning? No, not coffee, the other one.

Yep, a good old cup of "Rosie Lee".



Tea first arrived in Britain in the 1600s, to traders from China and (allegedly) a tea-loving queen, Catherine of Braganza (who was actually from Portugal, it's complicated).

Tea leaves were picked from a plant, dried and sometimes rolled or crushed, then packed up so people could put them in hot water to make tea. The hot water works like a bathtub, breaking down the tiny dried cells in the leaves.



\*That's Cockney rhyming slang, which is an old East London language, where "Rosie Lee" rhymes with "cup of tea". It was first recorded around 1923.



By the 1800s, the British were drinking millions of cups a day, which was expensive.

So they decided to grow their own and set up plantations in places like Assam and Darjeeling in India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka).

You might have seen those names on the front of tea boxes in your kitchen or at the supermarket. PG, Tetley, Twinings were all born from the British Empire.



In 1848, The East India Company (a powerful English business) wanted to break the Chinese monopoly on tea (a monopoly is where you control something completely). So they sent a Scottish spy named Robert Fortune to China disguised as a merchant to steal tea secrets.

The Empire transformed tea from a luxury into a daily, affordable thing for everyone.

**BUT**, they did it by establishing big plantations that often didn't treat workers fairly...



Tea made Britain vast amounts of money and helped power trade, shipping routes and it was even supposed to cure stuff. But there was a bitter side to this sweet drink.

Local plantation workers were often paid very little, worked 16-hour-days and had few rights (that's the stuff that should automatically come with your job to protect you and your workmates).

Just imagine, spending twice as long as your school day working in a hot field, picking leaves so that people thousands of miles away can have a nice drink.

THIS IS HOW PEOPLE WERE SHOWN IN TEA ADS. WOULD THAT BE OK TODAY?



Adverts in historical Empire made tea bags seem "civilised" in the production of this book.



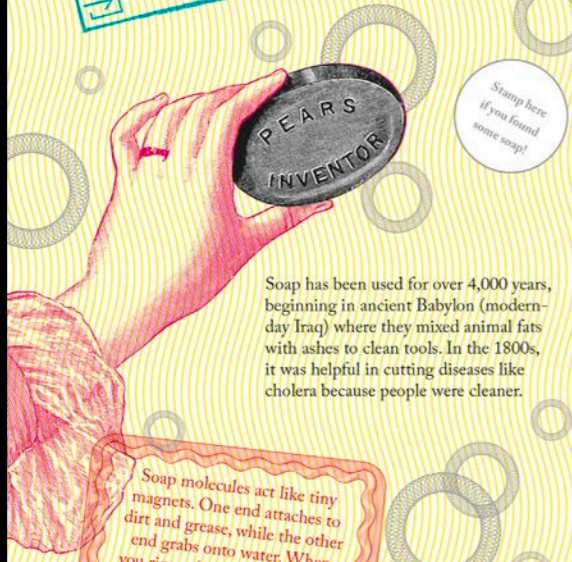
Today, we drink 160 million cups of the brown stuff a day.

It is grown in many of the same places and shipped thousands of miles across oceans creating pollution. Some workers can still face tough working conditions decades later.

So when you see steam rising from a mug, think about where your tea comes from and how it got to you. You might want to ask who grows your tea now? Do workers earn enough? Can we choose to buy a brand that treats people fairly?

# SOAP

"WASH YOUR HANDS!" How many times are you told that every week?



Stamp here if you found some soap!

Soap has been used for over 4,000 years, beginning in ancient Babylon (modern-day Iraq) where they mixed animal fats with ashes to clean tools. In the 1800s, it was helpful in cutting diseases like cholera because people were cleaner.

Soap molecules act like tiny magnets. One end attaches to dirt and grease, while the other end grabs onto water. When you rinse, the soap lifts the dirt and germs off your skin and washes them down the drain.

One of soap's main ingredients is something called Palm Oil which comes from a tropical tree with large, reddish-orange fruits. It's squeezed from these fruits and combined with something called sodium hydroxide and water to make solid soap. Look at the ingredients on a bar of soap, you might see "sodium palmitate," that comes from these trees.



