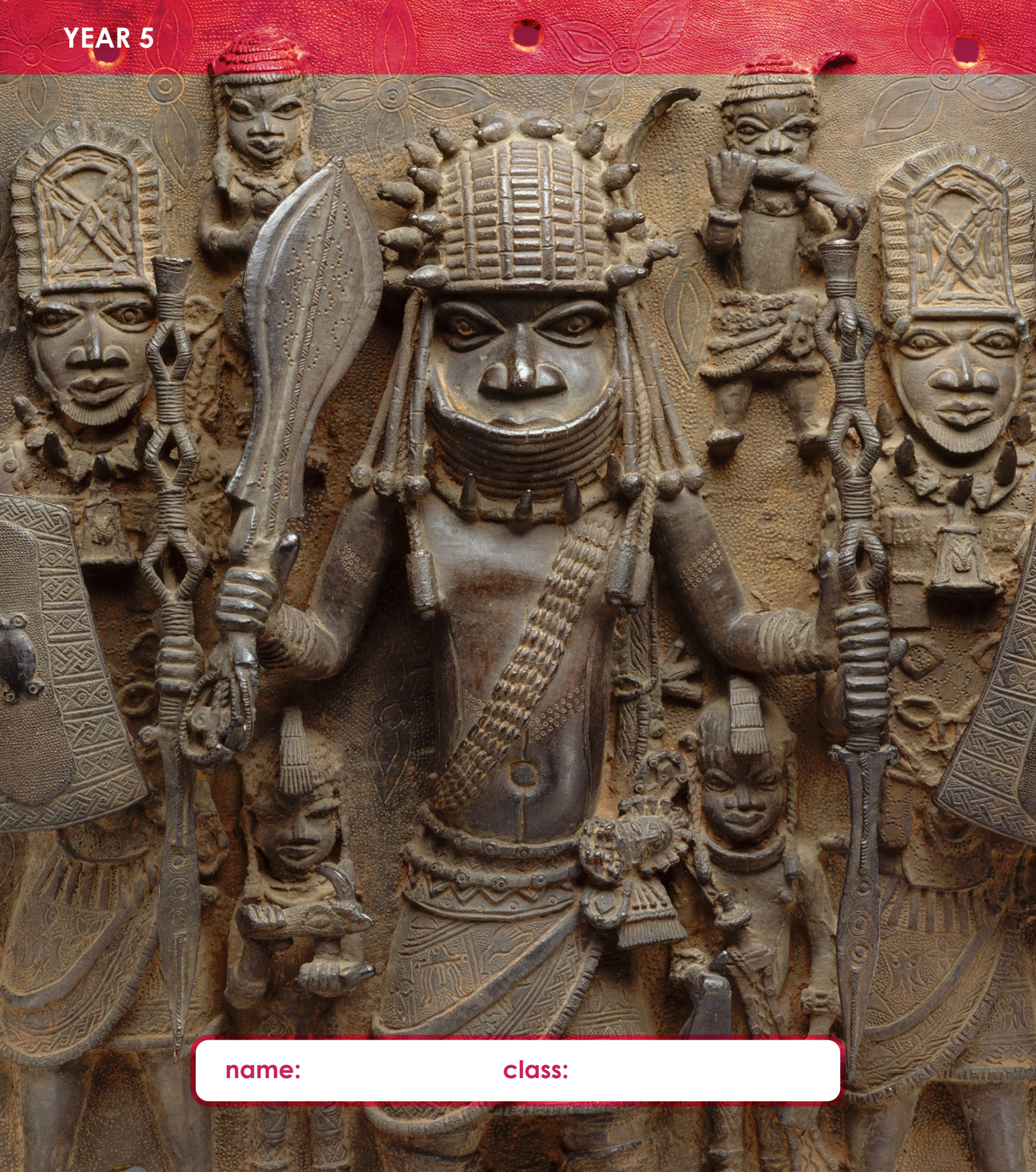


BENIN KINGDOM



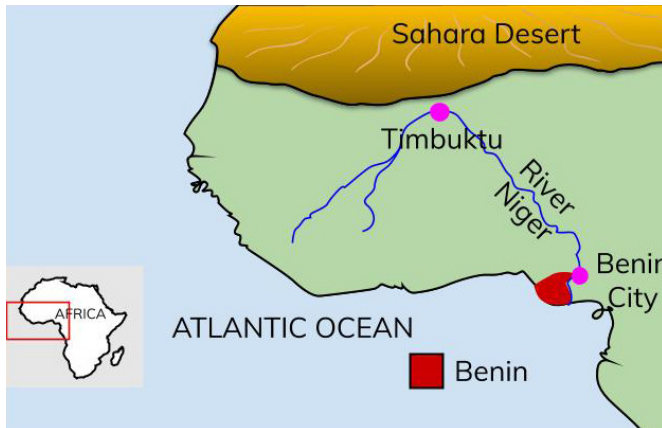
YEAR 5



name:

class:

