

The Kingdom of Benin: A West African Power

Learning objective: To understand the significance and achievements of the Kingdom of Benin in West Africa.

Read the text carefully with Ellie the Elephant, then answer the questions below to test your historical knowledge.

Long ago, in the tropical forests of what is now Nigeria, the Kingdom of Benin rose to power. Led by a ruler known as the Oba, the kingdom became a wealthy and sophisticated society. The people of Benin were master metalworkers, famous across the globe for their intricate bronze plaques. These works of art decorated the royal palace, telling the stories of past kings, brave warriors, and important ceremonies. While many people in Europe were still using simple tools, Benin's artisans were using complex techniques to create stunning sculptures that shimmered like gold. The city itself was a marvel of planning, featuring massive earthen walls and a well-organised system of trade. Merchants arrived from far away to exchange goods like pepper, cloth, and ivory. Ellie the Elephant loves studying this kingdom because its history shows us how advanced and creative African civilisations were hundreds of years ago. By examining the patterns on the bronze plaques, historians have discovered exactly how the people lived, what they wore, and how they valued their rich, royal heritage.

Word bank: Oba · bronze · craftsmanship · prosperous · civilisation · archaeologists

1. What was the title given to the ruler of the Kingdom of Benin, and what is one item that merchants traded there? (2 marks)

2. According to the text, what did the bronze plaques tell the people of the kingdom? (2 marks)

3. Why might the bronze plaques be considered a vital source of information for historians today? (3 marks)

4. What does the text imply about the level of skill possessed by the artisans of Benin compared to other civilisations at that time? (3 marks)

5. If you were the Oba of Benin, which aspect of your kingdom's achievements would you be most proud of and why? Justify your answer. (4 marks)

Draw: Draw a bronze plaque from the Kingdom of Benin showing a scene from daily life, including patterns and symbols that might tell a story about a king or a craftsman.



Extension challenge: Compare and contrast the city planning of the Kingdom of Benin with a modern-day city. What might happen if the city walls had not been built? Write a short diary entry from the perspective of an artisan finishing a bronze plaque.