In the 19th century British companies like Lever Brothers (which later became part of Unilever, who own Pears) used ingredients such as palm oil from colonies in Africa. Ships carried it to factory cities like Liverpool and Bristol, where workers turned them into soap bars.

You might have seen these dispensers at home, or at school, or in the supermarket. They can be recycled, which is great (apart from the pump bit which has a spring in it).



**BUT**, soap's history isn't all that clean. There are other things behind just washing your hands before dinner...

Today, palm oil is found in about half of all packaged supermarket products, everything from biscuits to shampoo!

Palm oil itself is not a problem, but *how* it is grown is. Demand for it causes deforestation, destroying rainforests in Indonesia and Malaysia. This removes homes for endangered animals like orangutans and tigers. Forest loss for palm oil in 2022 (globally) equaled 11 football fields PER MINUTE!

But, by choosing products with certified sustainable palm oil, we can help protect it.

So next time you see soap bubbles, remember: they carry stories of history, science and nature from around the world.

Pretty deep for something that smells like strawberries, right?



Approved to be used by the WWF for palm oil products.



THIS IS HOW PEOPLE WERE SHOWN IN SOAP ADS. WOULD THAT BE OK TODAY?

EH?

During the British Empire, soap was promoted as a symbol of "civilisation," linking being clean with being better.

Ads like these from Pears Soap showed non-European people becoming "clean" and therefore more "civilised," reinforcing ideas of Empire while undermining local identity.

So when you buy things like this, choose ethically sourced stuff to protect the environment *and* the cultures of where it comes from.

# SUGAR

Did you find some? Sweet Stamp!

A giant wild grass from the south Pacific. Sugar cane was first cultivated around 800 BC. It was known as "honey without bees" and used as medicine in India and Rome before spreading globally.



Travellers helped it spread across East Asia, where traders discovered it and carried it to Europe.

It was a commodity so rare, its value equalled that of precious gems. So people would show it off like a fancy car. The Victorians made sugar sculptures 6 feet high made just out of sugar!



The cane was cut and quickly taken to mills, where it was crushed and boiled. The sugar and molasses (brown stuff left over) were packed into barrels and sent from the Caribbean to places like Liverpool and Bristol by ship.

Back in the 1700s, the average British person ate about 2kg of sugar per year, but today people in the UK eat around 30-35kg per year. That's more than 10 times as much (no wonder dentists stay busy!)



OLD ARTIFICIAL TEETH BOUGHT FROM THE MESSRS BROWNING, 378 OXFORD-ST. W.

You might have found a packet like this at the back of your cupboard in the kitchen, or seen it at the supermarket. Tate & Lyle is the largest cane sugar brand in the UK. We use about 2 million tonnes of the stuff per year!



BUT, amongst all this sweetness, there was a triangular shaped problem...

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, there was something called the **Triangle Trade**. No, it didn't trade in shapes, it traded in *people*.

First came the "Manufactured Run," when British-made goods were taken to Africa and exchanged for captured African people.

Next was the "Middle Passage". Those people were shipped to the Americas on vessels like **The Brookes**, which left Liverpool in 1781 and could carry up to 609 enslaved people in horrific conditions.

Finally, the "Home Run" brought goods produced by enslaved labour, sugar, rum and cotton, back to British ports.

Around 12.5 million people were forced onto ships; millions died because the journeys were so brutal. Sugar became hugely popular in Britain, grown on plantations by enslaved workers. Companies like Tate & Lyle grew from this trade.



Today, many businesses like Tate & Lyle are examining their past and improving conditions in their supply chains (the journey products take to reach you). As shoppers, we can help by choosing fair-trade products that aim to pay and treat workers properly.

So when you're munching a choccy bicy LOADED with sugar, remember to ask who made your bicy, and are they a nice bunch?



DID YOU KNOW THAT THE TATE GALLERY WAS STARTED BY HENRY TATE? HAVE YOU BEEN?



# SCHOOL UNIFORM



KITCHEN-SHUN!

Here's a smart (and slightly itchy) history story about school uniforms!

They didn't start as a fashion choice, they actually grew out of military clothing (military is a term used to describe the army, air force and navy).