Knowledge Organiser • Benin Kingdom • Year 5



Vocabulary

Oba	A king, or chief.
Ogisos	The first kings of Benin. Ogisos means "Rulers of the Sky".
Empire	lots of countries or states, all ruled by one monarch or single state.
Guild	A group of people who all do the same job, usually a craft.
Animism	A religion widely followed in Benin.
Voodoo (or Vodun)	The belief that non-human objects have spirits or souls.
Cowrie shells	A sea shell which Europeans used as a kind of money to trade with African leaders.
Civil war	A war between people who live in the same country.
Moat	A long trench dug around an area to keep invaders out.
Colonisation	When invaders take over control of a country by force, and live among the people.

Timeline of Events

900 CE	Lots of villages join together and make a kingdom known as Igodomigodo, ruled by the Ogiso.
c. 900-1460 CE	A huge earthen moat was constructed around the kingdom, stretching 16,000 km long.
1180 CE	The Oba royal family take over from the Ogiso, and begin to rule the kingdom. They are treated like Gods.
1440 CE	Benin expands its territory under the rule of Oba Ewuare the Great.
1470 CE	Oba Ewuare renames the kingdom as Edo, with its main city known as Ubinu (Benin in Portuguese).
1485 CE	The Portuguese visit Edo and Ubinu.
1514 CE	Oba Esigie sets up trading links with the Portuguese, and other European visitors.
1700 CE	A series of civil wars within Benin lead to the kingdom declining in power.
1807 CE	Britain passes a law abolishing the slave trade, which further weakens the kingdom.
1897 CE	Benin city (in modern day Nigeria) is destroyed by British troops, and comes under Britain's control.

Key Misconception

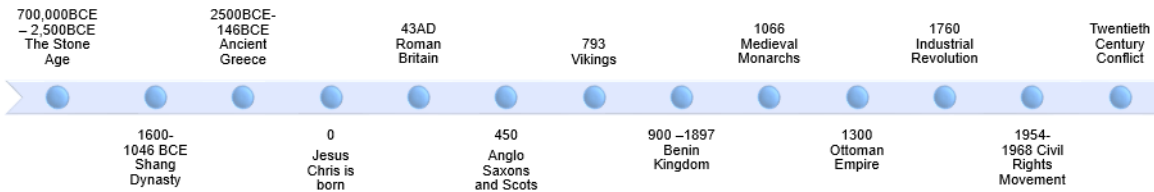
The Kingdom of Benin is not the same as the modern day country called Benin

Lesson Question	You will learn	Learning Review
<p>How did the Benin Kingdom begin? How did the Benin Kingdom begin?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the dynasty of the Obas began. • Who was Ewuare the Great. • Reasons why Benin grew into a successful empire. 	
<p>What was life like for the Edo people in the Benin Kingdom?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the Obas ruled. • What guilds were. • How religion involved gods and magic. 	
<p>How were trade links established and what goods were traded?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which Europeans Benin started trading with. • What good were traded. • What were manila bracelets and what did the Edo people use them for. 	
<p>What led to the Civil war in the 1700s?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the Golden Age was. • Why the kingdom went into decline in the 1600s. • What Oba Akenzua and his son Eresonyen did to kick-start the Benin renewal. 	
<p>What was the Transatlantic Slave Trade?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The route of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. • Examples of the goods traded. • What the 'Middle Passage' was and how Britain was involved. 	
<p>Why did the British colonise Benin and what impact did this have?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why Britain wanted a closer relationship with the Kingdom of Benin. • What happened in the conflict of 1897. • The Benin Punitive Expedition. • When Benin became an independent country. 	

How did the Benin Kingdom begin?



1. When did the Benin Kingdom begin and end? What happened before? What events were happening elsewhere in the world during the time of the Benin Kingdom? What happened after?



Term	Definition
Edo	A member of a people inhabiting the district of Benin in Nigeria.
Igodomigodo	The historical name of the now fallen Benin Empire.
Ogisos	The first kings of Benin. Ogisos means “Rulers of the Sky.”
Oba	A king or chief.
Empire	Lots of countries or states, all rules by one monarch or single state.



Kingdom of Igodomigodo

Over a thousand years ago, a group of people known as the Edo lived in West Africa. Around the year 900, the Edo began to cut down trees and make clearings in the rainforests. Lots of villages joined together to make a kingdom known as Igodomigodo, which was ruled by a series of kings, known as the Ogisos or “Rulers of the Sky”.

