

Year 5 History

The Kingdom of Ancient Benin



Name: _____

Class: _____

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LESSON 1: The Foundation of the Kingdom of Benin



PART I: Where was Ancient Benin?



PART 2: How did the Kingdom Begin?



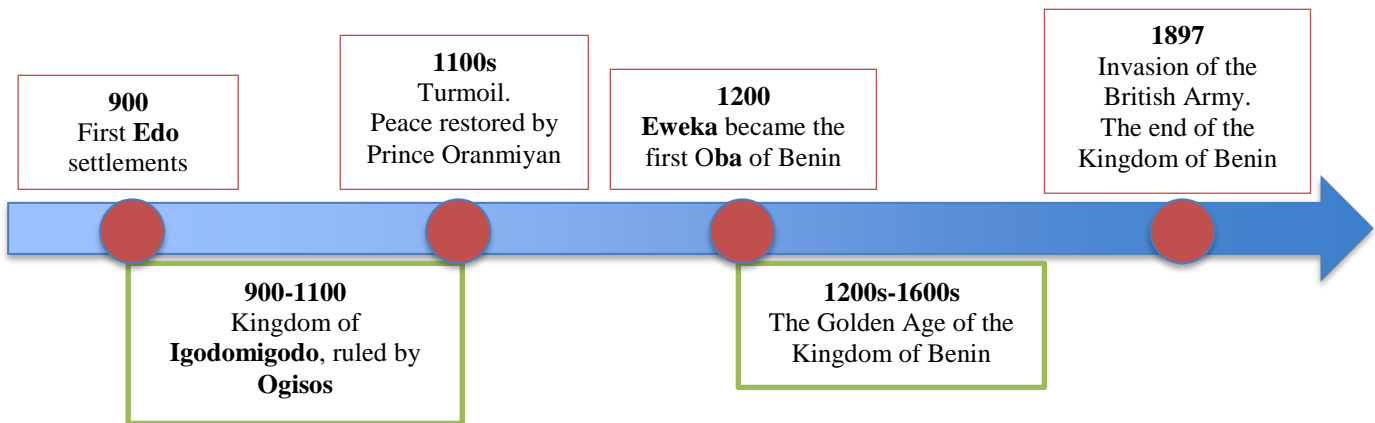
The kingdom of Benin began in the 900s when the **Edo** people settled in the rainforests of West Africa. At first they lived in small family groups, but gradually these groups developed into a kingdom.

The rulers of the first kingdom were known as **Ogisos**, which means ‘rulers of the sky’. In the 1100s there were struggles for power and the Ogisos lost control of their kingdom.

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. Eweka was the first in a long line of **Obas**, who reached the peak of their power in the 1500s. The Obas lived in beautiful palaces decorated with shining brass. Gradually, the Obas won more land and built up an empire. They also started trading with merchants from Europe.

For 400 years Benin was very successful, but in the 1600s the Obas started to lose control of their people. By the 1800s Benin was no longer strong or united. The kingdom came to a sudden end in 1897, when a British army invaded and made it part of the British Empire.



1. When did the Kingdom of Benin start? _____
 2. What was the name of:
 - a) The people who formed the settlement, which became Ancient Benin? _____
 - b) The first rulers? _____
 - c) The next rulers? _____
 3. Ancient Benin was in the same part of Africa as which modern day country? _____
 4. Why did the Kingdom of Ancient Benin come to an end? _____
-

PART 3: What was the sequence of events?



In groups of 3 or 4, put the events in the order that the events happened. Choose 2 of the events and create a freeze frame for these.



Number the events as they happened:

1100AD Ogisos started to lose control of the kingdom. Edo people asked King Ife for help.	
1200 - 1600AD Obas lived in beautiful palaces. They started to trade with European merchants and built an Empire.	
King Ife sent his son Prince Oranmiyan to restore peace.	
900 AD Edo people settled in West African rainforests. The first rulers were called Ogisos, meaning "rulers of the sky".	1
1897 The British army invaded and made the kingdom part of the British Empire.	
approx. 1200 AD Oranmiyan chose his son Eweka to be the first Oba of Benin.	

PART 4: How does this fit in with other eras of History?

Can you place these periods of History on the timeline. NB Some will overlap!



LESSON 2: Life for the Obas and their officials in Ancient Benin

Part 1: How much do you remember from lesson 1? Circle or tick the correct answer.

1. Where was the Kingdom of Ancient Benin?
 - a) Mostly in Nigeria, West Africa
 - b) Rome
 - c) South Africa
 - d) Bechuanaland

2. When was it founded?
 - a) 900BC
 - b) 1100AD
 - c) 1897
 - d) 900AD

3. What was the name of the people who founded Ancient Benin?
 - a) Ogisos
 - b) Edos
 - c) Eweka
 - d) Obas

4. What were the first rulers called?
 - a) Ogisos
 - b) Edos
 - c) Eweka
 - d) Obas

5. What were the rulers called from 1200s - 1600s?
 - a) Ogisos
 - b) Edos
 - c) Eweka
 - d) Obas

6. How did the Kingdom of Ancient Benin come to an end?
 - a) Deforestation caused loss of habitat
 - b) The Spanish flu epidemic
 - c) The invasion of the British army
 - d) It united with Nigeria

PART 2: What was life like in Ancient Benin?