Soldiers wore matching outfits to show discipline and teamwork, and schools copied the idea because they wanted their pupils to seem that way too.



British-style schools were set up in colonies all over Africa. Going to school there was quite different from school in the UK today. Many kids wore neat uniforms like British students and lessons were often taught in English, even if it wasn't their first language. The school day was usually strict, with rules about sitting quietly, standing for teachers and lining up before class.

Parents might buy your uniform from a supermarket like Sainsburys, Tesco or Asda.

It can cost £300 or more per child each year! (That's probably why you're always being moaned at for a dirty jumper or something).

Specialist shops sell them too and many schools do second-hand swaps to save money.

Uniforms were meant to create order and show connection to British education. BUT they also sometimes did other things too...

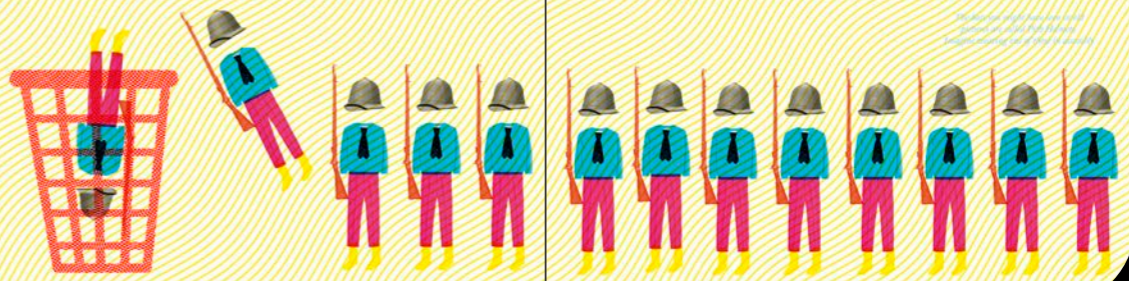


Ties and blazers travelled the world and were used to teach belonging, but also control.

What about the actual clothes? A few years ago, investigations revealed that workers making uniforms for British supermarkets in Bangladesh (which is a green, watery country located in South Asia, right next to India), could work over **70 hours a week and get £51 a month**. In the UK today, working **37.5 hours a week can get you £1,984 per month**.

There's also a green side. The clothing industry produces about 10% of the world's carbon emissions, which is more than international flights and shipping combined. Reusing uniforms or buying durable ones helps protect the planet.

So next time you put on a tie or a blazer, remember that it's linked to history, identity and even the planet. Not just sports day.



Uniform can be a good thing because it makes everyone look similar, and you don't worry about fashion so much.

But on the flip side, uniforms can make it harder to show your identity. Some uniforms also treat gender in strict ways, which may not fit everyone.

Since uniforms grew back in ye olden times, maybe it's time to change it up? Maybe make flexible, inclusive options that everyone can be proud to wear?

IF YOU WEAR A UNIFORM, HOW DOES IT FEEL?

# CRICKET

Cricket is a game played between two teams of 11, but 2.5 BILLION people follow it, making it one of the most popular things to do on the planet.



One team bats to score runs by hitting a ball and running between things called wickets, while the other team bowls and fields to try to get them "out" by knocking the wickets over.

Matches can last a few hours or even several days. The longest ever recorded match lasted 14 days in 1939!

They use pretty weird words like 'Howzat?' when a wicket is knocked over and 'out for a duck!'



At first, cricket was mostly played by rich people in England, especially in private schools. But over time, it spread to poorer communities in colonies, where soldiers, teachers, and officials introduced it. It was especially popular in places like Australia and India.

One of the biggest rivalries is between the England cricket team and the Australia cricket team.

They compete for The Ashes, a famous trophy dating back to 1882, when England lost at home and a newspaper joked English cricket had "died."

Huge tournaments like the Cricket World Cup attract billions of viewers.

**BUT**, the "Gentleman's Game" was more than running between 2 sets of sticks and hitting a (very hard) ball with another stick. It had a whole other use back in the mists of time...



# QUIZ!

WERE YOU PAYING ATTENNN-SHUN!?

- How many cups of tea do Brits drink a day?
- If you wash your hands with soap, how much does it reduce the risk of getting sick?
- How much forest was lost for palm oil in 2022 per minute?
- How much can a family spend on school uniform per child per year?
- How much sugar do people in the UK eat per year?
- How many slaves could ship called The Brooke carry?
- How many tonnes of waste clothing does 'Fast Fashion' create each year?
- When was the longest recorded cricket match?
- In what year was the Aboriginal Cricket Team brought to the UK?
- What was the first name of Mr Tate, the sugar guy?



- 1.65 million cups a day.
- 400%
- 11 football fields PER MINUTE.
- It can cost £500 or more per child each year!
- Around 30-35kg per year.
- About 92 million tonnes globally each year.
- 14 days.
- 1868.
- Henry.

# ANSWERS

Cricket was viewed by the British and their colonial counterparts as the perfect thing to help 'civilise' the people and the countries they took over.

You might have read the word 'civilisation' earlier in your hunt for objects. To 'civilise' means 'to help people or societies become more organized, educated, and polite. It involves teaching better manners, creating fair rules and improving how people live, work, and treat each other, moving away from a rude or disorganised state'.

Just the same as soap being used to clean away local people's identities, this time sport was used to promote the ideals of Empire.



## ARRIVAL OF THE BLACK CRICKETERS

Since the late ingenious George Martin brought Deerfoot from the Americas to combat against English pox, plans of arrival has been met with so much curiosity and interest as that of the Black cricketers from Australia.

In Australia, the first Aboriginal cricket team toured Britain in 1868. They were talented athletes, but they were also displayed to crowds almost like a curiosity or attraction. Modern cricket is biggest in countries that were once part of the empire, but they've made it their own thing now.

Oh, by the way. They won 14, lost 14 and drew 19 matches. Howzat!?



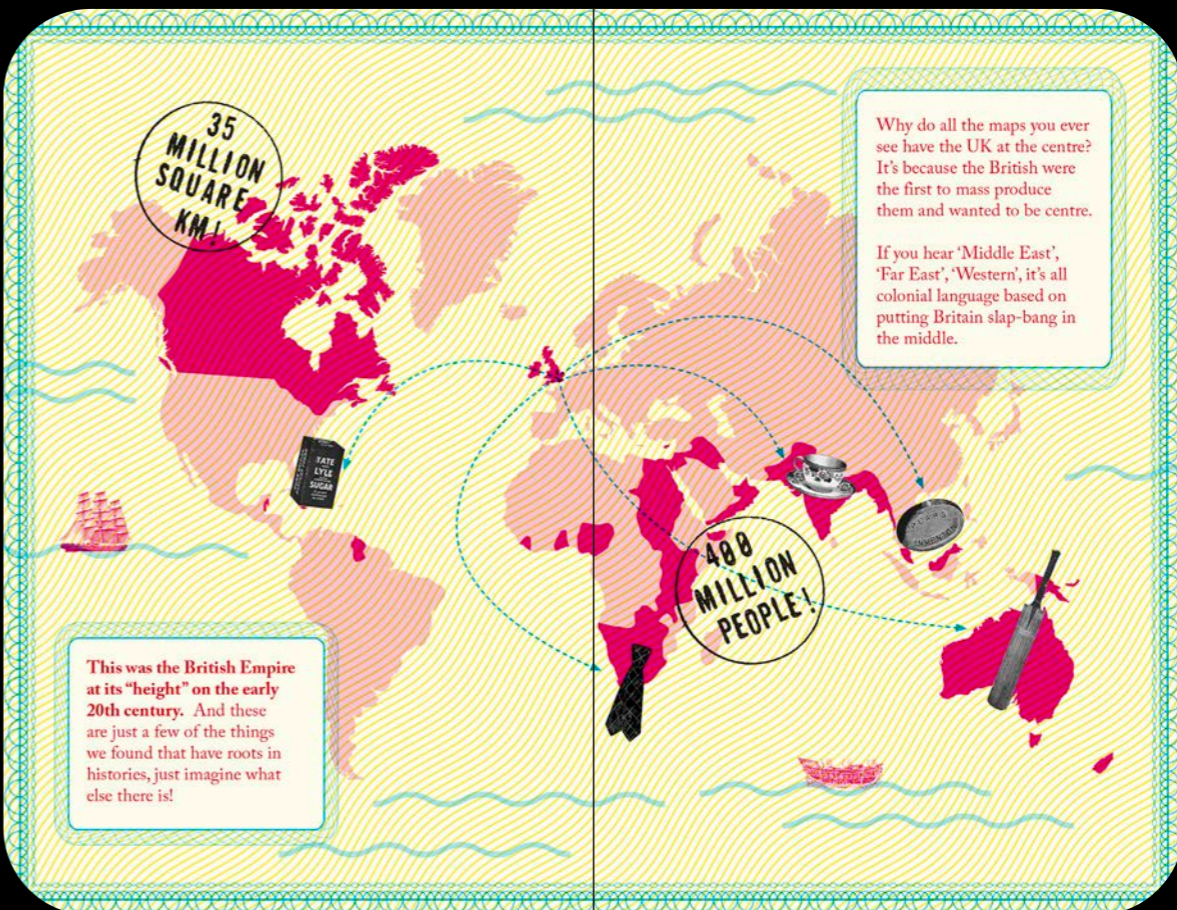
civilised, having been brought up in the bush to agricultural pursuits as assistants to Europeans, and the only language of which they have a perfect knowledge is English.