The Kingdom of Benin was located in what is now southern Nigeria and was one of the oldest and most highly developed states in west Africa. Although there is now a country in Africa called Benin, the Kingdom of Benin was located in a different place.



2. Use a pen to add Benin City to the map below.



How did Benin become an empire?

In the 1100s, the last Ogiso king was banished. The Edo people feared that their country would fall into chaos, so they asked their neighbour, the King of Ife, for help. The king sent his son Prince Oranmiyan to restore peace to the Edo kingdom. Oranmiyan chose his son Eweka to be the first Oba of Benin.

Around 1440, Ewuare became the Oba of Benin. He was known as Ewuare the Great as he helped Benin become more powerful. His success came from building up an army, winning land and rebuilding Benin City and the royal palace. This is why this time is sometimes referred to as the 'Golden Age'.

During this time, a 16,000km long earthen moat was being dug by the Edo people to create a boundary around the city. Outside the wall was a ditch, the kingdom was surrounded by high walls, the gateways were guarded by soldiers and nine gates restricted access to the city.

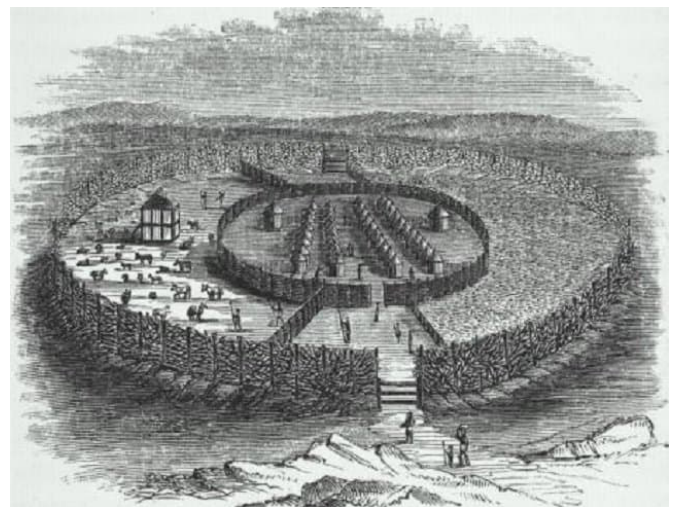


Diagram: The Great Benin Wall



3. Who was the first Oba of the Benin Kingdom?



4. Why do you think the Edo people built a moat around the kingdom?



5. When did Europeans first make contact with the Benin Kingdom?



6. Which Europeans were the first to visit Benin Kingdom?

Oba Ewuare was the first of five great warrior kings. His son Oba Ozolua was believed to have won 200 battles. He was followed by Oba Esigie who expanded his kingdom eastwards to form an empire and won land from the Kingdom of Ife. Oba Ozolua and Oba Esigie both encouraged trade with the Portuguese who first visited the Benin Kingdom in 1472 AD, and the wealth they gained from this exchange was used to continue to build up a vast army.

During this period there were many great Kingdoms and Empires in the West Africa, including the Kingdom of Ife, which influenced the culture of Benin, and Asante, which was famous for its work in gold.



The orange represents Benin Kingdom and the arrows show the directions of expansion from the 15th to the 17th century



7. The Obas of Benin Kingdom built up a vast army. Using the text and diagram on the expansion of the Benin Kingdom to help you, why do you think doing this helped make Benin Kingdom more powerful?

Below are some statements about why Benin grew into such a successful empire.



8. Rank them in order of importance with 1 being the most important reason to 7 being the least important.

	The Kingdom traded goods with other countries.
	There were no schools and people did not read or write.
	From around AD 1180, the Edo people were ruled by kings called Obas.
	The Benin Kingdom had a large, powerful army.
	A large mound of earth was built around the Kingdom.
	The history of the Kingdom was passed down through storytellers.
	Smaller tribes joined together to form a bigger group of people.



9. Which of the above was the most important and least important reason for why the Benin Kingdom became such a successful empire?

What was life like for the Edo people in the Benin Kingdom?



Retrieval Practice

1. In which modern day country was the Kingdom of Benin located?
2. What are the Ogisos also known as?
3. What were the people living in the Benin Kingdom referred to as?
4. How long was the earthen moat around Benin City?
5. Why was Oba Ewuare known as Ewuare the Great?

Term	Definition
Chief	A leader or ruler of people.
Official	A person having official duties, especially as a representative of an organisation.
Merchant	A person involved in trade.
Oba	A king or chief.
Guild	A group of people who all do the same job, usually a craft.
Voodoo	A religion widely following in Benin. It combines elements of Roman Catholic ritual with traditional African magical and religious rites
Animism	The belief that non-human objects have spirits or souls.

The rule of the Obas

The people of Benin were polytheistic – meaning that they worshipped many gods. Their gods were different to the gods of other civilisations we have studied. The people of Benin believed that their Oba was a god.

Everyone had to show great respect to the Oba. People approached him on their knees and nobody could look at him without his permission.



1. Does this remind you of any other civilisations who also saw their leaders as gods / as chosen by gods?



2. From this plaque, how can you tell that the Oba was regarded very highly in the Benin Kingdom?



Redraft after discussion

The Oba lived apart from the ordinary people inside the royal court in Benin City. Most of the time the Oba was kept very busy with his duties as king. He held meetings with his officials and he led religious ceremonies. The Oba owned all the land in his kingdom. He gave orders to his chiefs and officials on how his kingdom should be run and he decided when his armies should go to war.



3. What duties did the Oba have?

Below is a source sharing the observations made by a Portuguese ship captain of the Benin Kingdom.



4. What does the below source tell you about how the Oba and the Edo people lived in Benin?

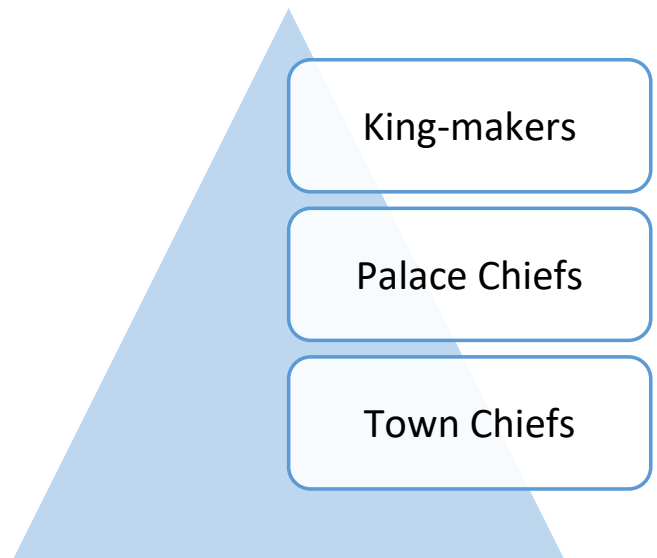
In 1691, the Portuguese ship captain Lourenco Pinto observed: "Great Benin, where the king resides, is larger than Lisbon; all the streets run straight and as far as the eye can see. The houses are large, especially that of the king, which is richly decorated and has fine columns. The city is wealthy and industrious. It is so well governed that theft is unknown and the people live in such security that they have no doors to their houses."

Source: *The Guardian*

Who helped the Oba?

Although the Oba was a divine king and the spiritual head of the kingdom, his power system also included many chiefs and officials to help him run his kingdom.

These chiefs and officials helped the Oba in many areas including running the royal court, organising the craft workers and making agreements with European merchants.



There were three classes of chiefs - king makers who worked closely with the Oba, palace chiefs and town chiefs. Palace chiefs came from rich families and their jobs were passed down from father to son. These chiefs would work with the Oba in the administration and discharge of justice at the Oba's palace. Although they would support the Oba, when a decision could not be reached, the Oba's decision was paramount and therefore final.

The villages were headed by town chiefs who governed the ordinary people and had an important role to play in the smooth running of the provinces.

State affairs such as war, taxes, and dates of important ceremonies, were decided by a state council led by the Oba, formed of these three classes of chiefs and other dignitaries.



5. Give three examples of jobs the chiefs and officials helped the Oba with.

Work

Many people in Benin lived in villages in the rainforest. They cleared away the trees to grow vegetables and they built their houses from mud, wood and palm leaves.

In the Benin Kingdom, people who had a certain craft (did the same job) were put together to live and work together, these were known as guilds.

There were more than 40 guilds in Benin City and each guild had to perform a special duty for the Oba. Some guilds were for craft workers, such as ivory-carvers and artists making brass plaques and other guilds were for other jobs such as doctors, drummers, acrobats and dancers.



Benin ivory mask (source: British Museum)



6. What might the benefits have been of having guilds?

Religion

The Edo people worshipped many gods and had many stories involving gods and magic which they passed on through storytelling. The Edo people held ceremonies to honour their gods and some of these ceremonies are still performed today by the Edo people.

Every town and village had its own deity (god/goddess) which they all passionately worshipped. For example, Olokun was a very popular god. As well as ruling the ocean, he was the god of wealth. Other popular gods were Ogun the god of iron and warriors and Osun the god of medicine and magic.

