



Rudyard Kipling

(1865-1936)

1 COMPLETE Kipling's life and works with the words from the box.

Nobel Prize
journalist

Bombay
attend school

autobiography
short stories

correspondent
settling

beast fable

Rudyard Kipling was born in **(1)** _____, India, in 1865. There he was able to learn the Hindi language more easily than English and observe Indian life. At the age of 6 he was sent to England to **(2)** _____, as was the custom among upper-class Anglo-Indians, and returned to India in 1882. While working as a **(3)** _____ in his native country, he began to publish collections of poems and **(4)** _____ about Indian life: *Departmental Ditties* (1886), *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888) and *Wee Willie Winkie* (1890). In 1889 he returned to London, where he wrote *The Light That Failed* (1890), his first attempt at a full-length novel, a genre which he was never too happy with, apart from *Kim* (1901). After **(5)** _____ in the USA with his American wife, he added to his reputation with the two volumes of *The Jungle Book* (1894-95), which are an excellent modern version of the ancient genre of the **(6)** _____. He returned to England in 1896, where he continued to write, and in 1907 he was the first Englishman to receive the **(7)** _____ for Literature. During the First World War he worked as a **(8)** _____. He died in 1936 and his ashes were buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. His last work was an **(9)** _____, *Something of Myself*, published posthumously in 1937, from which the figure of a man and an artist of great dignity and integrity emerges.

Two epics

Kipling wrote 'epics rather than novels'; his major works, *Kim* and *The Jungle Book*, are a series of episodes held together by a central character: Kim and Mowgli, who both represent the 'citizen of two worlds'. *Kim* is a novel about British India, but also a spy story set at a time when Russian expansion in Central Asia was a cause of concern for the British. The character of Mowgli, a child growing among wolves in the Indian jungle, appears in eight of the 15 stories of *The Jungle Book*. In spite of the imperialistic overtones of this book, Mowgli has become famous among children, especially thanks to the 1967 Disney film.

The short stories

In his short stories Kipling often employed the device of the 'frame story', a narrative form popular at the turn of

the century consisting of a story in which several tales are related. This technique was a reaction against the omniscient narrator in favour of a **more ambivalent vision of the world**. The story is told by a fictional character in different situations: in an army camp, on board ship, in an Indian hut. The 'frame situation' is well described and this generally allows the writer to provide an **ironic comment** on the central story that follows.

Style

Kipling was a master in the handling of language: both his poetry and prose show his love for words and his ability to use them to convey feelings and emotions. He also excelled at portraying exponents of both the British ruling class and the natives.

Key idea

The white man's burden

In Kipling's work the British Empire acquired almost a mythical status. He exalted imperial power, whose purpose was to provide order and stability among the natives. He believed in the 'burden' of the British, who, as the elected race, had to carry civilisation all over the world and establish their government

based on honour and dignity (→ *The mission of the coloniser*).

In 1899 Kipling celebrated the American conquest of the Philippines in a poem, *The White Man's Burden*, which made him the bard of the British Empire.

COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING INFORMATION

1 READ the texts and explain:

- 1 why Kipling is regarded as an imperialist writer;
- 2 his contribution to the short story.



The mission of the coloniser

These are the first four stanzas of Kipling's famous poem written in response to the American takeover of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. The poet urged the USA to take up the 'burden' of the white man, just as Britain had. The phrase became a euphemism for imperialism.

Rudyard Kipling
*The White Man's
Burden*
(1899)

Take up the White Man's **burden** –
Send forth the best ye breed¹ –
Go bind² your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
5 To wait in heavy **harness**
On fluttered folk³ and wild –
Your new-caught, **sullen** peoples,
Half devil and half child.

Take up the White Man's burden –
10 In patience to **abide**,
To veil the threat of terror
And **check** the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain,
15 To seek another's profit,
And work another's **gain**.

Take up the White Man's burden –
The savage wars of peace –
Fill full the mouth of Famine
20 And bid⁴ the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought⁵,
Watch Sloth and heathen Folly⁶
Bring all your hope to **nought**.

25 Take up the White Man's burden –
No **tawdry** rule of kings,
But **toil** of serf and sweeper –
The tale of common things,
The ports ye shall not enter,
30 The roads ye shall not **tread**,
Go make them with your living,
And mark them with your dead! [...]

- 1 Send ... breed. Mandate (in missione) i migliori che allevate.
2 bind. Legate, vincolate.
3 fluttered folk. Gente agitata.
4 bid. Ordinate.
5 sought. Cercato.
6 Sloth and heathen Folly. La pigrizia e la follia dei pagani.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the poem and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 tolerate | 6 hard work |
| 2 shameful, immoral | 7 nothing |
| 3 improvement | 8 set foot on |
| 4 heavy load | 9 special equipment |
| 5 control | 10 angry, showing irritation |



➤ COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ the poem again and find out what Kipling actually means by 'burden' in each stanza.

➤ COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

3 POINT out how the colonised peoples are described.

4 SAY what advantages are brought to them by imperialism, according to the poet.

5 EXPLAIN whether the mission of the coloniser implies reward.

➤ COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS WITH THE CONTEXT OF THE AGE

6 DISCUSS how the poem can be interpreted in the Victorian context.