35 MILLION SQUARE KM!

488 MILLION PEOPLE!

This was the British Empire at its "height" on the early 20th century. And these are just a few of the things we found that have roots in histories, just imagine what else there is!

Why do all the maps you ever see have the UK at the centre? It's because the British were the first to mass produce them and wanted to be centre. If you hear 'Middle East', 'Far East', 'Western', it's all colonial language based on putting Britain slap-bang in the middle.



The stories of the objects in this book have travelled through hands, across oceans and through time. So have the ideas, systems and choices connected to them.

By learning where these things come from, we become more curious, more thoughtful and more connected to each other.

*(And grown-ups: learning doesn't stop for you when school ends. Ask questions, listen and change your mind).*

The journey doesn't end here.

It continues every time you open a cupboard, put on a uniform, or sit down for a cup of tea. We are all citizens of the world, lets try and treat it and each other well.

So did that elephant get any smaller? That's up to **you**...



Ever wondered where your stuff really comes from? Like, history-level back, before your grandparents were even born (and before phones were smart)?

Every time you wash your hands, eat a snack, or pull on your favourite hoodie, you're part of a giant story web without even noticing. Lots of the things around you travelled from far-away places, made by people you've never met. If your socks could talk, they'd probably say, "I'm toe-tally knackered".

Many of these stories began during a time called the British Empire, when Britain ruled over lots of other places for hundreds of years and, spoiler alert, it didn't always treat people very kindly. Those choices still affect the world today.

Now the world is more connected than ever. Music, games, trends, zoom across the planet in seconds. But can they also help us connect to the past?

In this book, you'll go on a journey without leaving your house, discovering hidden histories in the everyday things you barely notice.

Ready? Grab an adult (they're coming too) and let's go!

## QUESTIONNAIRE

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KIDS

Name:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Do you learn about any of this stuff at school?

What do you think of the British Empire now?

How does it make you feel?

The subject can be awkward, do you think the hunt around your home is a good way of finding things out?

Was the text easy to read?

Name one fact that you learned, without looking back at the text:

What would make this book better?

Did your parent learn anything? Did they help?

What else would you put in the book?

Would you make it shorter or longer?

Would you add any more activities in there, like writing in it?

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## QUESTIONNAIRE

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ADULT

Name:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Occupation:

What do you think of the British Empire now?

Empire and colonial legacies are an important subject. It's widely acknowledged that it's not dealt with in the school curriculum, teachers can feel ill prepared. So do you think this is a worthwhile thing to do outside of school?

Did you feel a bit uncomfortable reading it? Did you feel better afterwards?

What do you think of the design, what would you change?

What about the tone of the writing, did it work for you and the child you were reading with?

Could you see this working at a school for example? Or maybe on a plane if you were going somewhere with family?

What worked for you in the book?

How long did it take you to find the stuff and read the book?

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