The religion widely followed during the Benin Kingdom was Voodoo. The roots of the Voodoo practices come from practising the belief in animism which is the belief that spirits inhabit all things, including animals and plants.



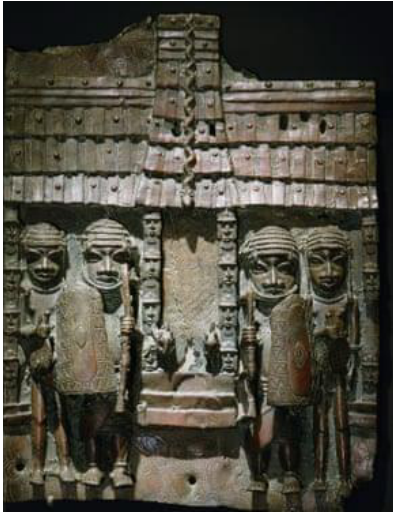
7. How would voodoo beliefs have supported law and order in the Benin Kingdom?

Benin art

A popular guild in which many Edo people worked was the craft maker's guild. In this guild, Edo people made Benin bronzes – metal plaques and sculpture, mainly made from brass and bronze – which were primarily used to decorate the royal palace of the Kingdom of Benin.



8. What do these Benin bronzes tell us about the Oba's palace and the warriors of Benin Kingdom?



Plaque showing figures in front of the Oba's palace Benin, Nigeria.



Plaque of a warrior



Image: Benin warrior and attendants.



9. Some people might argue that this evidence gives a one-sided view of the Kingdom of Benin. Why might they say this?

How were trade links established and what goods were traded?



Retrieval Practice

1. How long was the earthen moat around Benin City?
 - a. 18,000km
 - b. 17,000km
 - c. 16,000km
2. Which three types of leader helped the Oba run his kingdom?
3. What is animism?
 - a. The belief that animals should not be eaten.
 - b. The belief that spirits inhabit all things, including animals and plants.
 - c. The belief that animals should be worshipped.
4. What was the name given to people living and working together?
5. What two metals did Benin's craft makers mainly use to make art?

Term	Definition
Manilla bracelets	Bracelets made out of brass.
Cowrie shells	A sea shell which Europeans used as a kind of money to trade with the Africa leaders.
Slave	A person who is the legal property of another and is forced to obey them.

Geography of Benin City



1. Looking at the map of Benin below, how did its location aid with the trading of goods?



How were trade links established with the Europeans?

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to visit Benin.



Brass figure of a Portuguese soldier holding a musket. (Source: The British Museum).

Records suggest that Ruy-de Sequeira was the first Portuguese to visit Benin territory in 1472 during the reign of Oba Ewuare, although no strong relations were established. However, with the full backing of John II (the king of Portugal), Afonso d'Aveiro went to Benin in 1486. At this time, Oba Ozolua (who was the Oba at that time) was interested in the visitors and was ready to trade with them. He was ready to allow the Portuguese to trade in slaves and other products or items that may interest the Portuguese. Oba Ozolua even sent one of his leading officials, the chief of Ughoton, back to Portugal to meet the king and discuss the opening of the trade relation.



2. Why do you think the Oba of Benin Kingdom was interested in trading with the Europeans?

Articles of trade

The people of Benin traded with merchants from Europe (including the Portuguese, British, French and Dutch) and instead of using money, they exchanged goods.

Here are some of the goods that were exchanged:

- Brass manilla bracelets from Europe (people in Benin would melt them down and use it to make plaques and statues).
- Cowrie shells from Europe (the African rulers used them as money).
- Guns from Europe.
- Slaves from Benin (soldiers from Benin made raids on other kingdoms to capture people to sell as slaves to the Europeans).
- Peppercorns from Benin.
- Ivory from Benin.
- Textiles such as cotton from Benin.



Examples of goods that were traded



5. According to this source, how did the Kingdom of Benin become so powerful?

From the 17th century European traders, led by the Dutch, began to sell firearms in large quantities. These played a crucial role, and Benin's soldiers learnt much from Europeans, particularly the Portuguese. Gunpowder assured victory on the battlefield...

(Plankensteiner, 2007: 77)



3. List 2 items that the Europeans got from trading with the people from Benin



4. List 2 items that the Benin Kingdom got from trading with the Europeans

Trading of brass

Although West Africans invented the smelting of copper and zinc ores and the casting of brass at least as long ago as the 10th century, they themselves did not produce enough metal to supply the casting industry of Benin City. Therefore, the Portuguese had the perfect opportunity to offer Benin brass in the form of bracelets called "manillas" which the brass workers melted to use again. This brass was used to make Benin art such as the plaques we looked at in lesson two.

The source at below written by a historian and describes the trading relationship between the Europeans and people of Benin.

