

# Benin: A Lost Kingdom

Why is the Kingdom of Benin so significant?

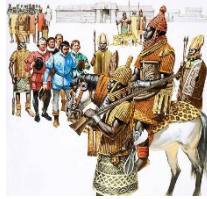
Golden Threads: Exploration & Trade; Innovation & Legacy

Chronology: c. 900 - 1897

Year 4 Summer 2

## 1. Why should we learn about Benin in school?

- The Kingdom of Benin was a civilization of cities and towns, powerful kings (known as Obas) and a large empire which traded over long distances
- Its craftsmen were skilful in bronze and ivory
- Their religious belief systems included animism – the belief that animals and objects had spirits.
- West Africa invented the smelting of copper and zinc ores as early as 10<sup>th</sup> century
- Benin still exists as a civilization with its Oba, palaces, court, artists etc



### **Significance & Chronology**

## 3. How was Benin City similar to & different from the City of London in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century?

- We can make a direct comparison of the Oba's procession with Queen Elizabeth I & Charles II's processions through picture sources
- Using other available evidence, we can evaluate the usefulness of Dapper's picture as a source
- Through comparison of written sources and pictures of Benin City and London at the time of the Great Fire, we can establish similarities and differences



### **Similarities and Differences**

## 2. What can we tell about society of Benin from what has survived?



- Physical evidence of the Kingdom of Benin is mainly from 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> Century: we are reliant on stories and archaeology rather than written records
- We can see the symbolic use of leopards, crocodiles & mudfish on plaques
- The evidence shows the importance of the Oba and the Idia
- There were guilds of workers within Benin City, including brass workers

### **Cause and Consequence**

## 4. What changes took place when the European settlers started trading?

- The rise of Benin began before Europeans arrived
- Benin supplied the Portuguese with pepper, ivory, leopard skins manillas (brass bracelets which were made in Holland, used as currency as melted down by brass workers in Benin)
- Benin also supplied the traders with enslaved people – this was the origin of the 'Triangular Trade' in enslaved African people.



### **Cause and Consequence**

## 5. Should the bronzes be returned to Benin?

- The Victorians destroyed Benin City in 1897, incorporating the kingdom into Nigeria as part of the British Empire
- The bronzes were looted and sent all over the world
- Historians have argued about whether the bronzes should be returned to Benin ever since. French & German museums have agreed to return their bronzes, but many are still in the British Museum
- Class debate considering both sides of the argument
- Write letters to the British Museum to argue their point of view



### **Significance**

Assessment task:

Understanding of the significance of the Kingdom of Benin as seen in letters to the British Museum.