

The Kingdom of Benin: A West African Treasure

Learning objective: To understand the significance and achievements of the Kingdom of Benin, a non-European society that flourished during the medieval period.

Read the passage below carefully and answer the questions. Make sure to use your best handwriting and full sentences.

Ellie the elephant loves to visit the history section of the library to learn about the Kingdom of Benin, which was once a powerful empire in West Africa. Starting around the 10th century, the people of Benin built a highly organised society. Their ruler, known as the Oba, lived in a grand palace in the centre of their capital city. The city was protected by massive earthworks, which acted like a giant wall to keep the kingdom safe.

The people of Benin were famous for their incredible artistic skills. They created beautiful sculptures and heavy bronze plaques that decorated the palace walls. These items told the stories of their history, their warriors, and their culture. The Kingdom of Benin was also a busy centre for trade. They exchanged goods like cloth, ivory, and spices with people from many distant lands. Because they were so good at trading and farming, the kingdom became very wealthy and stable. Even today, the legacy of their craftsmanship continues to amaze people all over the world, teaching us about the talent and intelligence of this historic African civilisation.

Word bank: Oba · bronze · plaque · craftsmanship · prosperous · fortification · kingdom

1. What was the ruler of the Kingdom of Benin called, and where did they live? (2 marks)

2. Name two types of goods that were traded by the people of Benin. (2 marks)

3. Why do you think the people of Benin built massive earthworks around their city? (2 marks)

4. Based on the text, what can we infer about the importance of art to the people of Benin? (2 marks)

5. Why is it important for historians to study civilisations like the Kingdom of Benin? Give a reason for your answer. (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a bronze plaque that might have hung on the walls of the Oba's palace. You could include symbols of a warrior, a jungle animal, or an important event.



Extension challenge: Imagine you are a trader visiting the capital city of Benin. Write a short diary entry describing the sights, sounds, and smells you might experience in the busy marketplace.