Misconceptions



6. With your partner, discuss the similarities and differences between the arts being produced in Europe versus the art produced in the Benin Kingdom.



Europe V.S. Benin



Similarities

Differences

The arrival and the reception of the bronze plaques caused a sensation in Europe. People struggled to understand how African craftsmen could have made such works of art, with some even suggesting that the Benin artwork had European influences.

Watch the video 'Western reactions to Benin bronzes.'



7. What misconceptions do people have about Benin art?

What led to the Civil War in the 1700s?



Retrieval Practice

1. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to visit Benin.
True / False

2. Circle the countries that were involved in trading with Benin.
 - a. Portugal
 - b. Britain
 - c. France
 - d. Japan

3. What did brass workers in Benin do with the manillas?

4. The religion widely following in the Benin Kingdom was _____

5. How did the location of Benin City help with trade?

Term	Definition
The Golden Age	This refers to a time in Benin Kingdom when the Oba was at his most powerful within the region.
Territories	An area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler or state.
Moat	A deep, wide ditch surrounding a castle, fort, or town.
Civil war	A war between people who live in the same country.

The Golden Age

Oba Ewuare, the first Golden Age Oba, is regarded as being influential in launching military campaigns and expanding the city-state's territories to surrounding regions.

Oba Ewuare built many roads and constructed nine gateways to Benin, making his kingdom well connected. In order to protect himself from any potential coups (takeovers), the Oba commissioned a then nationwide moat around the city and hundreds of walls which divided the land into separate and distinct areas depending on what trade would be undertaken there. This helped ensure his Kingdom was secure, especially as he was rapidly expanding his territory.



A drawing of Benin City made by a British officer in 1897 (source: *The Guardian*)

Rebuilding his city required a lot of money and as a result, Ewuare opened his borders, especially to European merchants with whom the Edo people traded. Using this foreign investment, Ewuare was able to use it to fund his city and strengthen his empire.

Under his rule, Benin City and the Edo underwent a period of a golden age which saw the region becoming well known for its sculptures- particularly in ivory and bronze. The Benin Kingdom dominated trade along the coastline of the Niger Delta.



1. Name one thing Oba Ewuare did in the Golden Age.



2. Why was this period in the Benin Kingdom called the 'Golden Age'?



Redraft after class discussion.

The decline

However, by the 1600s, the political situation in Benin began to decline as the royal court and the officials spend the money foolishly.

Alongside this, the kingdom began diminishing geographically as territories were being lost as it was becoming more and more difficult to maintain a strong hold on the expanding territories. Power struggles between princes became prominent (noticeable) as they fought for the throne in a series of battles which eventually led to a civil war in the early 1700s.



3. Give three causes of the decline of the Benin Kingdom in the 1600s?

The Impact of the Civil War

A visitor to Benin City described it as having been reduced to a “mere village” as a result of the War.

The Civil War saw the Benin Kingdom change from being a centrally governed Kingdom, with the King ruling with assistance of leaders he chose, to more of a collectively governed Kingdom, with greater levels of independence.

How do historians know about the Civil War?

The Edo people did have some writing system, mainly in the form of art work. As a result much of the history has come from ‘oral tradition’, stories that have been handed down. In the 1930s the first extended history of the Bening Kingdom was written by Jacob Egharevba, mainly using oral sources.



4. Compare the oral tradition to the writing of the Venerable Bede in Anglo-Saxon times. How is oral tradition different?

More recently there has been the discovery of more documentary sources, informed by eye-witnesses, including sea captains and merchants.

One eye-witness account stated that in a single day the Oba could organise an army of 20,000 men because he had such a strong hold on power in his Kingdom.

Benin’s renewal

By the mid-1700s, Benin Kingdom had hit rock bottom. In this state of decline, two influential kings – Oba Akenzua and his son Eresonyen – helped kick start Benin’s renewal. They achieved this mainly by setting up new commercial (trading) ties with Europe in which Benin’s main export (what they sold overseas) was slaves.



5. What do you know about slavery? Where do you think the slaves were taken?

What was the Transatlantic Slave Trade?



Retrieval Practice

1. What did craft makers from the Benin Kingdom do with bronze they got from Europe?
2. Which modern day country is the Kingdom of Benin located in?
3. Other than brass, what other material did the Edo people use to make plaques and sculptures?
4. Which Oba led the Benin Kingdom at the start of the Golden Age?
5. The Kingdom of Benin went into decline because the officials were spending the money foolishly and they were losing their influence on gained territories.

