

Keystage history

Knowledge organiser

Benin



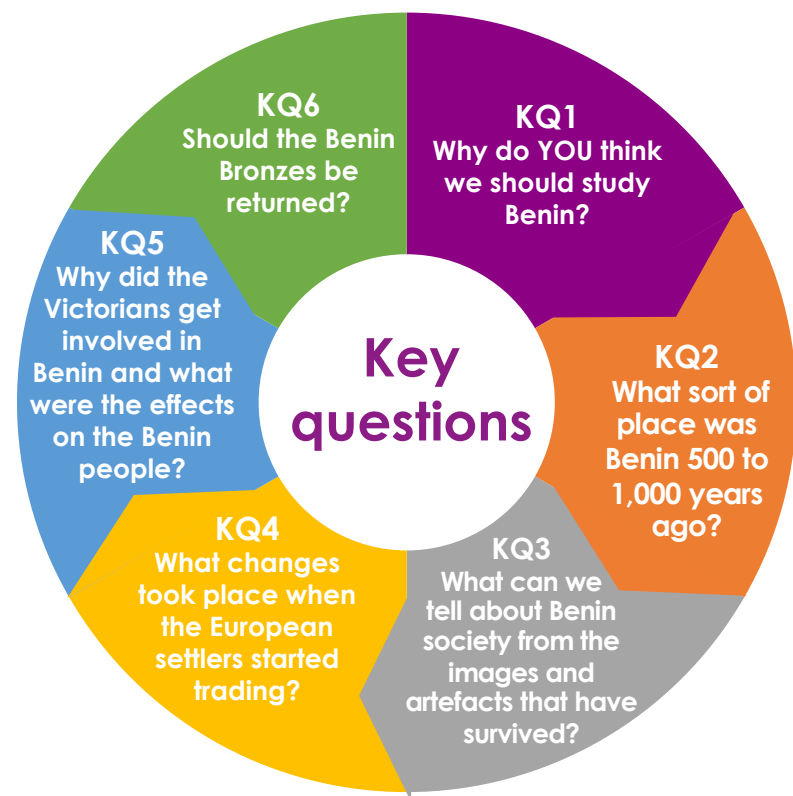
Benin

Why we are learning about Benin

Benin was a very important civilization, not just within Africa but in world history too. An important part of what you'll learn is a comparison with Benin offers a good opportunity to compare with British society at the time, when the Saxons, Vikings and Normans were ruling. Although the period you are asked to study is a thousand years ago, many of you will also be able to compare with the Tudors as the kingdom of Benin was not really established until the Oba Eweka I in the 1200s. Later Benin was involved in the slave trade.

This topic is great for showing you how an African society developed outside Europe without any contact. of this time. For too long people have underestimated how sophisticated Benin society and craftsmanship was. Most people knew mainly about the Benin bronzes, many of which were looted by the British during the late 19th century when Victoria ruled the empire. Today there is an important debate about whether these bronzes should be returned from museums across the world. You will learn about the arguments on both sides so you can join in the debate.





Key vocabulary

Barter

As people did not use coins they used to swap goods.

Bronzes

Special metal items beautifully crafted, among best in the world.

Dynasty

Rulers of a country passed down from father to son.

Empire

Lands outside and ruled by Britain.

Fortifications

Buildings, walls and ditches to protect a place.

Loot

To steal valuable objects.

Oba

All-important ruler who owned all the land and whose palace made up one third of the city,

Palace

Really big building with many rooms and expensive furniture

Top takeaways

1. Benin, in modern day Nigeria was an advanced society as long ago as a thousand years, in many ways more advanced than Saxon and Viking society at the time
2. Its really important that people living in Britain today recognise how African societies such as Benin developed in their own right and not as a result of contact with Europeans. This helps combat some prejudices people have today thinking that all the important developments in world history took place in in the West.
3. Benin society was organised around the all-important Oba who lived in his own palace within a well-defended city.
4. The society is best remembered for its magnificent bronzes
5. At the end of the Victorian period soldiers of the British empire clashed with the inhabitants of Benin and looted a vast number of these superb bronzes many of which are still held in British museums
6. The debate about whether the Benin bronzes should be returned still rumbles on. There are arguments on both side