

The Kingdom of Benin: A Journey through History

Learning objective: To understand the social, artistic, and historical significance of the Kingdom of Benin (c. 900–1897 AD) and analyse its achievements.

Use your knowledge of the Kingdom of Benin to answer the following questions. Provide detailed explanations where requested to show your historical understanding.

Ellie the elephant has been reading ancient scrolls about the powerful Kingdom of Benin, located in modern-day Nigeria. The kingdom was famous for its complex government, impressive walls, and world-renowned metalwork.

Word bank: Oba · Bronze · Plaques · Craftsmen · Trade · Edo · Earthworks · Kingdom

1. The Oba was the leader of the Kingdom of Benin. Explain why the Oba's role was central to both the government and the religious life of the people. (2 marks)

2. The people of Benin were famous for creating intricate bronze plaques. Describe how these plaques were used to record history before written books were common. (2 marks)

3. Compare the defensive earthworks of Benin to a medieval castle. What are the similarities and differences in how they protected their inhabitants? (3 marks)

4. Justify why the Kingdom of Benin is often described as a 'sophisticated civilisation' by historians. Refer to their trade and craftsmanship in your answer. (3 marks)

5. What might happen to our understanding of the Edo people today if their bronze plaques had not survived to the present day? (2 marks)

Draw: Imagine you are a master craftsman in the royal court of Benin. Design a bronze plaque that tells a story about a great event, such as a royal parade or a successful harvest.



Extension challenge: Research the 'Benin Bronzes' and write a short persuasive paragraph explaining why it is important for historical artefacts to be studied and preserved in museums. Consider the perspective of the original creators.