True / false

Term	Definition
Transatlantic Slave Trade	A trade that involved the transportation of enslaved African people, mainly across the Atlantic Ocean, to the Americas.
Migration	Movement of people to a new area or country.
Americas	Refers to North and South America.
Trafficking	The action of transporting people from one country or area to another for exploitation.
Plantations	Large areas of land owned by Europeans where crops were grown.
Colonies	A country or area under the full or partial political control of another country and occupied by settlers from that country.

Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Transatlantic Slave Trade was the enforced transportation by slave traders of enslaved African people, primarily to North, South and Central America. It began in the 15th century and lasted up to the end of the 19th century.

Most of the slaves came from West Africa (where the Benin Kingdom was located) and were sold by other West Africans to European slave traders. A few were captured directly by the Europeans.

Portuguese slave traders took the first slaves to Brazil, and quickly Spain and Britain followed.



1. Where did most of the slaves end up?



2. Which three continents were involved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade?

The route

The transatlantic slave trade is sometimes known as the 'Triangular Trade', since it was three-sided, involving voyages:

- From Europe to Africa
- From Africa to the Americas
- From the Americas back to Europe

The exchange

The Europeans generally exported manufactured items such as alcohol, cloth, beer, pots, pans and guns to Africa to be exchanged for African captives (orange arrow).

The enslaved Africans were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to North and South America and the Caribbean (green arrow). Here they were set to work for free on the plantations.

The ships' captains would then buy goods to take back to Europe (pink arrow). These would be goods produced by slave labour on the plantations. They were tobacco, sugar, indigo (a plant used for dye), rice, rum and cotton.



3. Trading is the action of buying and selling goods and services.

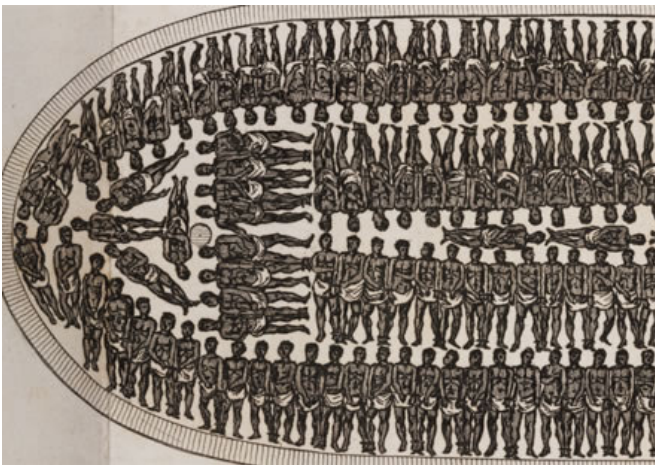
Why did the Europeans want to buy and sell goods with Africa?

The middle passage

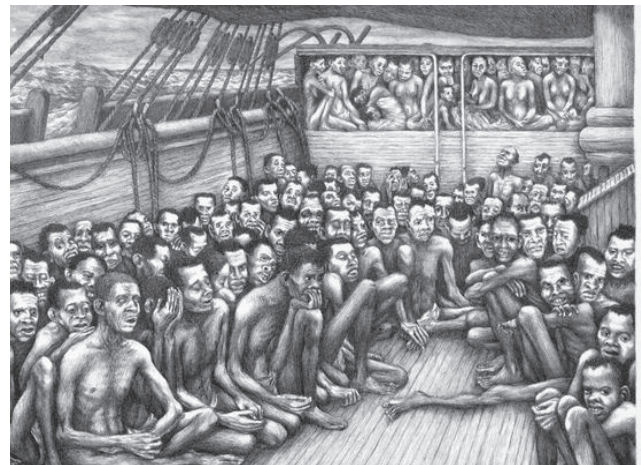
The Middle Passage was the second stage in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, in which ships carried enslaved Africans from Africa to either the Caribbean islands or the Americas. In total two million people were killed on the journey.



4. What do the two pictures below tell you about the conditions on the slave ship?



How the slaves were positioned on the ships



Slaves on the ship



5. Write your ideas down below

Here is an extract taken from Chapter Two of the 'Interesting Narrative' by Olaudah Equiano.

At last, when the ship we were in, had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. ...The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome....The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died -- thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers.

Written by: Olaudah Equiano, 1789.



6. Summarise what the conditions on the slave ship were like.

British involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Britain was heavily involved in the slave trade. By the early 18th century, Britain became the world's leading slave trading power. It is estimated that British ships were responsible for the forced transportation of at least 2-3 million Africans in that century.

British involvement expanded rapidly in response to the demand for labour to cultivate sugar in Barbados and other British West Indian islands. It was important to supply the labour as the sugar colonies were Britain's most valuable colonies, bringing in four million pounds by the end of the eighteenth century. Such huge profits helped Britain to finance the Industrial Revolution.