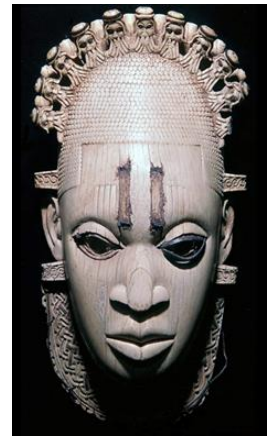
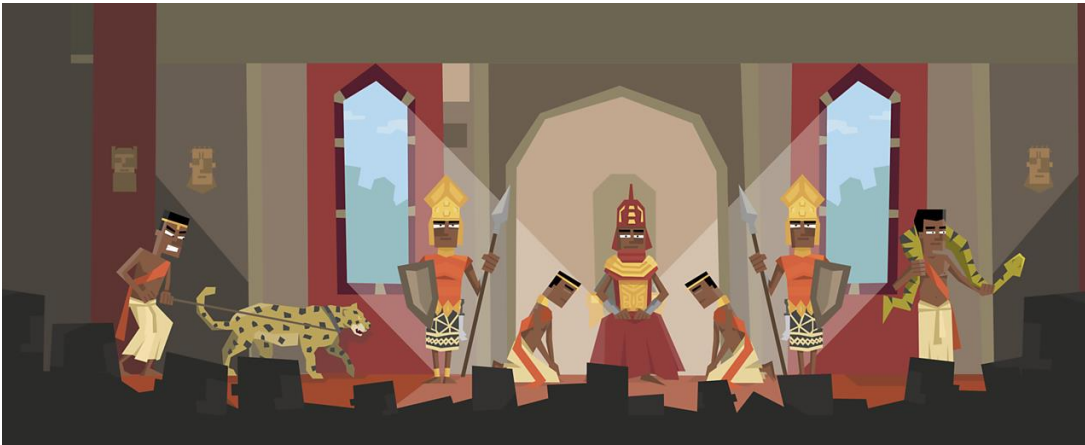


Benin was a large and varied kingdom. Some people lived in villages and small towns, but most people lived and worked in **Benin City**.

The most important person in the kingdom was the king, known as **the Oba**. Hundreds of men and women lived at the royal court, and devoted their lives to looking after the Oba and his family. Some people at court had very special jobs, working as acrobats, sorcerers or leopard hunters.

Most people in the countryside worked as farmers but there were also potters and blacksmiths. They made simple pots, weapons and tools for the villagers.

What was life like for the Oba and his courtiers?



The people of Benin believed that their Oba was a god. He 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. But he also had some free time to spend with his family. Obas had many wives, and all their wives and children lived in special apartments inside the palace.

The Oba owned all the land in his kingdom. He gave orders to his chiefs on how his kingdom should be run and he decided when his armies should go to war. Sometimes he rode into battle at the head of his troops.

Everyone had to show great respect to the Oba. People approached him on their knees and nobody could look at him without his permission. Most people in Benin believed that the Oba didn't need to eat or sleep!

The Oba's courtiers

The Oba relied on many chiefs and officials to help him run his kingdom. Palace chiefs ran the royal court, organised the craft workers and made agreements with European merchants. They came from rich families and their jobs were passed down from father to son. Town chiefs were chosen to do their jobs because they were good rulers. They governed the ordinary people.

Another important figure was the mother of the Oba. The first great Queen Mother or 'Iyoba' was Queen Idia, the mother of Oba Esigie. She helped her son to defeat his enemies and gain control of the River Niger. As a reward, Esigie gave her a palace of her own.

People believed that the Queen Mother had magical powers. She was not allowed to see her son after he became Oba, in case she used her magic to control him!

LESSON 3: Life for ordinary people in Ancient Benin

Part 1: How much do you remember from lessons 1 and 2? Fill in the gaps. Look back at earlier lessons if you are unsure.

1. The kingdom of Ancient Benin was founded around the year _____ in _____ Africa, where we would now find the country of _____.

It was founded by the _____ people who were ruled over first by the _____ and later by the _____. The Kingdom of Ancient Benin was at its strongest around _____ but eventually came to an end in _____ when _____.

2. People thought that the Oba
- a) was a great warrior
 - b) was a god
 - c) did not need to sleep or eat
 - d) All of the above

3. The lyoba (Oba's mother) was not allowed to see the Oba because _____

PART 2: What were the different jobs for ordinary people in the kingdom of Benin?



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. Most people in the countryside worked as farmers.

Some people made a living by being potters and blacksmiths. They made simple pots, weapons and tools for the villagers. Benin was famous for its craft workers. Specialists in a craft (like ivory-carvers) formed groups called guilds. All the members of a guild lived and worked together.

