explainity explains: colonies

Sally and her dad live in England. Today, they're going on vacation to Jamaica. While she is on the island, Sally learns that Jamaica has been independent since 1962. She asks her dad what that means; and he tells her that the country was once a colony. That means one country occupies another region for its own use. This is usually to gain more geographical, political and economic power.

Many thousands of years ago, even the Greeks established colonies on the coasts of the Mediterranean and Black Sea. Later came the Roman Empire. Rome sent out its citizens to conquer large parts of Europe, North Africa and West Asia. And from the end of the 13th century, the Ottomans occupied regions in Northwest Africa, Asia Minor and Eastern Europe.
Once the major seafaring nations – initially Spain and Portugal – launched exploration expeditions, colonies were established worldwide.
In 1494, Christopher Columbus sailed under the Spanish flag across the Atlantic, where he "discovered" Jamaica. The island and its inhabitants became Spanish property. Around 150 years later, the British came and took Jamaica for themselves. So there we have it.

Colonies were intended to boost international trade. A side effect was that language and literacy was spread in these areas. The historical age of colonialism was between 1870 and 1914. Back then, the European powers seized the remaining African countries.

However, colonialism was never free from violence. So what was the point of it all?
New territory brought more wealth, more power and more possibilities. The colonial rulers took the precious resources of the occupied land, such as cotton, coffee, spices, tobacco, dyes or gold and diamonds, and exported them to their home country.
The colonial powers also forced the population to adopt their culture and faith. Indigenous people were oppressed, displaced, killed or kept as slaves and traded all around the world.

And this is roughly what the colonized world map of 1914 looked like. For a time, the British occupied a quarter of the world's land area – which is one of the reasons why English has become a global language.

The turning point in colonialism came about through uprisings by the native peoples and displaced slaves, as well as the major World Wars. Colonial powers gradually lost their territories everywhere, or preferred to invest their money in rebuilding their own country.

Sally's dad explains to her that in Jamaica back in the 18th century, escaped slaves were already able to take over parts of the island. It was a long path to freedom - until 1962, when Jamaica finally became independent.

But that doesn't mean that today everything is OK again. As a result of colonialization around the world, tribes were torn apart or different groups were combined in one country. The consequences of colonialization are only slowly fading away. Even today, civil wars, poverty, crime and discrimination still persist in many places.

Sally would like to find out more about colonies and she discovers many marks of colonialism in Jamaica.