7. Think about who might have profited from the slave trade. Discuss benefits for British slave ship owners, British slave traders, plantation owners and ordinary people in Britain.

The end of the slave trade

In 1807, Britain passed a law abolishing (ending) the slave trade.

Despite this, an illegal trade continued for many years, and slavery itself was not abolished in some countries until the 1880s. In Brazil, for example, slavery continued to be legal until 1888.



8. In which year did Britain pass a law to abolish the slave trade?

The Legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The legacy of the transatlantic slave trade is huge. The trade has had a massive impact on the making of the modern world we live in today. In Year 6 you will learn about the Civil Rights movement, which has, for the last 150 years, been seeking to ensure rights and liberty for the black population of the USA.

The slave trade contributed to the growth of racist ideas in America and Europe, as well as weakening Africa (which lost millions of its young, healthy population) and enabling Britain to industrialise rapidly in the 1900s.

It is one of the most important events in history for understanding the world we live in today.

Why did the British colonise Benin and what impact did this have?



Retrieval Practice

1. Which three continents were involved in the Transatlantic Slave Trade
2. Finish the following sentence about religion in Benin:
The Edo people worshipped many _____ and had many stories involving gods and _____ which they passed on through _____.
3. What was the second stage in the Transatlantic Trade called where ships carried enslaved Africans to the Americas?
4. Which continents were involved in the Transatlantic Trade?
5. Where did the slaves work for free?
They worked on _____.

Term	Definition
Palm oil	An oil from the fruit of certain palms, especially the West African oil palm.
Punitive	When something is intended as punishment.
Expedition	A journey undertaken by a group of people with a particular purpose.
Looted	When goods are stolen from a place, typically during a war or riot.
Independence	When a nation, country or state can exercise self-government.

Britain seeks control over trade

By the 19th century, Benin was flourishing due to the trade in palm oil, ivory, slaves, textiles and other resources. Benin independently ran its trading activities in its region and was not subjected to orders from any other kingdom or empire, even Britain, which was increasingly powerful in the region.

Oba Ovonramwen, who was the leader at that time, wanted to preserve the kingdom's independence and so bit by bit, banned the export of goods from Benin until the trade was exclusively in palm oil. This put a strain on the relationship between Benin and Britain as Britain wanted a closer relationship with the Kingdom of Benin and wanted to control the trade in the area and have access to the kingdom's rubber resources.

The conflict of 1897

In 1897, a British officer, Lt James Phillips, set out to visit Benin to lay down the law to the Oba. Initially, they were sent away because the Oba was busy with a religious ceremony but they decided to visit anyway. As Phillips approached Benin City with other officials and officers, they were attacked by a group of warriors who drove them back. In this ambush, several British men were killed.



3. How do you think the British reacted to this attack?

Benin Punitive Expedition

Shortly afterwards, in the same year, the British sent over a thousand soldiers, led by Sir Harry Rawson, to invade Benin. During the conquering and burning of the city, most of the country's treasured art, over 3,000 pieces of art work, including the Benin Bronzes, was either destroyed, looted or dispersed. These cultural artefacts were taken by a number of European countries, some of these items taken from the Benin Kingdom are still displayed in museums, for example the British Museum.



1. By the 19th century, why was the Benin Kingdom so successful?



2. What put a strain on the relationship between Benin and Britain?



British soldiers with looted artefacts in 1897
(source: British Museum)

There is a further argument that these items have been illegally taken. No one from Benin invited the British to take these items, they were stolen.

On the other hand, it may be that they can be seen by more people in London and that they might be better looked after in this environment. In addition, it may help us to learn more about different cultures.



4. What was the Benin Punitive Expedition?



5. What happened to the cultural artefacts, like the Benin bronzes during the Punitive Expedition?



6. There are fierce debates about whether or not these cultural artefacts should be returned or not. What is your opinion on this?



7. Write down what you think



After the debate, has your opinion changed? If you still have the same opinion, what other points can you add to your answer?

Repatriating Artefacts

The Kingdom of Benin's art treasures are not the only artefacts from foreign countries that you can see at the British Museum. The most famous are the Elgin Marbles, which decorated the Parthenon in Athens, Greece. There is a huge debate about whether artefacts should be sent back to the country they came from (also called repatriation).

The arguments in favour of repatriating include that it is morally right, that the artefacts have a connection with the place they were produced and are part of the history of that country. There is also an argument that you can better understand and appreciate an artefact in its home.

Independence

After the British invasion, Benin became part of the British Empire. It remained so until 1960 when it became part of the independent country of Nigeria.

Today, the Oba of Benin leads religious ceremonies, but he no longer rules his people



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