There were more than 40 guilds in Benin City and each guild had to perform a special duty for the Oba. Not all the guilds were for craft workers. Doctors, drummers, acrobats and dancers had their own guilds too.

Men from all over the kingdom served the Oba as soldiers. Warriors went into battle armed with swords, spears and crossbows, and by the 1600s they had guns as well. Some brave boys trained as hunters. They started their training very young and the bravest of all became elephant hunters.



Part 3: What commodities were traded by merchants?



Part 4: Comparing and contrasting

If you lived in Ancient Benin, what job would you want to do? Remember to justify your answers. You could be a:

- Farmer
- Warrior
- Palace courtier
- Craft worker: potter, blacksmith, bronze worker
- Merchant

Why would you want that job? What skills would you need? Why would you be good at it?



Part 5: Independent practice. Time to write that job application...

A large rectangular box containing 15 horizontal lines, intended for writing a job application.



Part 6: Why is trade so important to the development of a nation?

LESSON 4: Beliefs and Bronzes

Part I: Quiz

1. Who were the most successful rulers of Benin?

- a) Ogisos
- b) Edos
- c) Eweka
- d) Obas

2. When was it founded?

- a) 900BC
- b) 1100AD
- c) 1897
- d) 900AD

3. Name 3 jobs done by ordinary people _____

4. What was the main city called?

- a) Lagos
- b) Benin City
- c) Obatown
- d) Niger

5. Which European nation started trading with Benin?

- a) French
- b) British
- c) Nigerian
- d) Portuguese

6. Names three goods that were traded by Ancient Benin _____

Part 2: What were the religious beliefs of the Edo people?



The people of Benin worshipped many gods. They told stories about their gods and held ceremonies in their honour. Some of these ceremonies are still performed today by the Edo people.

According to Edo legends, the great god **Osanobua** created the world. **Olokun**, his eldest son, became the god of the waters. **Obiemven**, his daughter, was put in charge of farming and childbirth. **Ogiuwu**, his youngest son, became the king of death.

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.

People believed that the Obas of Benin were the direct descendants of **Osanobua**, the creator god. The Obas were all worshipped as gods.



Name of God	God of	Possible symbol
Osanobua	creation	



Part 3: How were bronze statues made?



Part 5: What can art tell us about beliefs?



My Benin bronze design:

My bronze represents:

The clues to this are:



PART 5: Should the British Museum return to Benin bronzes to the Nigerian government?

LESSON 5: Whose Artefacts are they?

Part I: Quiz

1. How do we know about the culture and life of the Kingdom of Ancient Benin?
 - a) Through studying artefacts
 - b) From written records
 - c) From stories handed down through generations
 - d) Through inventions that we still use today

2. Why are the Benin bronzes important?
 - a) They teach us about Ancient Benin's religious beliefs
 - b) They teach us about the skilled craftworkers of Ancient Benin
 - c) They show us how important the Oba was
 - d) All of the above

3. How did the people of Benin make links with other people, including Europeans?
 - a) By writing letters
 - b) Through trade
 - c) By invading their countries
 - d) By going on holiday

4. The Kingdom of Ancient Benin reached the height of its powers in the 1500s. Which era of British History was this?
 - a) The Victorians
 - b) The Vikings
 - c) The Tudors
 - d) The Anglo-Saxons

5. Write a definition of the following Historical terms:

Empire	
Civilisation	
Oba	
Artefact	



Part 2: Setting the context - What was the British Empire?



Part 3: Why are so many artefacts from Benin in the British Museum?



For 200 years, Benin was very successful, but in the 1600s, the Obas started to lose control of their people. By the 1800s, Benin was no longer strong or united. In 1897, the British army invaded and made Benin a part of the British Empire. They took many artefacts and bronze sculptures with them and many of these are in the British Museum. Nigeria has sought the return of these artefacts on several occasions, just as with Greece and the Elgin marbles and Egypt and the Rosetta stone. So far, the British museum has refused to return any artefacts. However, the French government has recently agreed to return the Benin bronzes from French museums.

- 1) When did the British army invade Ancient Benin? _____
- 2) What did they take? _____
- 3) Why do you think the British Museum has not returned any plunder?



Part 4: Should the British Museum return the Benin bronzes?

Pros	Cons

LESSON 6: Visit to the Horniman Museum 20th March 2019

LESSON 7: Assessment

L.I. I can share my knowledge of the Kingdom of Ancient Benin

Word bank

Edo	palace	blacksmith	British Museum	plunder
rainforest	court	ivory	culture	controversy
Ogisos	courtiers	bronze	civilisation	Nigeria
Oba	merchants	beliefs	British Empire	artefact
West Africa	trade	craftworker	army	ancient
Nigeria	manilla	empire	invasion	sculpture

The foundation of the Kingdom of Benin

The lives of the Oba, the palace officials and ordinary people

The significance of the Benin bronzes

The impact of the British invasion

What I have enjoyed in this unit about the Kingdom of Ancient Benin:

What would make it even better

I like/don't like the booklets because
