**Hunting, the Wilderness, and Imperialism**

0.0 – Module Lesson Plan

This module is part of the History for the 21st Century project (H21). History for the 21st Century is a collaborative project designed to serve students in introductory college history courses and their instructors. Together, we build, assess, and progressively improve free, online educative, enquiry-based curriculum. You can find out more about H21 by visiting <https://www.history21.com/> .

**Module Overview**

This module explores the ways humans hunted, poached, and preserved wildlife during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in imperial contexts. It looks at the global circulation of these ideas and practices, and focuses on case studies in British Eastern Africa, the United States, and British India. Through four to six class meetings, the module investigates how the ruling class defined appropriate methods and practices of hunting, and then used those definitions to deny colonial subjects and the rural poor access to wildlife and wild spaces. It demonstrates how these deliberately cleared spaces contributed to our contemporary understanding of national parks.

At the start of the module, students will be introduced to William Cronon’s seminal essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” which asks them to historicize the idea of “wilderness.” In doing this they will see that our contemporary understanding of nature is not “natural,” but rather the result of complex interactions between different groups of humans and the non-human environment. This will lay the conceptual groundwork for the rest of the module, in which students will investigate what wilderness and hunting means to different groups of people in several imperial and neo-imperial settings, with an emphasis on how race, gender, and class moderate one’s access to and relationship with wilderness and animals.

Students will practice reading primary source material from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and will be asked to consider one of the fundamental problems of archival material in this period: that privileged people were more likely to produce written texts and have those text preserved. Therefore, in addition to reading these texts for general comprehension, they will be asked to follow the Subaltern School’s technique of reading “against the grain” in order to uncover the narratives of people who did not leave a written record.

Students will also be asked to contemplate how their perceptions of contemporary social and environmental issues have changed in light of this new historical perspective. Discussion topics may include articulating their relationship with the non-human environment in a nuanced and historicized fashion; questioning when poaching is an act of political resistance and when it is an act of theft, particularly in the midst of Earth’s sixth mass extinction event; and debating the appropriateness of global and local responses to environmental issues such as sustainability and climate change.

By the end of the module, students will:

* Have the tools to read and interpret a single primary source document from the perspective of multiple historical actors by reading “against the grain.”
* Articulate what a historically constructed relationship is and how that term relates to the relationship between humans and the non-human environment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
* Complicate the relationships between humans and wilderness and humans and animals.
* Understand that one’s social position influences how one is able to interact with the non-human environment.
* Become familiar with the broad outlines of imperialism in eastern Africa, the United States, and South Asia.

**Module Map**

## **Lesson 1 – Hunting in the “Wilderness”**

* explore the main themes of William Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness”
* examine archaeological and textual evidence of pre-modern hunting practices with a focus on the Pleistocene Overkill
* outline categories of human-animal relationships including domestication, protection, and predation
* consider examples of three main categories of hunting: subsistence, commercial, and elite

**Lesson 2: Hunting and Masculinity in Imperial Africa**

* explore the history of hunting in eastern Africa
* highlight the links between railways, hunting, and empire
* explore hunting as part of the identity of elite white men in empire through Rudyard Kipling’s “The White Man’s Burden”
* discuss of the challenges of historical sources in pre-colonial Africa and introduce the idea of “reading against the grain”
* examine the content and context of J.H. Patterson’s *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*

**Lesson 3: Clearing the Way for National Parks in the United States**

* explore the history of hunting practices in the United States, focusing on Native American groups in the northeast
* examine hunting practices in England and how they changed when English colonists first arrived in the Americas
* examine the United States government policy of Indian clearances
* highlight the impacts of commercial hunting of beaver in the northeast and commercial and elite hunting of bison in the west
* examine the content and context of George Catlin’s paintings and *Letters and Notes*
* examine the beginnings of the United States’ conservation movement in the Adirondacks and Yellowstone

**Lesson 4: The Human Experience of Wildlife in India**

* explore examples of a variety of human-animal relationships in pre-modern India
* examine elite hunting through the Mughal *shikar* and the symbols of imperial power in the hunt
* examine elite hunting in British India
* explore resistance to imperial hunting in British India as both religious and political
* examine the context and content of Jim Corbett’s *My India*
* examine Salim Ali and the beginnings of the conservation movement in independent India
* highlight the creation of American-style national parks in India and the problems with this system in a highly-peopled land

**Conclusion**

* examine elite hunting in North America and Africa today
* consider the legacies of the history of imperialism and elite hunting on hunting and ideas about conservation today