Primary Source Text:

“On French Colonial Expansion,” Speech before the French Chamber of Deputies, March 28, 1884
Speech by Jules François Camille Ferry

Lesson:
This text could be used in a variety of lessons for vocabulary development in an activity such as thematic vocabulary, reading and comprehension in a guided reading question or dialectical journal activity, as well as analysis and writing components with a letter of response like an editorial or comparison chart. Pair with images of the economic systems set up by the French, White Man’s Burden cartoons, and maps. Suggested topics to draw quotes for include economic development, White Man’s Burden, Western influence, politics, Social Darwinism, foreign relations, colonial rule, living conditions, etc.
Standards Alignment

California State Standards for Grade 10

• 10.4 Students analyze patterns of global change in the era of New Imperialism in at least two of the following regions or countries: Africa, Southeast Asia, China, India, Latin America, and the Philippines.
  – 1. Describe the rise of industrial economies and their link to imperialism and colonialism (e.g., the role played by national security and strategic advantage; moral issues raised by the search for national hegemony, Social Darwinism, and the missionary impulse; material issues such as land, resources, and technology).
  – 2. Discuss the locations of the colonial rule of such nations as England, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Portugal, and the United States.
  – 3. Explain imperialism from the perspective of the colonizers and the colonized and the varied immediate and long-term responses by the people under colonial rule.
  – 4. Describe the independence struggles of the colonized regions of the world, including the roles of leaders, such as Sun Yat-sen in China, and the roles of ideology and religion.

Common Core Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Science for Grades 9 & 10 Students:

• RH 1 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
• RH 2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
• RH 4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.
• RH 5 - Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.
• RH 9 - Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

Common Core Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Science for Grades 9 & 10 Students:

• WHST 1 - Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
  – a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
  – b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claim(s) and counterclaims in a discipline-appropriate form and in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns.
  – c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
  – d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
  – e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from or supports the argument presented.
• WHST 4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
• WHST 5 - Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
• WHST 6 - Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
• WHST 7 - Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
• WHST 8 - Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
• WHST 9 - Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
Ferry was twice prime minister of France, from [1880-1881, 1883-1885]. He is especially remembered for championing laws that removed Catholic influence from most education in France and for promoting a vast extension of the French colonial empire. The text provides justification for Western imperialism and colonization on behalf of the French empire.
The policy of colonial expansion is a political and economic system ... that can be connected to three sets of ideas: economic ideas; the most far-reaching ideas of civilization; and ideas of a political and patriotic sort.

In the area of economics, I am placing before you, with the support of some statistics, the considerations that justify the policy of colonial expansion, as seen from the perspective of a need, felt more and more urgently by the industrialized population of Europe and especially the people of our rich and hardworking country of France: the need for outlets [for exports]. Is this a fantasy? Is this a concern [that can wait] for the future? Or is this not a pressing need, one may say a crying need, of our industrial population? I merely express in a general way what each one of you can see for himself in the various parts of France. Yes, what our major industries [textiles, etc.], irrevocably steered by the treaties of 18601 into exports, lack more and more are outlets.

Why? Because next door Germany is setting up trade barriers; because across the ocean the United States of America have become protectionists, and extreme protectionists at that; because not only are these great markets ... shrinking, becoming more and more difficult of access, but these great states are beginning to pour into our own markets products not seen there before. This is true not only for our agriculture, which has been so sorely tried ... and for which competition is no longer limited to the circle of large European states ....

Today, as you know, competition, the law of supply and demand, freedom of trade, the effects of speculation, all radiate in a circle that reaches to the ends of the earth .... That is a great complication, a great economic difficulty; ... an extremely serious problem. It is so serious, gentlemen, so acute, that the least informed persons must already glimpse, foresee, and take precautions against the time when the great South American market that has, in a manner of speaking, belonged to us forever will be disputed and perhaps taken away from us by North American products. Nothing is more serious; there can be no graver social problem; and these matters are linked intimately to colonial policy.

Gentlemen, we must speak more loudly and more honestly! We must say openly that indeed the higher races have a right over the lower races ....

I repeat, that the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races .... In the history of earlier centuries these duties, gentlemen, have often been misunderstood; and certainly when the Spanish soldiers and explorers introduced slavery into Central America, they did not fulfill their duty as men of a higher race .... But, in our time, I maintain that European nations acquit themselves with generosity, with grandeur, and with sincerity of this superior civilizing duty.

I say that French colonial policy, the policy of colonial expansion, the policy that has taken us under the Empire [the Second Empire, of Napoleon 1111, to Saigon, to Indochina [Vietnam], that has led us to Tunisia, to Madagascar-I say that this policy of colonial expansion was inspired by... the fact that a navy such as ours cannot do without safe harbors, defenses, supply centers on the high seas .... Are you unaware of this? Look at a map of the world.
Gentlemen, these are considerations that merit the full attention of patriots. The conditions of naval warfare have greatly changed. At present, as you know, a warship, however perfect its design, cannot carry more than two weeks' supply of coal; and a vessel without coal is a wreck on the high seas, abandoned to the first occupier. Hence the need to have places of supply, shelters, ports for defense and provisioning. And that is why we needed Tunisia; that is why we needed Saigon and Indochina; that is why we need Madagascar... and why we shall never leave them! ... Gentlemen, in Europe such as it is today, in this competition of the many rivals we see rising up around us, some by military or naval improvements, others by the prodigious development of a constantly growing population; in a Europe, or rather in a universe thus constituted, a policy of withdrawal or abstention is simply the high road to decadence! In our time nations are great only through the activity they deploy; it is not by spreading the peaceable light of their institutions... that they are great, in the present day.

Spreading light without acting, without taking part in the affairs of the world, keeping out of all European alliances and seeing as a trap, an adventure, all expansion into Africa or the Orient—for a great nation to live this way, believe me, is to abdicate and, in less time than you may think, to sink from the first rank to the third and fourth.

Source: